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Feminist bodies, affect and the radicalisation of democracy: An investigation into feminist mobilisations in Spain

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An investigation into feminist mobilisations in Spain

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Abstract

This thesis aims to rethink the radicalisation of democracy through an affective lens by shedding light to the way in which feminist mobilisations might contribute to the radicalisation of democracy. Understanding the latter as the process of deepening and disrupting democracy, the research engages with literature that theorises the relationship between feminist mobilisations and democracy, to argue that the affective dimension in the articulation of feminist mobilisations is under-explored when it comes to understanding the radicalisation of democracy. Therefore, the thesis aims to move beyond the literature that builds on the horizon of women as a foundational category of feminism, and the linguistic focus of agonistic demands, to further understand the role of affect and emotions in articulating feminist bodies that allow for concerted political action. The research takes as a main case for study recent feminist mobilisations in Spain, and follows affect and emotions through a series of interviews and an analysis of theatre performances. Ultimately, the thesis contributes to the literature on radical democracy and feminist mobilisations arguing for the importance of the role of affect and affective readings in holding feminist bodies together that destabilise affective understandings of the world.

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Acknowledgments

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the product of my own work. All sources used are referenced.

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Irene Queralt Santamatilde

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INTRODUCTION

I remember the spring of 2018, when, after the court ruling that cleared the men from La Manada of rape, thousands of people flooded the streets of Spain (and beyond) to reject this decision: *hermana, yo sí te creo*[1]. After what had been the most successful feminist mobilisation in Spain, with more than 5.6 million people supporting a feminist strike, and hundreds of thousands gathering in the streets for 8th of March that same year (El País, 2018). This came as a bittersweet moment: the outrage and anger for the events were coupled with the surprise, and, even, pride in recognising what feminist bodies were doing once again: we are here mobilising our network, we are claiming the streets, and we are fed up.

At the time of the final editing of this thesis, August 2023, feminist bodies seem to be, once again, spilling out onto the streets. Now over the case of Jenni Hermoso, a football player of the women's national team who was kissed without her consent by the President of the Spanish Football Federation during the celebration of the World Cup final. *Se acabó*[2]. There has also been Diana Quer, more mobilisations against *La Manada*, solidarity with *Ni Una Menos*, feminists against *Vox* (the main far right political party in Spain), and unmissable dates every 8th of March and 25th of November, to name a few. Feminist bodies in Spain have been repeatedly gathering in the streets over the past few years. And in doing so, feminist mobilisations have become more and more relevant to understand the politics of the country, as seen with the strong focus on gender equality of the last government, the reforms in the law of gender based and sexual violence, or the way that the outrage for the aforementioned #seacabo movement rapidly spread, occupying tabloids, tv shows, social media and, ultimately, the streets in a matter of days.

I do not aim to argue here that recent feminist mobilisations in Spain are in any way more extraordinary than other feminist mobilisations before, or elsewhere. In fact, a

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[1] "Sister, I do believe you" (translation my own) was used as one of the main claims in the protests against La Manada (Sánchez, 2018), a case of gang rape that became very mediatic and outraged people in Spain.

[2] "it's over" (translation my own), has become the main hashtag of what is being called the #MeToo of Spanish football (Martínez-Bascuñán, 2023).

genealogy of feminism is quick in showing the disruptive and defying dimensions of feminist mobilisations throughout time, that have continuously challenged the injustice of their moments opening the road for the feminist mobilisations to come (Serra, 2019)[3]. However, it cannot be denied that the sudden centrality of feminist mobilisations in Spain, where multiple demands, bodies and claims have come together where a big feminist identification did not exist prior to such mobilisations (Serra, 2019) raises questions about democratic and political change, and the role that feminist bodies play in it.

In fact, in remembering all the feminist encounters over the past years, I also remember the bittersweet and slightly disappointing walk home after every mobilisation. The "now what?", and "how does this matter, if at all?". And what started as a personal frustration and a feminist curiosity, became an academic concern: how can feminist mobilisations contribute to radicalising democracy? And, seeing the plurality in these feminist bodies and the centrality of emotions in my own living of feminist mobilisations: what is the role of affect and bodies in this?

1. Research questions and rationale

This thesis addresses that feminist curiosity, while also contributing to fill in a gap in feminist and democratic literature, building on the already established conversation between feminist theorising and democratic tradition. Like the first section of Chapter one will show, feminist theorising has already tended towards democratic theory in an attempt to disrupt and deepen it. Inscribing my thesis into this conversation, I aim to build on the recent feminist mobilisations in Spain, to answer the two main research questions of this thesis: *how do feminist mobilisations contribute to the radicalisation of democracy? And what is the role of affect and the body in this?*

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[3] Moreover, the increased centrality of feminist mobilisations in Spain, has also come with a increase of reactionary movements, like those fueled by far-right and reactionary organisations like *Vox* or *Hazte Oír*. Nevertheless, given the focus of this research project in feminist mobilisations, such reactionary mobilisations will not be explored.

A number of secondary questions arise from the discussions in this thesis. The plural and heterogenous character of these feminist mobilisations (Serra, Macaya & Garaizábal, 2021) further complicates this discussion, asking *how is it possible to bring about and tie together feminist bodies in the absence of shared identities and demands*? This question moves away from (while also building on) the body of feminist literature that understands the relationship between feminist theorising and democratic tradition like one concerned with the widening of democratic categories to include (a relatively) harmonious and unitary category of women (Pateman, 1989; Young, 1990; Elshtain, 1981).

In confronting this question that aims to understand feminist bodies beyond identity, feminist theorising on radical democracy, as well as radical democratic theorising, (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Brown, 1995; Fraser, 1996b; Zerilli, 2005; Honig, 2013; Butler, 2015; Gago, 2019; Palop, 2019) have overlooked either the affective or the bodily dimensions of feminist mobilisations. This, as the thesis will argue, further replicates exclusions of certain bodies, and does not allow understanding the way in which the radicalisation of democracy might come about through affective or bodily processes of signification and politicisation. This leads the thesis to ask: *where are the bodies and their emotions in feminist mobilisations and the radicalisation of democracy?*

Hence, the thesis will aim to answer such questions by *developing a model of affective politics of precarity that, building on the concept of affective readings[4], allows understanding how feminist mobilisations contribute to disrupting democracy, while at the same time ensuring a certain degree of openness by pointing towards the possibility that the world that they are confronting could also be otherwise.* And, in approaching the empirical research on feminist mobilisations in Spain with this bodily and affective lens, the thesis asks *how do the affective politics of precarity in feminist mobilisations in Spain contribute to tying feminist bodies together in the absence of a shared identity, while they enable processes of affective*

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[4] Although the term affective reading will be further defined in Chapter 6, it shall be noted here that I refer to the process of meaning making that comes with the attribution of the origin of certain emotions to certain bodies and objects.

and embodied articulation that allow contestation and conflict between the bodies articulated?

Moreover, the thesis further contributes to literature on feminist mobilisations in Spain. As argued above, feminist mobilisations have become a prominent part of Spanish politics. However, despite this growing relevance (Serra, 2018, 2019; di Marco, 2019, Palop, 2019), most literature analysing the recent feminist turn in politics has mainly focused on feminist mobilisations in Latin America, where the Argentinian fight against abortion and the feminist protest in the face of the far-right in Brazil have been catching the attention of scholars (di Marco, 2019). Therefore, by engaging with the case of Spain, I aim to broaden the cases of analysis and to offer a different insight into feminist mobilisations and their affective politics.

Thus, this research contributes to rethinking the radicalisation of democracy through an affective politics of precarity that allows engaging with the emotional and bodily dimension of feminist mobilisations, and filling the gap in radical democratic theory that does not account for the way in which such affective and bodily practices can contribute to disrupt and recreate the surfaces and political boundaries of the feminist bodies, sustaining feminist interventions while also ensuring openness and contestation. In doing so, this research points towards a wider reflection of radical democratic politics and activism, useful beyond academia. This allows reimagining new forms of politics and rethinking questions and strategies for political and democratic change, building on theoretical reflection to reimagine political alternatives.

2. Methodology

To answer the research questions, this thesis combines different methods. I build the methodology on two main axes, a literature discussion, on the one hand, and empirical research conducted in Spain, on the other. This section will further explain my methods. Firstly, it will engage with the selection of literature and the reason behind my choices of authors discussed. Secondly, it will lay out the methods used in

the empirical work, as well as some of the limitations I encountered and a reflective account of the ways I addressed them.

2.1 Reading texts: choice of literature

The literature discussion aims to bring into conversation theories of democracy and theories of feminism. It shall be noted that this thesis draws influence from both Sara Ahmed's understanding of affect, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's understanding of radical democracy. This is reflected throughout the thesis with my choice of literature, which mainly builds on an understanding of radical democracy as the disruption and deepening of democracy through contestation and openness; and an understanding of affect and emotions as social and circulating between bodies and signs[5]. The importance behind this understanding of affect and radical democracy lies in the fact that it allows me to engage with the current feminist mobilisations in Spain, and explore how they come together in the absence of a shared identity or demand, probing into processes of politicisation and articulation, and put the political at the forefront of these processes (also central to Laclau, Mouffe and Ahmed's theories).

Nevertheless, as Chapter 1 will show, I choose to trace some of the histories and debates in the field by reading the work of some of the first authors who engaged with questions of democracy and feminisms. In this sense, my choice to start discussing the work of difference democrats, namely Pateman, Young and Elshtain, is not arbitrary. Instead, it aims to return to some of the main questions in feminist and democratic theories present in their work, and situates my research as a continuation and an expansion of that literature.

The authors I chose to discuss in the second chapter are those who engage in a critique and destabilisation of the focus on difference as identity from the authors in Chapter 1. In this sense, it would have seemed pertinent to formulate this critique from the literature on black feminism. Nevertheless, the choice to engage instead with authors who critique difference democrats from what I call an agonistic

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[5] Throughout the thesis, I will refer to signs as elements that carry meanings and emotions and that are shaped by historical, political and affective encounters.

perspective, attending to the impact that it has on the radicalisation of democracy rather than the impact that it has on feminism(s), responds to the ultimate research interest of this thesis: understanding the relationship between feminist mobilisations and the radicalisation of democracy. My choice of the term agonistic to call these theorists is also not arbitrary. As I argue in Chapter 2, not all theorists would consider themselves as writing within agonistic theory. Nevertheless, by reading them as sharing an ethos of destabilisation and openness, I am able to articulate a discussion that highlights the potential of feminist mobilisation to radicalise democracy, rather than engage in a debate over the foundational subjects of feminism. The thesis will aim to complement the lack of engagement with feminists of colour in Chapter 2 by exploring their work on Chapter 3.

On the other hand, the omission of Chantal Mouffe in Chapter 2, given her work on both agonism and feminist theory, might seem surprising. However, this is due to the choice to discuss her work together with that of Ernesto Laclau (see Chapter 6), who did not work on agonistic theory. This choice responds to the main research interest of the thesis, which is understanding the relationship between feminist mobilisations and the radicalisation of democracy. Thus, I understood that Mouffe's literature on radical democracy and agonism could bring more added value if discussed in conversation with Ernesto Laclau and the other authors discussed in Chapter 6, together with the fieldwork of Chapter 5. In this sense, this does not constitute an overlook of Mouffe's work but rather a choice to read her work with a focus on the added value that it brings to the discussion of the radicalisation of democracy as a whole, rather than on the critique of difference democrats.

As mentioned, Chapter 3 brings the discussion to the body. Here, I choose to contrast de Beauvoir with Ortega, thus also including the critiques of feminism of colour into the discussion of the thesis. The choice to include Butler responds to their work in acknowledging the role of the body in street politics as well as the way in which their work allows me to understand the political dimension of the body beyond a reflection of social norms. Similarly, Sabsay's work further expands Butler's work in this direction. Although I briefly acknowledge it, I chose not to engage with Arendt's work and its influence on Butler's concept of bodies acting in concert since I wanted the focus to remain on the role of affect and emotions in the articulation of bodies

and the radicalisation of democracy. Thus, I decided to further build on this idea of bodies assembling by reading Butler together with Ahmed's affective circulation, as Chapters 5 and 6 will show.

Chapter 4 engages with affect and emotions, through Sara Ahmed and Laurent Berlant's work. As the chapter will further develop, this is mainly due to an understanding of affect and emotions as political. While Sara Ahmed's work serves to lay out the understanding of affect and emotions that the thesis will build on, Laurent Berlant's work is mainly used to illustrate how the concepts of precarity and precariousness can be read as affective objects circulating. This will be crucial to build the model of effective politics of precarity discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 6 brings together all the literature discussed throughout the thesis to build the hypothesis, and it engages with four main authors writing about radical democracy. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe are the first two authors to write about radical democracy, and have defined the way that I understand the process of radicalisation of democracy as requiring articulation of conflictive elements. Secondly, the choice to discuss Butler responds to their emphasis on the role of the body, and is therefore central to the discussion in this thesis. Finally, Nijensohn who, like this thesis, reads Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony together with Butler's performativity.

2.2 Reading affect and emotions: fieldwork

As mentioned, the thesis also builds its argument on fieldwork. When I first started thinking about this research project and designing the methodology, I wanted to conduct an autoethnograhic analysis of the feminist mobilisations in Madrid. One of the personal motivations behind this research is my involvement in feminist mobilisations in Spain. A long time before I considered conducting this research I already had some of these questions in my mind: what is it that brings us all here? And what is it that we are doing precisely? I thus wanted to bring these questions into conversation with the literature that I was engaging with. Moreover, given the centrality of affect, it seemed that this method would allow me to follow my emotions and understand how they circulated through me, and they moved me

attaching to other objects, signs and bodies circulating, potentially contributing to disrupting and deepening democracy.

For this original plan, I wanted to attend the feminist mobilisations of the 8th of March in Spain in 2021, as well as join the organisation of the mobilisations as an observer from mid-2020 until the mobilisations took place in March 2021. I had chosen Madrid as the city to attend the mobilisations in since this is where I had been active as a feminist before, and where I had a network that could allow me to better integrate into the mobilisations. I wanted to complement it by attending other mobilisations in other cities, like that of the 25th of November on the Day for the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence. Moreover, I was already familiar with the functioning of the Commission of the 8th of March, made up of feminist volunteers divided into different taskforces (communication, migration, education, international, etc.) who coordinate the mobilisations of the 8th of March. Each of these task forces is constituted into an assembly, where the volunteers join to update each other and make decisions. There are also regional assemblies and local ones. These local assemblies, often linked to neighbourhood associations, act as a meeting point for many grassroots feminists, as well as a place for community building and support in the neighbourhoods. I thus planned to join some of these local assemblies, as well as the national one, to understand how affect circulated in these spaces, and to have a better understanding of feminist mobilisations beyond the actual mobilisation.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic hit while I was in the process of planning my methodology, which significantly altered my plans given the periods of confinement imposed (both in Spain and in the UK). The situation did not allow any of the big mobilisations to happen, and it also restricted the regular grassroots meetings of those who were involved in it. I tried to adapt my methodology to attend some of the regular check-in meetings that the Commission of the 8th of March moved online. At first, it seemed as if there was a burst of energy to remain active and online, but this quickly died off. Not many commissions had the capacity to move online, and those that did were not greatly attended.

It is true that in March 2021, the Spanish government had started lifting some of the restrictions and larger gatherings seemed to be granted permission by the concerned authorities. Nevertheless, two days before the 8th of March, the government of Madrid forbid the mobilisation. This was due to the large number of people who were expected to attend the event, but also partly caused because of the political struggles of the local, regional and national governments. Because of the travel restrictions within different regions in Spain, it was not possible to travel to other cities where feminist mobilisations were allowed. In any case, these challenges had already prompted me, together with the Ethics Committee, to reflect on the ethics of researching and attending protests during a pandemic, and I had decided not to take part in any of them.

Therefore, I considered turning towards a social media analysis of feminist mobilisations in Spain, focusing on all feminist mobilisations that took place in Spain from the 8th of March 2018, where the biggest women's strike to date in Spain took place. I aimed to use two social media platforms that have been the most popular because of their use of the hashtag, Twitter and Instagram, to gather an online archive of interventions around the feminist mobilisations. I wanted to analyse the images, videos, memes, documents and captions shared under the specific hashtags of the different mobilisations, from the day of the mobilisation until two days after (to also capture the material that is posted after the protests take place). The aim of the analysis was not to assess how affect circulates through social media and social media posts. Instead, the goal was to use social media as an archive or a collection of feminist interventions during the mobilisations, allowing a closer look into the affective dynamic of such feminist mobilisations. In utilising social media as an archive of feminist interventions, it shall be noted that this research does not understand social media as a neutral or equalising platform. Instead, it is aware that the digital is not separate from the non-digital, and that "digital spaces are discursive and material, produced as an entanglement of physical and immaterial objects and ideas, practices and things" (McLean et al, 2019: 741). This means acknowledging the "gaps, silences and ambivalences that circulate with digital feminism, carried over and reproduced from the offline" (McLean et al, 2019: 743)

However, despite the importance of social media and the wide range of materials that I had access to, it proved hard to get consent for analysing such materials. This is mainly because of the difficulty of reaching out to those social media users posting the materials, and the low level of responsiveness (a lot of the messages of users you are not connected with are marked as spam). This meant that if I were to have continued with this methodology, I would have had to employ a big amount of time in trying to contact users to access their content, and I might have not been able to collect enough data for my analysis.

Therefore, I decided to abandon the social media analysis to undertake semistructured interviews instead. I shall note that I still decided to include some materials from social media in Chapter 5. However, I limited my analysis of social media content to a few instances where that content was directly relevant to the discussions in the interviews, and where I managed to achieve consent from the users. In those cases, I selected the materials according to the keywords that the users posted it and the dates, and only after the instances of the mobilisations that they reflect in their social media posts had been mentioned by the participants of the interviews. In these cases where I identified such materials, I contacted the users asking to include their posts in my research, and providing them information about it, together with a consent form. I also offered to have a call with them should they want to further discuss any of the details of the research and the consent form, although none of them considered it necessary. Once I obtained the consent, I downloaded their posts, and stored them to later consider them as an extended part of the interviews. This is, I read the posts as fitting into the narrative of the interviews, attending at the language they used in the captions, and I transcribed them into the main body of the research with a descriptive role, rather than an analytical one. Therefore, I do not necessarily analyse how affect and bodies are moved in those social media posts, and I reduced the inclusion of that material to a supporting role further illustrating and describing the instances discussed in the interviews, which are the main focus of the analysis. Similarly, as Chapter 5 will show, some extracts were used from traditional media also to illustrate the claims made by some of the participants.

I should point out that there is an instance where I will analyse a video uploaded to twitter, showing a confrontation between different feminist activists in the middle of a performance. The analysis of this video is complemented with an interview where the activist in the confrontation explains the way that they felt and narrates the happening. In proceeding to analyse the video, I decided to stick to merely describing what happened and directly quoting the exchange, and I analysed the way that affect circulated through the story told in the interview by the activist involved instead. This is because I am interested in understanding the way that their bodies were moved by the encounter, rather than the way that my body is moved by their encounter. This is not to claim that the way I include the video and describe the event happening is purely objective nor separate from any affective reading, but rather that I approach this material from a descriptive stance, rather than an analytical one.

As mentioned, since it was not possible to conduct ethnographic research and given the difficulties tied to social media analysis, I chose to focus on (online) semi-structured interviews with feminist activists to engage with how their activism is marked by a process of embodiment of different affective flows. In this sense, through semi-structured interviews I will still be able to engage with the circulation of affect through different bodies and signs, and to attend to the way that it moves bodies and brings them together, and how this might potentially contribute to the disrupting and deepening of democracy. This, as the methodology will show, will be complemented by the analysis of a theatre play that was mentioned during one of the interviews. Moreover, even if the focus shifts from my own affective readings of feminist mobilisations to the participants' affective readings of them, I still wanted to keep an element of self-reflexivity throughout these interviews. Therefore, I still kept a research journal where I reflected on my thoughts, feelings and questions after the interviews and during the process of assembling them into a chapter, as I will discuss later. Although these have not been used explicitly in the writing of the thesis, they have served as an immense source of reflection and knowledge throughout the fieldwork, and contributed to ensuring that I did not conceive my participants and my research as something external and separate from me, but rather as still a process of cocreation and a continuum of affective experiences.

Interviews have been one of the most utilised methods by feminist scholars since they allow involving participants actively in building the data needed, rather than just extracting it from them (Reinharz, 1992). In this sense, semi-structured interviews allow reaching into the stories around the participants, adapting to their different realities, experiences, and contexts in a way that enables better understanding and co-creation of the research (Undurraga, 2012). Interviews have also been used to research affect since they allow interaction with intimate spaces and emotional geographies (Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Sharp, 2009) through the words and the world of the participants. This is vitally important for the matter of this research since it will focus on affect, its circulation, and affective readings of the world. Through the semi-structured interviews, I can, as a researcher, access part of those different affective readings of the participants interviewed, and contrast them, building a story with them, rather than just focusing on my own affective reading of the world. In this sense, the changing emotional geographies that I encounter through my research, and the fact that I encounter them through their words and language, facilitates reflection on the different affective entanglements and feminist encounters (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016).

One of the main feminist authors who uses interviews in their work on affect is Sara Ahmed. In their last book, Sara Ahmed (2023) used interviews to collect personal testimonies of feminist activists and follow the trope of the feminist killjoy through them, reflecting on the role of affect and emotions in feminism and how feminists relate to the world around them. Similarly, I chose to build on the testimonies from feminist activists to follow the circulation of affect and understand how it contributes to bringing about the feminist body.

I conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews, covering feminist mobilisations in Spain since the feminist strike of 2018 until the time of the interview. The interviews took place online to comply with all the sanitary measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, through a secure platform and were carried out in Spanish. Reaching out to participants proved tricky during the pandemic, so I relied on my network having been involved in organising several feminist mobilisations in Madrid. On the one hand, I contacted feminist organisations that I had been in contact with in the past and provided an information sheet about my research project,

where I included a call for participants and my contact details. On the other hand, thanks to people in my network (mainly feminist friends and activists I had volunteered with in the past). I was able to inform them about my project and let them know that I was looking for feminist activists to interview, who then helped me spread the message through more informal channels such as WhatsApp group chats. Finally, through snowball sampling, I had several participants encouraging their friends or fellow volunteers to participate in my research (even if not all of them agreed to do so in the end).

When selecting the participants, I wanted to ensure that there were people with different relationships to feminist mobilisations, interviewing some very committed activists, people who identify as feminists but only sporadically attend feminist mobilisations, and people who did not attend any feminist mobilisation. I also tried to ensure that there was a bit of a geographical balance, which was only possible thanks to snowball sampling and the help of one of the participants who was very involved in the feminist movement. Nevertheless, there is still a majority of participants from Madrid, given my reliance on my network. Below there is a chart with some demographic information about the participants and how I got in touch with them.

Participant	Gender identification	Region	Point of contact	Other comments
Participant 1	Woman	Madrid	Feminist organisation I had been involved in	
Participant 2	Woman	Bilbao	Snowball sampling	
Participant 3	Woman	Toledo and Madrid	Feminist organisaion I had been in contact with	
Participant 4	Non-binary	Barcelona	Snowball sampling	
Participant 5	Woman	Barcelona	Feminist organisation I had been in	

			touch with	
Participant 6	Woman	Madrid	Feminist organisation I had been involved in	
Participant 7	Woman	Madrid	Feminist organisation I had been in contact with	
Participant 8	Man	Madrid	Snowball sampling	Selected partly because he does not identify necessarily as a feminsit activist or is usually involved in feminist mobilisations
Participant 9	Woman	Madrid	Network of contacts	Participant 10 interrupted the interview with participant 9 by mistake. She was then invited by participant 9 to remain for the rest of the interview so she could listen.
Participant 10	Woman	Madrid	Interview of participant 9 (she is her grandmother). More on this process below	Participant 9 was present during the interview of participant 10, as a request of participant 10 and after participant 9 agreed to.
Participant 11	Woman	Bilbao	Network of contacts	
Participant 12	Man	Madrid	Snowball sampling	

Prior to the interviews, I provided participants with participant information sheets to ensure they were fully informed before providing consent and we established continuous consent that allowed both the participants and researcher to stop the interview and withdraw the answers at any given moment. I also asked them for permission to record our interviews. As part of the co-creation of a safe space, I reassured participants that they did not need to disclose anything that they did not feel comfortable with. During the interview I regularly checked with them how they were feeling to ensure that their consent is ongoing and that they are happy with the

way that the interview is going. After the interview, I debriefed with the participants to address any potential issues that might have arisen during the interview and to make sure that they leave feeling comfortable and confident with the result. As part of a feminist ethos of research the debriefing process also involved asking for feedback when they felt comfortable providing so. This ensured that they are also agents in the co-creation process of the research, as well as guide future interviews and reflections of the process. I also provided all participants with my contact details, and emphasized that I am available to them should they wish to contact me or request a summary of the thesis.

There is one particular case where one of the participants was recruited during the interview of another participant. During the interview of participant 9, her grandmother entered the room, not knowing the participant was in a call. Participant 9 stopped to explain what the interview was. Since participant 9 had been recruited through my network of contacts (she was an activist I had volunteered with in the past), she introduced me through our friend in common, and explained my research project. The grandmother found it interesting and the participant asked if she wanted to stay and listen. We agreed that it was possible to do so if she wanted to and if participant 9 felt comfortable with the decision. She decided to stay. When the interview with participant 9 finished, the grandmother said that she also thinks about some of these things often. I told her that if she was interested in it, I would love to hear her thoughts and have her join the research. She doubted herself at first, but then thought it could be interesting. However, she asked if it was possible that her granddaughter stayed with us for the interview, since she would feel more comfortable. I checked with participant 9 and she agreed to stay, even pointing out that this would become a "bonding" experience for them. We then proceeded to take a small break and came back to start the interview with the grandmother, who was now participant 10. Like with other participants, I briefed her about the interview and shared with her the information and consent forms and we proceeded with the cocreation of our safe space and our interview.

The topics discussed during the interview revolve around their overall experience in feminist activism, movements and/or mobilisations (their participation and the reasons behind it, impressions of the events, their feelings, emotions, satisfaction

with the demands put forward and the achievements, etc.), as well as their overall impressions of feminism and their feeling of belonging to the feminist community (what feminism means for them, whether they self-identify as feminists, discrepancies or feelings of marginalisation within the movement, alliances with other movements, etc.). This ultimately allowed probing into the affective flows that work to shape the boundaries of the feminist bodies, and to ask about the way that this relates to democracy (Chapter 6).

It is important to mention that not all of the activists interviewed answered the same questions. Adopting a semi-structured approach to my interviews, I started all interviews from the same point, but then allowed the different conversations to explore the topics that came up, rather than following a very strict guide that could restrict the flow of the conversation[6]. This is mainly because, especially when engaging with affect and emotions, there are different topics and experiences that shape the testimonies of participants. This fieldwork is built following the understanding of affect explored in Chapter four and, as such, it understands affect and emotions as sticking to different bodies differently. Therefore, it is only logical to use a method that allows following the emotions and formulating questions around them, rather than making those emotions fit around questions. As Chapter five will show, participants were moved by different issues in different ways, and employing a method of semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore those while finding common threads around the way that emotions work, and the work that emotions do.

Once I transcribed the interviews and my notes, I analysed them following Sara Ahmed's method of emotional reading of texts (Ahmed, 2004: 13), which focused on how emotions circulate through texts. Originally, I aimed to have a thematic analysis, coding the most prominent emotions that had been brought up, and clustering the interventions of the participants around them. Nevertheless, the interest of the thesis in emotions is not so much on what specific emotions are present, but on their effects and circulation. Therefore, with an emotional reading of the interviews, I was able to identify emotions and understand how they travel through the imaginary of the participants, and the way in which they were moved. To

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[6] See Appendix 1 for the list of questions

do this, I identified the different emotional encounters that they referred to, and tried to understand:

- Who and/or what was part of that emotional encounter? How were they perceived by the participant?
- Did that emotional encounter generate any movement? And if so, what was the movement that the encounter generated (*towardness, awayness*)?
- What were the effects of such movements?

This allowed me to code and group the affective encounters in three big groups, according to the effect that the circulation of affect had, as Chapter 5 will show. Following this method allowed me to identify how emotions are named or performed in these mobilisations, and how they contribute to differentiating between the objects and subjects of feeling, contributing to making different bodies and demands get 'stuck' together, or to distance from each other. In other words, the analysis identified how emotions and affect stick to signs, banners, bodies, and performances, etc., and enquired into its political effects in the radicalisation of democracy. In this sense, even if a big part of the analysis was the textual responses of the participants, body language and non-textual communication elements (such as the tone of voice, laughter, etc.) were also important. Therefore, I would argue that I adapted Sara Ahmed's emotional reading of texts into a method of emotional reading of interviews.

This method was also used for the analysis of the theatre performance, which was brought to my attention to one of the participants I interviewed. This theatre performance is, as Chapter five further explains, part of the activism of *Territorio Doméstico,* a feminist group of activists who campaign for the rights of racialised and migrant domestic workers in Spain. I decided to include it as a material to analyse because, like other social media material, it was brought by my interviewee. Moreover, it also works around topics of precarity and emotions in relation to feminist activism, which is one of the underlying focuses of this research. I decided to watch the performance (available online) several times, and to transcribe the dialogues with annotations about the *mise en scène*, the performance of the activists,

their costumes, etc. I then proceeded to apply the method of emotional reading to the performance, to identify and follow the way that affect works an how it moves. Moreover, I chose to add another dimension, by reading the circulation of affect together with Fisher's Radical Democratic Theatre (see Chapter 5). In doing so, I am able to explore the way that affect might allow opening up spaces to articulate political alternatives that deepen democracy.

At this point, it is important to note that the process of interviewing and analysing the materials of the fieldwork is not a neutral one. This methodology allowed me to adopt a self-reflective perspective that believes that there is no sharp distinction between the research subject and the object. In the interviews I understand the role of the researcher as a partner in the conversation that contributes to co-create knowledge together with the participants, rather than to extract knowledge from them. This becomes even more evident when researching emotions and affect: what emotions do I resonate with? How do I feel about their feelings?

As part of the analysis and writing processes I had to select materials from hours of interviews and decide what stories and emotional encounters to include and exclude. This is not arbitrary or random, but rather responds to my own position in a specific time, space, body and the political structures that underpin it. Hence, despite my awareness of my positionality as a white, cisgender, middle class, highly educated woman, and the efforts to be self-reflective about the design, conducting and writing up of the research, it would be naive to take this fieldwork as the true, objective and precise account of the reality of those feminist mobilisations. It is not aimed to be so. Rather, it is meant to question and destabilise hegemonic ways of understanding feminist mobilisations and affect, opening up spaces to think about them (or rather from them) differently.

Similarly, my way of affectively reading their stories and accounts of their affective encounters, and the way that I translate it into a story, is also mediated but my own positionality. It could be arguesd that I affectively encounter their stories and, in doing so, I am also moved by them in specific ways. This is why I, in no way, aim to reproduce an exact account of the feminist mobilisations or their stories. Rather, I try to be mindful of my own positionality and privileges and do justice to the stories that

they shared with me, trying to avoid reproducing hierarchies in my way of retelling them.

Interestingly, this issue is not only present in how I think about the conversations I had with the participants and how I transformed and assembled them into my thesis, but also in how the participants approached our conversation. Most of their answers are directed towards emotions and affect even when they were not explicitly asked about it. However, the fact that participants had been informed that the research aimed to explore affective encounters, made it natural for them to think in these terms when answering the question, sometimes seeming that they were trying to provide me with the right answer. This highlights that I was, most times, perceived as a researcher before anything else, and that this role came with specific power relations that shaped our affective encounter, and the way they approached our conversation. Even if their references to affect were not a problem per se, since the thesis aims to analyse the way that affect worked, not to uncover affect or whether it is present, it points towards the need for continuous self reflection and awareness of the partiality of the work that we were producing.

To practice strong feminist reflexivity, I have kept a journal that allowed me to gather my thoughts, emotions and feelings, and reflect on my own position regarding my research (Emerson et al 2001: 357). Although these do not constitute a central part of the material explicitly analysed in Chapter five, keeping such a journal did allow me to be further aware of the political relationship with my research, and to highlight that my research and interview fragments are selective. I do not in any way claim to produce a detailed, neutral or exhaustive reflection of feminist mobilisations. I do not aim to tell the only story about them either. Instead, I want to understand the way that different emotional readings of the world might collide into feminist bodies and question the role of affect in it. And this also requires recognising my role in the co-creation of the conversations that the interviews turned into and in the shaping of their narratives when I analysed and assembled them.

3. Structure of this thesis

The thesis will be divided into six main chapters, an introduction and a conclusion.

Chapter 1 engages with a number of authors who return to the horizon of women as a subject to argue for a widening of democratic politics. The chapter analyses the work of Carole Pateman (1989) and her approach to citizenship; Iris Young's (1990) affinity groups and Jean B. Elshtain's (1981) social feminism as a basis to rethink democracy through mothering. In doing so, the chapter argues that the return to the horizon of women, which I understand in this thesis as the use of women as a unitary category, when exploring the relationship between feminism and democracy does not allow to deepen and disrupt democratic tradition. Instead, their contribution is limited to the widening of the categories of democracy in a way that it includes and recognises the contribution of what they conceptualise as a unitary category of women which reproduces the same exclusions that they are trying to dismantle. Ultimately, the chapter argues that despite the importance of these approaches to further understand the way that feminist politics contribute to the process of widening democracy, all authors return to the 'horizon of women', that I understand as the use of women as a homogeneous category to make their claim, disregarding the role of conflict. This, I argue, overshadows the possibility to engage with the radical potential of feminist mobilisations that, as Chapter five shows, are no longer built around the subject of women and their concerns but instead engage a multiplicity of heterogeneous subjects, demands and concerns.

Chapter two engages with a group of authors that develop what I label as agonistic feminism. The authors discussed in this chapter suggest disrupting and deepening democratic tradition in a way that accounts for the ineradicability of difference and pluralism, the importance of conflict to ensure openness, and the centrality of articulating alternatives. It starts by analysing the work of Arendtian scholars Bonnie Honig (1994) and Linda Zerilli (2005), and the way in which their conceptualisations still focus on the assembly of a feminist subject. It then moves on to engage with Wendy Brown's (1995), Nancy Fraser's (1996) and Kathi Week's (1998) reading of feminism as the building of a project of political transformation around the assembly of particular demands, and with Gago's (2019) feminist reading of striking as a way to assemble a feminist body around desires for different political order. The chapter then proceeds to analyse the work of M. Eugenia Palop (2019) and Gabriela di

Marco (2019) who argue that feminism contributes to widening democracy through claim-making against an opposed other: neoliberalism.

Ultimately, the chapter argues that there is a gap in this literature that is overly focused on the linguistic dimension of demands and claim-making and overlooks the bodily and affective dimensions of both feminist and democratic theorising. In doing so, I argue, they privilege the rational model of democracy that perpetuates exclusions and concealment of the contributions of certain bodies, not allowing for engagement with mobilisations like those that this thesis is concerned with.

Chapter 3 thus picks up the task of destabilising the rational model, aiming to fill in the gap accounting for the role of the body in the articulation of feminist bodies that aim to disrupt and deepen democracy. For this, the chapter starts engaging with the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1948) and Mariana Ortega (2016), and their phenomenological approach to feminism whereby bodies are seen as the product of social knowledge. Secondly, it engages with the work of Judith Butler (2015), who proposes a performative understanding of the body where bodies are not just the product of social meaning but also create it, having the potential to deepen democracy by performatively gathering in the streets, claiming to disrupt the unequal distribution of precarity. Finally, it builds on Leticia Sabsay's (2016) reading of Butler's performative assemblies (2015) through a lens of radical democracy that highlights the urgency of considering the process of articulation and the way that bodies that are performatively gathering in the street might be contributing to building a boundary that separates them from an antagonistic other.

Chapter 4 aims to continue filling in the gap identified in chapters 2 and 3, accounting for the role of affect and emotions and investigate the way in which it might contribute to the previously raised process of articulation. In order to do so, this chapter develops a model of affective politics of precarity building on the previous discussion of precarity and bodies in Chapter 3, and agonism and articulation in Chapter 2. For this, the chapter starts clarifying the terminology, arguing that I chose to employ the concepts affect and emotions indistinctively. It then moves on to develop the idea of affective politics of precarity and affective readings as a way to examine how precarity can be read as an affective object that

circulates moving bodies, contributing to tying them together while also sustaining openness by allowing space for conflict and contestation. Even if the concept will be further developed in Chapter 6, at this point it suffices to say that with the term affective reading I refer to the process of meaning making that follows an encounter between bodies, where affect and the attribution of the origin of affect plays a central role,

To develop this idea of affective encounters, it engages with Sara Ahmed's (2004) notion of circulation and the political economy of affect, as well as with Lauren Berlant's (2011) idea of cruel optimism. Ultimately, the chapter argues that feminist bodies are moved by their affective reading of precarity and each other, and that in such movement and reading there is a redrawing of the porous boundaries and skins that brings them together and separates them from that which they oppose, responding to Sabsay's (2016) call to consider this process of articulation discussed in the previous chapter.

Chapter 5 further explores the affective politics of precarity developed in Chapter 4, and backs it up with empirical research by looking into the feminist mobilisations in Spain. In this sense, the chapter aims to understand how the affective politics of precarity contribute to holding the feminist bodies together in the absence of women as a defining category and how, in doing so, it allows articulating different bodies and demands in a way that it allows contestation and openness, and by attending to process of embodying and the economy of affect. For this, the chapter draws on a series of interviews with feminist activists conducted in 2022 as part of this research, as well as analysing social media posts and footage from previous mobilisations and a theatre performance by the activist group *Territorio Doméstico*.

The has been divided into three different sections that explore the role of affect and emotions in relation to the way that they contribute to hold the feminist body together. The first section explores the way that shared emotional readings of the world might contribute to bringing different bodies together. The second section gathers interview extracts that highlight the way in which bodies read each other emotionally, renegotiating the porous boundaries of such feminist body. Meanwhile, the final section, builds on interviews and theatre performances to show the way that

the performance of alternative (desired) affective readings of the world, allow thinking that another political (more feminist) reality is possible.

Finally, Chapter six aims to return to the original question: how, if at all, does the model of affective politics of precarity found in feminist mobilisations contribute to radicalising democracy? To answer this question, the chapter investigates three different conceptualisations of radical democracy and reads them together with the feminist mobilisations analysed in the previous chapter and the concept of affective readings. The chapter starts engaging with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe´s (1985) conception of radical democracy. It will then move on to engage with Judith Butler´s (2015) conceptualisation of radical democracy, given the prevalence of the body in her account. Finally, it engages with Nijensohn's account of radical democracy (2019), since she also develops an understanding of radical democracy that allows engaging with feminist politics. Ultimately, the chapter argues that through a consideration of affective readings it is possible to rethink the radicalisation of democracy accounting for the affective and bodily processes that are at the core of feminist mobilisations, and that contribute to a deepening of democracy.

4. Feminist bodies

Throughout the thesis I will repeatedly refer to feminist bodies. At this point it is important to clarify what I mean by this, and to explain that when I use the term *body* or *bodies*, without the word feminist preceding it, I refer to the individual bodies, the living materiality and their cultural and political dimension that are part of feminist mobilisations. This is, each of the people who are present in the mobilisations.

When I use the terms *feminist bodies*, however, I am referring to the multitude of individual bodies (present and absent), objects, signs and demands that gather in feminist mobilisations as a whole collective. This is, for example, the individual bodies, but also their demands, those bodies that would have wanted to be there but were not able to (such as the bodies of the imprisoned), etc.

In using this term, I want to capture the tension between the universal aspirations of feminist mobilisations and the particularity of those that are gathering in them. This demonstrates the fragile balance of openness and closure within them, that this thesis will be investigating. Because of this, I chose to always use the term bodies in plural, recognising plurality and openness, accompanied by the term feminist, which aims to reflect a certain level of (constructed) coherence.

Simultaneously, the choice to use the terms feminist bodies responds to the fact that I do not want to imply that those bodies gathering in feminist mobilisations are a necessary representation of Feminism (whatever that might be), or that there is a relationship of identification of those bodies under the term feminist. Moreover, I also do not want to imply that there is a level of solidification or organisation of those bodies that are gathering in the street into a collective. Some of them might encounter each other again, and some of them will not. There is a fluid and porous dimension to these mobilisations that I aim to capture with the idea of feminist bodies, moving away from more rigid concepts like feminist collective or, simply, feminism and feminist.

In this sense, the term bodies, in its plural form, allows me to highlight the plurality of mobilisations, but also the plurality that gathers and is mobilised around it. The choice of the word bodies is intentional. I think of those elements gathering under feminist mobilisations similarly to how I would think of a body, with different parts and organs that have a unique function and particularity but are functioning together (for the most part), constituting a whole. Bodies grow, shrink, they move, they feel, and they are surrounded by a skin that separates them from the outside, but that is porous, that is permeable. These are all characteristics that feminist bodies have, as the thesis will develop over its six chapters.

Utilising the word feminist, I aim to, as argued, confer a certain level of normativity and constructed coherence between the bodies that gather. This is not to say that I am here trying to formulate an account of feminism that has a privileged understanding of what feminism is, or what it opposes. Rather, I aim to point towards some meaning and aspirations that brings the different feminist bodies that I engage with throughout the thesis together. Hence, here I will choose to follow bell hooks'

definition of feminism as "the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression" (hooks, 2000: 33), understanding, like she does, the intersection and inability to separate sexism from racism, capitalism, ableism and other forms of oppression. The dimension of movement that hooks highlights suggests moving away from a static and foreclosed approach to feminist bodies and will be central to this thesis. In addition, it captures the idea of feminist theorising as feminist bodies as deepening and disrupting democracy, as the next chapters will elaborate.

5. Why democracy and feminism?

Although it would seem that feminism and democracy are two concepts that can be easily discussed together given their shared concerns with issues such as equality, marginalised groups, and decision-making, amongst others, academic literature has historically tended to approach them in isolation from each other (Phillips, 1981: 8), despite the field and the terms of debate having evolved significantly in the past years. This has left feminists and feminism with the responsibility of exploring the systemic privileging of men and the reproduction of patriarchal structures under the idea and presumption of neutrality that lays at the foundations of, not only democratic, but also political theory, and the consequent historical exclusion of women from both democratic theory and practice (Phillips, 1981: 10).

However, the contribution of feminism to democracy is invaluable: from suffragettes contesting the limitation of the right to vote to men, to recent feminist mobilisations like Ni Una Menos or MeToo. Feminist mobilisations and activism have had a crucial role in shaping current democracies. Similarly, in academia, feminist authors shed light on the important contributions that feminism makes to democratic theory, exploring the different ways in which democracy and democratic politics can benefit from a feminist approach and analysis, as this section will show.

When speaking of feminism, here I am following the definition I discussed earlier that feminism is "the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression" (hooks, 2000: 33), understanding, like bell hooks does, that sexism cannot be separated from racism, capitalism, and other structures of power and exploitation. I chose to discuss feminist practice and theorising together, following

Ahmed's idea that feminist theorising is about "producing different ways of dwelling and moving in the world in the very act of explaining its mere existence as a form of contestation" (Ahmed, 2000:100), adding that feminist theorising is "not simply important as a way of explaining what is but as a way of remaking what is" (Ahmed, 2000: 100).

This is the idea that feminist theorising is not just about describing or responding to a (feminist) reality, but a process of disruption and deepening that cannot be separated from acting and living as a feminist. I therefore bring together instances of feminist theory and feminist practice, mainly feminist mobilisations, in trying to understand how feminism contributes to democracy. In this sense, I do not perceive theory as trying to make sense of practice, or practice as informing theory, but rather approach it as a blurred body of feminist interventions that work together in shaping each other, in disputing each other, as well as other forms of knowledge, and in inhabiting the world.

In this sense, Sara Ahmed's idea of "sweaty concepts" (Ahmed, 2017: 12) can help explaining the work that I am trying to do. Sara Ahmed refers to sweaty concepts as concepts that "come out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world" (Ahmed, 2017:13). This knowledge, Ahmed suggests arises from the bodies that are disrupting and redefining the world that they are in, even if that is just by finding the strength to persist in a world that denies and discomforts them. I will thus understand the relationship between feminist theory and practice throughout the thesis as a sweaty one, one in which the one emerges from the other as the result of contemplation and interaction, rather than through a relationship of exteriority where one precedes the other. And similarly, as the next chapter will show, the relationship between feminism and democracy can also be considered a sweaty relationship, one where feminists and feminism are disrupting and deepening democratic tradition and practices.

At this point, it is important to explain what I mean when I say that feminism disrupts and deepens democracy. As the section will show, feminism emerges as a redescription of the world that we are in (Ahmed, 2017: 27), turning everything into "something that is questionable" (Ahmed, 2017: 2). This brings two different

dimensions, one that aims to dismantle the structures of power that constrain certain bodies in the world; and one that aims to assemble alternatives to it. Therefore, when I think of disruption, I argue that like Ahmed's feminists become killjoys that question sexist jokes at family dinner tables (Ahmed, 2017: 37), feminism becomes the killjoy that disrupts democracy: questioning its universalities with particulars, its exclusions and concealed power dynamics, calling for its widening, aiming to introduce its demands into democracy, questioning the role of conflict, bodies and affect in it, amongst others.

But feminism is also about asking what feminists are for, about that remaking of the world from the bodies that are made not to comfortably fit in that world, and through that process of not fitting in. When bodies are constantly confronting the walls of the world around them, they are forced to not only call out the walls, but also to move around, squeeze and stretch to be able to go around them, or at least leave their imprint on them (Ahmed, 2017: 18). And it is in this moving, in that approaching democracy in a feminist way, that they are producing new ideas that are enriching and deepening the principles, tradition and practice of democracy. Therefore, this section aims to show some of the ways in which feminism has already started to disrupt and deepen democracy.

Feminist academia also builds on sexual difference to pose questions to democratic theory and call for a widening of democracy beyond its malestream reading. This group of authors who call for the widening of democracy, and will be discussed further in this first chapter, start their critiques and analysis in the assumption of neutrality and abstraction of democratic theory, equated to the masculine. The work of numerous feminists like Carole Pateman (1989), Iris Marion Young (1990) and Jean Bethke Elshtain (1991), amongst others, argue that the abstractions and universalisations that lie on the foundations of contemporary theories of liberal democracy are not such a thing. And, in questioning such abstract, universal and apparently neutral conceptualisations (such as the individual, citizen, the public, etc.), they have uncovered the gender dynamics in them (Phillips, 1992: 79). What might have initially appeared to be an absence of gender structures, reveals itself to be a concealing of them under ideas of universality that are, in fact, privileging

(white) masculinities as the object and subject of analysis and practice (Phillips, 1991: 14).

Thus, this feminist challenging of the malestream in democratic theory led to the emergence of a feminist theorising centred around difference (Phillips, 1992: 79). From the scholars who have focused primarily on sexual difference as the main form of social difference, to those most contemporary feminists that transcend the female/male binary to consider a theory of multiple differences, feminism has contributed to challenge the assumption of homogeneity and uncover the complex and unequal power relations that hide behind it, turning towards the importance of gender dynamics and structures, as well as highlighting group identities and their representations and articulation in democratic theory and practice (Phillips, 1992: 79). It can be argued that it is this feminist focus on difference and heterogeneity what allows questioning and introducing new issues and debates in democratic theory, thus widening it (Phillips, 1992: 81).

This group of feminist scholars who started questioning the foundations of democratic theory with a feminist lens, which will be further discussed in the next sections, opened up a discussion about feminism and democracy disrupting democratic tradition and aiming to deepen it with the widening of citizenship rights. A thought process which starts pointing towards the fact that feminism is not only concerned with furthering the (voting) rights of women, but also contributing to disrupting and deepening democratic tradition and practice.

However, feminism's contribution to democracy does not end in the questioning of the identities, social groups or subjects that get to participate from and be represented in democracies. A big challenge has also been that of ensuring that the demands of feminism are considered by democracy and vice versa. In fact, as Chapter 2 will show, feminist authors working within the framework of agonism disrupt democratic practice and tradition by pressing questions about the role of conflict in democracy, and about the importance of articulating diverse and conflictual demands into democratic projects. Recent feminist mobilisations like #MeToo or the Global Women's March during the inauguration of Donald Trump have shown that feminist mobilisations are not only concerned with women's rights. Instead, they bring

different, sometimes conflictual, demands together, blurring the limits of what constitutes feminist demands.

Here, authors like Linda Zerilli (2005), Bonnie Honig (1994), Wendy Brown (1995), Nancy Fraser (1996b) or Veronica Gago (2019) aim to disrupt and deepen democratic practice and tradition by, like those feminist mobilisations, suggesting models of democracy that account for conflict (rather than exclusively accommodating consensus), and question the way in which feminist demands can be articulated together with other demands for social justice. In questioning consensus in favour of conflict, these authors are challenging some of the foundational concepts on which the democratic tradition had been built, furthering the disruptive potential of feminism that I mentioned earlier. In fact, and as the next chapter will show, it could be argued that it is about finding a way of bringing into democracy (and in some cases even institutionalising) the disruptive dimension of feminism. In doing so, these authors are redescribing what democracy means, and what it should mean, is it about representation or about conflicting demands and temporary consensuses that are always open to contestation?

However, feminist theorising is not just about disassembling and dismantling, in this case, the possibility or desirability of consensus, but also about how we pick up the pieces of that which has been shattered (Ahmed, 2017: 166). Feminism has long questioned alliances and identifications (Ahmed, 2003: 238 in Eagleton, 2003), and the issue of solidarity has been central to feminist theorising (Dean, 1996; Hemmings, 2012): what is it that brings people together? In exploring these questions within the realms of (agonistic) democracy, the authors of Chapter 2 suggest for models that allow political action within conflict, and advocate for a widened articulation of feminist demands together with other demands that have not traditionally concerned feminism directly. Once again, this points towards the disruptive and deepening work that comes from approaching democracy with a feminist vision.

Moreover, and like chapters 3 and 4 will show, feminist theorising has also aimed to disrupt and deepen democracy when arguing for the importance of considering performativity and the role of affect and the body. Mobilisations like Ni Una Menos

or the Slutwalks questioned the way in which violence was directed to some bodies more than others, rending visible the ways that structures of power are embodied and performative. Furthermore, and as authors like de Beauvoir (1948), Ortega (2016), Butler (2006) or Sabsay (2016) will argue in Chapter three, these mobilisations point towards the disruptive and deepening potential of performativity to challenge power relations and norms that regulate bodies and that are ingrained in democratic practice. Moreover, feminist theorising has long challenged the division mind/body that is also present in democratic tradition, and that they disrupt when bringing forward the importance and the role of affect and bodies in democracy. When turning attention to the way in which affect and emotions can problematise identities and political alliances in democracies, like Chapter four will do by building on Sara Ahmed (2014) and Laurent Berlant, (2011), feminism is also contesting gender norms in democratic tradition and asking why they are so difficult to contest. To put it in Sara Ahmed's words "theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin" (Ahmed, 2017: 10).

Recent mobilisations like those of the 8th of March, as Chapter five will show, keep posing questions to democracy: what sustains a mobilisation in the absence of a foundational subject, a unified demand, and a common antagonistic other? And what does this mean for democracy? What is the role of affect and the body in this? This section shows that feminist theorising is not only relevant but also urgent for democracies. Approaching democratic tradition and practice with a feminist look is something that numerous feminists in academia, social mobilisations, politics and also their everyday lives have already done, and are already doing. This thesis aims to embed itself in this task of approaching democracy with feminism to further interrogate the way that feminism might contribute to the radicalisation of democracy through an affective politics of precarity.

Chapter 1: Feminism and democracy

This chapter aims to discuss a group of feminist authors who engage with democratic tradition and practice to question and widen it. These feminist authors discussed were some of the first to combine feminist and democratic theorising to explore democracy through sexual difference. As a result of this highlighting of difference, they have been labelled by some as "difference democrats" (Dryzek, 2002: 57).

According to Dryzek (2002: 57-59), difference democrats are concerned with the recognition of social groups that have been historically oppressed, arguing that democracy is not a neutral playing field, but rather systematically excludes certain identities and voices. In questioning the neutrality of democracies, difference democrats were the first feminist scholars that pressed to reconsider democratic theory, bringing attention to the androcentric, Eurocentric and rationalist biases of it. They argued that, even if democratic practices strive to bringing equality, when a society is founded on inequality it continues to perpetuate those unequal power relations (Phillips, 1992: 80).

Therefore, difference democrats look for ways that accommodate (sexual) difference in democracy. However, there is no consensus amongst this group of scholars of about the best way to move forward and accommodate such difference within democratic theorising and practice, or whether it is to be accommodated at all. There are different viewpoints amongst feminists on how to approach sexual difference: whether to advocate for a gender-free future, or a future where gender difference is present but does not constitute a basis for unequal power relations (Phillips, 1991: 12). The feminist authors discussed in this chapter (and this thesis) might not agree on the way to work around, with, or against sexual difference in democratic theory and practice, but they do agree that it is present and it cannot be ignored, and that for it properly addressed, democratic theory and practice must be transformed (Phillips, 1991: 12).

Starting discussion on radicalisation of democracy with the first authors who discussed democracy and feminism is not a coincidence. In fact, there are several reasons why. One of the main reasons goes back to one of the main concerns of this thesis: how is it possible to bring together a feminism moblisation that disrupts and deepens democracy in a way that moves beyond the horizon of women. Thus, I chose these authors to start my thesis, discussing the ways in which feminism can contribute to the radicalisation of democracy given their important contribution as the first feminist scholars aiming to disrupt and deepen the idea of democracy through the widening of democratic practices in relationship to sexual difference.

All the authors that I will engage with in this chapter share, in their reading of difference, a prioritisation of women as the foundational category of feminism. Whereby, they all return to women, their specific experiences, roles and demands to make their claims for the disruption of democracy. Therefore, the chapter aims to unpack the way in which this account of difference democracy built around women as a foundational category for political action might contribute to the disruption and deepening of democracy.

For this, the chapter will start engaging with Carole Pateman (1989), one of the main scholars who worked around the idea of deconstruction of the apparent neutrality of citizenship and pressed to consider a form of citizenship that acknowledges and accommodates the role of women in democracy. The chapter will argue that Pateman aims to widen democracy by expanding the categories that it is concerned with.

Section 1.2 will engage with the work of Iris M. Young (1990), who tries to accommodate women in democracy by arguing for a democratic system that further allows for the representation of those minoritised groups that have been traditionally excluded or underrepresented. She believes that difference is a resource that allows further democratising and the creation of more equality in society. Thus she poses questions to democratic theory on how to better allow space for the representation of diverse minoritised groups that are traditionally left out of decision making due to the power structures that shape liberal democracies.

Moreover, section 1.3 will engage with Elshtain who has focused on the specificity of women and female identity and the contribution that this makes to conceptions of power or democratic rule (Hartsock, 1983; Elshtain, 1981). This is not to say that she have focused on female identity as a natural or essential biological given. However, she has brought attention to the series of identity markers and characteristics that have been ascribed to women because of the way that they have been socialised, and the way in which these resulting characteristics put women in a privileged place to transform and improve our democracies (Mansbridge, Chapman and Shapiro: 1993, 345). As the section will show, despite the potential issues that the reification of certain roles and social identities might have, these group of scholars have brought to the attention of democratic theory the possibility to widen concepts such as power, as well as about the foundations of democracy.

Finally, the chapter will come to argue that these authors have had an immense contribution to literature on democracy through the unsettling of male-centrism and the attempt to widen the focus on democracy to recognise and represent women and their experiences. However, it will add that when returning to the category of women to make its claims they struggle to capture the importance of conflict and the disruptive potential of politicisation that happens when different performativities of gender come into conflict.

1.1 Carole Pateman's sexual contract: widening democracy for whom?

Carole Pateman (1989) starts with a feminist critique to liberal forms of politics, and more specifically liberal democracy. She argues that categories like that of citizenship are deeply masculinistic and patriarchal, despite being presented as gender-neutral (Pateman, 1989). Neutrality and abstraction conceal the fact that subjects and norms in liberal systems are models according to rationalist and masculinistic actors (Sabsay, 2018: 7).

Although Pateman unpacks the gendered dimension of liberalism buried under the premises of neutrality, she disagrees with those feminists that state that women are not part of the liberal political order. Instead, she argues that women have been

included but only as "the other sex", as subordinates of men, who were included as real citizens (Pateman, 1992: 16). This is what she calls the sexual contract (Pateman, 1989), where mirroring Rousseau's (1762) legitimation of the power of the state over the citizens, she brings attention to the way in which the subordination of women towards men has also been naturalised and legitimised. She thus believes that the attempts to find different ways to incorporate women into the public sphere should not become the main quest for a feminist democratic politics: women are already part of it, but the patriarchal system that shapes liberalism does not allow recognising their specific contribution to democracy (Pateman, 1992). As a result, for Pateman, the issue is not the absence of women, but the absence of recognition of women's contribution within the liberal democratic system.

Hence, she argues that the role of feminism is to recognise how women have already been incorporated into the public sphere, and the specific ways in which they are already playing a role in it. Consequently, Pateman departs from a conceptualisation of feminism that takes women as a foundational subject, since it is their experience and the specifics roles that they have been assigned that she is concerned with to build a more democratic and free society (Pateman, 1992: 25). Consequently, Pateman argues for the creation of a model of citizenship which recognises women's experience of motherhood: their ability to create life, which men do not have.

By drawing on the specificity of "women as women" (Mouffe, 1992: 375), feminists can deconstruct this apparent universalist, gender-neutral and power-free conception of citizenship and democracy, and account for the experience of women to be included into democratic processes without risking the perpetuation of patriarchal structures. Here, Pateman's feminism asks democracy to uncover the patriarchal and gendered dynamics in it through a recognition of sexual difference, and the way in which it determines what counts as citizenship and democratic practice.

Pateman's analysis of the sexual contract and the patriarchal dimension of liberal citizenship and liberal democracy have proved very useful for a number of feminist scholars (Puwar & Pateman, 2002: 125). However, she has also received numerous criticisms because of her universalistic and unitary approach towards the categories of women and patriarchy. It could be argued that she merely complements one

universalist (masculinistic) account of democratic values, with another one, which can be equally unitary and problematic. This account contributes to reproduce gender binaries that hierarchise, regulate and produce subjects in a way that reinforce the patriarchal system that she aims to dismantle (Butler, 1991: 89) and fails to recognise the way in which these categories produce the subordinated identities that she is trying to subvert.

Pateman puts forward an account of patriarchy as the main form of oppression that women suffer, hierarchising and disregarding the multiplicity of interlocked structures of domination that can converge under the umbrella of (and produce) the category of women. With this, she assumes that there is an "autonomous and self-perpetuating patriarchal system" (Butler, 1991: 88), where oppression and power is unilaterally exerted from men towards women, giving place to a hierarchical relationship between individuals.

In arguing this, Pateman prioritises male domination and patriarchy as the main systemic forms of oppression for women, disregarding other structures of discrimination that intersect with it (Butler, 1991: 90). This contributes to the homogenisation of experiences and subjects, since, as Nancy Fraser puts it "no-one is simply a woman" and "one is not always a woman to the same degree" (Fraser, 1992: 179). In other words, Pateman puts forward a vision of feminism where there is a certain degree of harmony between the identities and demands of women, leaving no room to account for the role of conflict between them. This denies the possibility of engaging with the context in which feminism arises as a democratic project that accounts for the interaction of different structures of power, failing to press urgent questions on democracy and really understand what it is that brings different groups together beyond one axis of oppression.

Pateman's contribution to democratic theory has nevertheless been considered as ground-breaking for being the first to question citizenship as a masculinistic concept and suggest a way to widen it by recognising a form of citizenship that is built around female difference and the experiences of women. Ruth Lister, for example, has built on her work to further widen the conceptualisation of citizenship and women's engagement in democratic politics (1997).

Lister (1997) argues that, if we follow Pateman, we are trapped in a dichotomy where there is either a male model for citizenship that is presented as neutral and women need to conform to, or they have to envision a new form of citizenship that is based on women's shared experiences that shifts the citizenship model in a way that allows them to be recognised by it, recognising their specificity and their sexual difference (Lister, 1997: 95).

Instead, Lister suggests building a form of citizenship that allows accounting for women in all their diversity, reconciling the debate on difference and equality and moving beyond the dichotomy through a "gender-inclusive" citizenship (Lister, 1997:96). She aims to formulate citizenship without erasing women, and withoutt contributing to perpetuating a new universalism (Lister, 1997: 195). Thus, Lister aims to widen citizenship so that it includes women and their fluid identities while avoiding the "exclusionary and disciplinary tendencies" (Lister, 1997: 195) that the politics of difference can foster when attempting to widen democracy.

In order to do this, Lister suggests a model of citizenship following what she calls a differentiated universalism, which embraces the tension between the difference of feminism and the universalism of citizenship (Lister, 1997: 196-197). This means that it further widens democracy through the inclusivity that results from acknowledging the exclusionary dynamics within and in between borders. (Lister, 1997: 196). This, she argues, is partly due to the fact that while feminism has long challenged the exclusions of feminism within the state, recent global feminist movements have also pushed to consider the practice of citizenship across borders (Lister, 1997: 296).

At the time of her writing, movements like *Take Back the Night* were becoming more prominent around the world. Because of the questions that such feminist mobilisations posed, together with the aim to address the current debates of feminism, which have moved from considering differences between men and women to focus on the differences between the experiences and identities of women (Fraser, 1996b), Lister aims to avoid the foreclosing of the category of women in her conceptualisation of citizenship, while still returning to the horizon of women to

build her account of it. In order to solve this tension, she emphasises the role of agency amongst those who are involved in feminist struggles.

Lister argues that it is the agency to act as a citizen, which she describes as to "engage in common activities, oriented to common … ends" (Gould, 1988: 71 in Lister, 1997: 41), that determines their belonging to a democratic category of women. Thus, rather than the recognition of a shared experience of injustice, like next section will argue, for Lister it is the decision to partake in collective action as women that determines the participation of women into active citizenship. Hence, for Lister, widening democracy through a widening of citizenship is not about recognising a distinct form of citizenship linked to the private sphere, but about recognising the active of participation of women, in both spheres, as active forms of citizenship, therefore reshaping the concept of citizenship according to the collective agency of women.

At this point it might look like Lister's argument is closer to that of the feminists that argue for the role of performativity and the body in redrawing the boundaries of democracy and democratic action, since she highlights the act of participation as one of the main ways for women to expand the boundaries of citizenship and democracy. However, unlike the feminist authors of Chapter three, Lister does not argue for a complete questioning and remaking of the category of citizenship resulting from the constitution and performativity for a feminist collective body. Instead, she argues for its expansion and the recognition of forms of collective participation of women as acts of citizenship. This does not necessarily question the structural and power relations that shape democracy and citizenship and that systematically exclude women and their experiences.

Therefore, even if she uses a more fluid conceptualisation of women, recognising the intersection of patriarchal structures with other structures of domination as well as the potential of collective action to widen citizenship, when she returns to the horizon of women (even if women is not a foreclosed category) she does so with the intention to further include women into the concept of citizenship, to ensure that "the universal and the particular are combined in an unbiased way: a differentiated instead of false universalism" (Lister, 1997: 199). In this sense, Lister does not work

around the possibility of imagining a different or alternative rearrangement of power relations and structures that does not foreclose democracy and allow for a democratic contestation and performative subversion of its limits, but instead she conceives participation (as citizens) as a means to be recognised by the system.

Therefore, it can be argued that Lister's contribution to widening democracy is crucial to move beyond Pateman's approach to citizenship. However, her approach does not address the subversion of structures of power that are excluding women, instead only focusing on the legitimisation of women's participation in democracy. Even if this is a very important contribution to democracy, it does not allow accounting for current feminist mobilisations are challenging the norms that regulate feminism and built beyond the category of women, like the last section of this chapter will show.

1.2 Iris M. Young's affinity groups: widening democracy through diversity

Iris M. Young's feminist critique of democracy (1990) also starts from a critique of the patriarchal dimension of liberal democracy and the apparent absence of women from it. Although it is true that both Young and Pateman differ in many aspects of their approach, they both share the centrality of women as a subject and the assumption that this subject is not natural but constructed around its socialisation and the structures of power in society. They also both argue for the recognition of this distinct subject (and its specific demands, roles and interests). However, unlike Pateman who argued that seeking representation within the system of male citizenship meant accepting its patriarchal dimension and perpetuating the oppressive structures that have for so long been excluding women from democratic practices (because they did not challenge the sexual contract in which it is built), Young advocates to diversify democracies from within in order to widen them.

Iris M. Young rejects the conceptualisation of a universal form of oppression of all women, and she dismisses the possibility of finding a universal form of oppression that could lead to the identification of a unique women subject (Young, 2013). However, she still conceives identity to be key in democracies and the enabler of

group political mobilisations, and thus she suggests a number of mechanisms and reforms to recognise an alliance of women, and consequently amend the patriarchal dimension of current democratic orders (Young, 1994).

For Young, feminist politics is set to overcome the injustice that arises when individuals (in this case women) are limited by the power structures that regulate their lives. In this context, feminists should call for a form of equality that does not erase that individual identity, but instead builds on difference to foster mutual recognition of different groups in a way that it denaturalises the universality of hegemonic cultures.

Young argues that the process of identification of individuals with a collective group can be both passive (individuals are born into certain social groups) and active (individuals choose to self-identify with certain social groups) (Young, 1997: 339). Young focuses on the active identification of individuals with certain social groups to define what she calls affinity groups (Young, 1990). These affinity groups are actively chosen by individuals and subjects are free to engage and disengage in identifications with these groups (Young, 1990: 170). Consequently, these collective affinity groups do not arise as a result of certain shared characteristics of individuals, but as a product of a shared will to identify with each other. In the case of the category of women, an affinity group would arise when a group of individuals actively decides to associate with each other, accepting the group identity as part of their own individual social identities (Young, 1990:170 - 172). Therefore, she argues that feminist politics speak "in the name of someone, the group of women, who are defined by this female gender identity" (Young, 1990: 176). It is important to highlight here that Young accounts for the intersection of different identities and the simultaneous belonging to different social groups. This approach is due to her rejection of the idea that all women are equal, instead incorporating in her theory some of the critiques of black feminists formulated in relation to the universality of feminist subjects[7].

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[7] See Chapter three for full discussion on this.

The bonds that result from these affinity groups are, for Young, potentially emancipatory, since they challenge the idea of essence and emphasise the constructed dimension of collective identification by reclaiming "the definition of the group by the group" (Young, 1990: 172). In other words, a group of women is not defined by a common essential element, but by a common will to become part of the group instead. Moreover, these affinity groups become political when those who self-identify as being part of this group become aware of the fact that they are discriminated against, and therefore decide to claim their identity to define it in more positive terms.

This is demonstrated by individuals actively choosing to gather under the same identification marked by their discrimination, actively presenting themselves in a way that celebrates their identity, rather than further marginalise it (Young, 1990: 160). Rather than attempting to be assimilated, Young argues that these groups actively display their difference, asking for recognition and representation within democracies. Consequently, she moves away from those who build the feminist body in relation to a shared unique oppression by all women and privileges a political process of constituting alliances and associations between women through the communication of "experiences and perspectives conditioned by them to one another" (Young, 2002: 83). As a result, her affinity groups are not constituted corresponding to traditional and given identity categories, but instead are built around a recognised shared experience of injustice.

The concept of affinity groups offers a framework through which Young aims to widen democracy by diversifying participation through the inclusion of groups that have been traditionally marginalised or overlooked in democratic practice (Young, 1990). Young argues that democracy should institutionalise specific spaces where these affinity groups are to share their experiences and challenges, enabling their voices to be heard, and thus making democracies more aware of the challenges and demands of such affinity groups.

Hence, Young argues that it is possible to reform the deliberative model of democracy by incorporating different perspectives, that allow accounting for the bias of the exploitations and exclusion of the ideas and experiences of certain individuals

and groups, leading to the "wisest and most just political judgments for action" (Young, 2002: 12). Thus, she argues that through ensuring the diversification of the groups that take part in democratic deliberations (affinity groups like women), it is possible to arrive to a more just and equal democracy.

This also means that Young assumes a certain level of transparency in individuals and affinity groups when arguing that "a democratic public arrives to objective political judgement from discussion" (Young, 2002: 83). This is because, when arguing that it is possible to strengthen democracy by diversifying its processes account for socially differentiated groups that are both brought together by their experiences of marginalisation and that share those experiences of injustice (Young, 2002: 83), she is implying that there is a core experience of injustice that determines their political demands and ideas (Young 1990: 162). It suggests that it is possible for affinity groups to find common agreements or decisions that represent the totality of experiences and opinions in the group, and that the group will always act on its self-interest.

It could be argued that this tension between Young's attempt to avoid essentialisation and her ultimate recognition of an underlying shared experience of womanhood that motivates affinity groups results from her aim to define women in a non-essentialist way, while still maintaining a conception of women as a "collective social position" (Young, 1990: 719) that enables representation in terms of unified single-affinity groups.

Her approach eventually concludes that there is a core experience shared amongst all individuals that belong to the same group (Young, 1990: 162). In other words, she identifies the existence of a common experience shared by all women in the group, which can be considered to be problematic given the very diverse interpretations, experiences, understandings and performances of womanhood. Here, it can be argued that Young's approach meets a similar shortcoming to that of Pateman: the lack of recognition for conflicting demands amongst individuals who share experiences of injustice.

Despite Young's valuable contribution to democratic theory by pressing to widen it through diversifying and to considering the exclusions and foreclosing of democratic practice, her conception of a collective politics that highlights difference understood as shared experiences of oppression can fail to capture both the complexity and fluidity that shared experiences of injustice entails.

Similarly, as the following chapter will develop, it also fails to address the potential for alliances across groups that do not share experiences of injustice but do share a reading of the world. Therefore, it could be argued that despite the importance of Young's contribution to disrupting democratic theory and pressing to consider both the unequal distribution of power in democracies and the way in which it affects different groups of individuals, it still fails to fully capture what brings feminists together (also with other non-feminists) in the absence of shared experiences of oppression and shared collective identities. This, as Chapter five will show, is crucial if we want to understand the way in which current feminist mobilisations might be contributing to further widen and radicalise democracy.

1.3 Jean B. Elshtain's social feminism: widening democracy through motherhood

Feminist theory has long shown a deep interest in the politics and issues of family. In fact, the family has become a matter of wide analysis in feminist scholarship, by focusing not only on the role of women within it, but on the gendered relationships that constitute this as a private sphere (Allen et al, 2013). Family has become an object of both critique and praise by different feminist scholars, who have long aimed to engage with the gendered relationships of power that produce such social structure, approaching the concept of family from a number of different angles, (Fraser, 1996a; Bystrom, 2010; McClintock, 1993).

Within these feminist analyses of the family, motherhood has become an issue of wide discussion because of its relation to both the female body and identity. In fact, early feminists such as Wollstonecraft recognised motherhood as one of the main duties of women (Wollstonecraft, 1993), to be fulfilled as part of their commitment

to the nation and society (Ford, 2009). Motherhood has been widely theorised as a positive force by those who reclaim the family and motherhood as important practices to increase and incorporate into feminist consciousness, aiming to reconstruct gender identity by mirroring them (Dietz, 1985: 20). On the other hand, motherhood has also been theorised as a reproduction of patriarchy and capitalism at home, a hierarchical and essentialist practice that impedes women realise their full potential as citizens and women (Firestone, 1970).

Elshtain's social feminism and politics of motherhood suggests that through the essentially feminine values of motherhood and maternal thinking, it is possible to envisage a more caring and democratic society, thus aiming to reconsider notions such as power within democratic theory and the discussion of alternative models of democracy.

Interestingly, and even if Elshtain probably holds the most conservative view on feminism amongst the authors discussed in this chapter, she succeeds at taking the task of widening democracy through feminism a step further. She aims to reconfigure democracy by mirroring what she considers to be the ethics of care essential to women. In this sense, even if her approach to feminism risks reifying limited accounts of womanhood and female identity, as well as the gendered division of the public and the private, she widens democracy by formulating ways in which feminist politics can disrupt and reimagine democracy, rather than accommodate feminism (or women and their experiences) into existing democratic systems.

Elshtain aims to restructure political thinking by bringing in the political potential of maternal thinking (Dietz, 1985:20). She critiques early feminist theories and their disregard of motherhood. She believes that it is crucial for feminist politics to develop a conceptualisation of women as mothers that becomes the subject of feminism.

Thus, in *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981), Elshtain develops an account of feminism built around women's identity and their traditional role in the family: mothers. She argues that it is the consideration of women as mothers that makes women distinct, locating in mothering the difference that defines womanhood, and

envisioning feminism as a different kind of politics that should be based precisely on this differential trait. Therefore, for Elshtain feminist politics should be based on women´s ability to be mothers and their role in traditional families as such.

Elshtain argues that feminism needs to develop a form of democracy that challenges individualism and highlights the importance of community in a way that does not dismiss the public and private divide that in her opinion some second-wave feminists have done. She argues that in the attempt to envision a way of democracy that is more inclusive of women and their needs and demands, feminist authors and activists have challenged the public/private divide calling for women to be included in the public realm. This has resulted in them ignoring the real distinct value of women: their role as mothers in the family, and in the private sphere. Feminism, she argues, should thus be formulated around this distinctiveness of women (their ability to mother), and trying to widen democracy by bringing women into the public sphere also means leaving behind this foundational difference on which she builds feminist politics. She thus believes that trying to advocate for such a blurring of the public/private divide, where women obtain more public roles and universal identities, also implies women losing the specific difference that should hold the feminist body together and constitute a basis for feminist political action (Elshtain, 1981: 305).

Consequently, she argues that her social feminism, a feminism based on compassion, care and empathy, should become a form of participatory politics, what she calls a participatory democratic citizenship (Elshtain, 1981). This should be built around a political community that allows maintaining the specificity and difference of mothering while allowing for forms of political action that do not require giving away such difference in the name of universal identities. For this, she calls to reconceptualise the private sphere as the locus for the participatory democratic citizenship.

This would imply recognising the values and identities that emerge in the private sphere (and that for her are always linked with the traditional values of family life) as crucial for political life, as a model on which to build the public sphere. Through this thriving of the private sphere, Elshtain argues, it is possible to foster the

participation of women in democracies without risking the loss of their identities. In this sense, she differs from Pateman (1989) because she does not assume that there is a model through which women are practice citizenship to be recognised and that it obscured by the privileging of male citizenship. She instead calls for a full consideration of democracy (and politics) taking the model of care where the real values, capacities and skills of democratic citizenship should be developed in the private sphere, taking the family and the caring experience of motherhood as the model of democratic and moral values of solidarity and empathy. Hence, Elshtain develops a maternalistic approach to democratic politics based on the motherly bonds of love, care and selflessness, through which to counter the individualistic dimension of liberalism.

Elshtain's approach has had a big impact on feminist scholarship and has received a number of critiques. Amongst the many analyses of her social feminism, Mary Dietz's (1985) elaborates a powerful critique of her work. Dietz analyses Elshtain's social feminism, engaging in a strong critique of this kind of politics. According to Dietz, social feminism contributes to distorting "the meaning of politics and political action by largely reinforcing a one-dimensional view of women as creatures of the family" (Dietz, 1985: 20).

Although Dietz recognises the importance of finding a common trait that unites the experiences of all women, she believes that reducing women's identity to motherhood is a highly problematic move for both feminist theory and democratic politics (Dietz, 1985: 20). This is because she both recognises the complexity of women's identity beyond a reductionist approach that focuses on maternal thinking, and she problematises the link that Elshtain draws between maternal thinking and democratic politics. Dietz argues that, for feminism to be a form of democratic politics, it shall abandon the emphasis on maternity and motherhood, to return to focusing on the category of the citizen.

Dietz agrees with Elshtain's statement that political orders should have the imperative to care for and preserve life. However, she does not agree that this preservation of life through communal care is enough to make a political order democratic, and thus she confronts Elshtain's theoretical link between maternal

thinking and democratic values (Dietz, 1985: 30). Besides the initial problematisation of the concept of family in Elshtain's work (Dietz, 1985: 24), Dietz argues that it is not possible to draw a link that equates practices of mothering with democratic values, which she defines in terms of "active citizenship, self-government, egalitarianism, and the exercise of freedom" (Dietz, 1985: 30). Dietz believes that maternal virtues could never provide the basis for democratic citizenship since they arise from a very specific and particular experience that cannot be extended to everyone, unlike citizenship, which concerns different activities and a wide public (Dietz, 1985: 31). In fact, she argues that "to be a mother is not in itself to have the requisite capacity for citizenship. (Good) mothers may also be (good) citizens, but their being (good) mothers does not make them (good) citizens" (Dietz, 1985: 31).

Moreover, Dietz considers a number of other aspects that make the principle and practice of citizenship distinct from that of maternal care. She firstly considers the different arrangement of power relations between the mother and her child, and the state and the citizens. Given that the relationship amongst citizens in a democracy is always a potential of equality, attempting to achieve what Aristotle calls freedom, it is not possible to equate it with that of the mother and her child, where there is always a subordination from the child, which is conceived as part of and an extension of the self of the mother. (Dietz, 1985: 31). Dietz then proceeds to consider the relationship amongst citizens, which cannot be described as one between brothers or sisters, but should be defined as one between friends instead, since citizens "are not intimately, but politically involved with each other" (Dietz, 1985: 31).

According to Dietz (1985: 32-33), if we are to promote practices of active citizenship like Elshtain suggest, we cannot focus on maternal thinking, but in political consciousness. This is not to say that some women might not decide to act politically as mothers, as it is the case of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, or the *Madres galegas contra la droga*[8] in Spain. What Dietz argues is that the practice of

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[8] Madres galegas contra la droga was a group of activists in the north of Spain in the late 80s. They protested against drug trafficking, especially cocaine and heorin, and the impact that it was having in the youth at the time, with many lives being lost

mothering per se cannot be taken as a democratic paradigm for political practice. She suggests that the practice of motherhood can be used to politicise certain issues, but these need to be politicised (Dietz, 1985: 33) "for it is only when mothers become politicized and, in particular, when they act collectively as feminists, that they can secure public policies" (Dietz, 1985: 34). Hence, the performance of mothering can become a starting point for political action, but it can only be deemed a matter of democratic politics if the process serves to make mothers realise that they are not only mothers "but women who share a common political situation with other women, some of whom are mothers, some of whom are not. Accordingly, the values that they must defend are not as such maternal (the growth and preservation of children) but political (freedom, equality, community power)" (Dietz, 1985: 34). It is only through this approach that maternal caring can become a foundation on which to build feminist and democratic politics.

1.4 Conclusion: A democracy of sexual difference, returning to the horizon of women?

The chapter engaged with difference democrats to highlight the way in which feminists started a conversation approaching democratic tradition through a feminist perspective. In doing so, it engaged with authors that returned to the horizon of women to make their claims and did not fully account for the importance of conflicting performativities of gender in both disrupting and deepening democracy. This, ultimately contributed to a widening of democracy: the authors envisioned important ways to represent women and include them and their experiences in democracy, but by neglecting the importance of conflict and performativity, contributed to an expansion of democracy as it stands, rather than a deepening of it through the pursuing of openness to contestation. This is, they suggested a model that, albeit including women in their thinking, did not allow for contestation of the new models, and therefore replicated the gender norms and structures of inequality they were trying to dismantle.

from either drug addiction, or engaging in drug trafficking. The movement was very successful at getting media attention and mobilising politicians to take measures to put an end drug trafficking in the region.

The authors discussed tend towards democracy through sexual difference, to widen it in a way that reveals the concealed power relations in democratic tradition and includes women into democratic practice and theorising. In doing so, this chapter argues, they contribute to widening democratic practice and tradition in a way that it accounts for the identities and experiences of women.

However, their return to the horizon of women when remaking democratic theorising does not allow to escape some of the problematic issues that they are trying to address in the first place: structures of power. Moreover, their lack of consideration for the role of conflict in democracy (and feminism), does not allow their approaches to reimagine democracy in a way that addresses some of the questions posed by recent feminist mobilisations: how is it possible to bring together conflicting, and sometimes contradictory demands and bodies in the absence of a shared identity? And is it possible to reimagine a (more) feminist world from this place?

Pateman fails to consider the intersection between different structures of power and the foreclosing that comes with establishing a model for citizenship that homogenises the experiences and identities of women. In this sense, Pateman's return to the horizon of women to widen democracy paradoxically reproduces the same power structures that it criticised: the exclusion of alternatives under an apparent universal or hegemonic model of citizenship that highlights certain traits, qualities and demands. It can be therefore argued that this return to women as a homogeneous group, and to patriarchy as the one main form of oppression for women, does not allow to consider the role of conflict between women, their experiences, identities and demands, which limits the potential of her approach to account for the diversity and pluralism of feminist theorising and feminist mobilisations, like Chapter five shows, overlooking the interplay between power structures and missing the opportunities to answer pressing questions on democracy.

Similarly, Iris Young, even when employing a more fluid and dynamic envisioning of her return to women's horizon, emphasises the existence of a common experience of womanhood shared by all those belonging to her affinity groups. She also assumes a certain level of coherence and transparency in those subjects whose demands she

expects to all converge into a logical extension of their shared experience of injustice. In doing so, and assuming this level of coherence, transparency and harmony between shared experiences of lived identities and political demands, her approach finds it challenging to capture the reality of some of the feminist mobilisations nowadays, like the ones explored in Chapter five: they present multiple demands, some of them conflicting and even contradictory, and still form alliances in the absence of such agreements and speak like a single body across groups that do not share a lived experience of injustice.

Finally, Elshtain's approach, also returns to that horizon of women when trying to elaborate an alternative model of democracy. When returning to the horizon of motherhood with a fixed understanding of it, the potential to deepen democracy by reimagining democratic tradition and practice accounting for different notions of power and care is threatened by the reification of limited accounts of womanhood and motherhood. However, when reimagining democracy in relation to such a static vision of motherhood and the characteristics of it, she fails to recognise the different experiences of motherhood, and the real disruptive and deepening potential of her theory: the politicisation that occurs as a consequence of performativities that are opposed to each other, sometimes in conflict.

Ultimately, it could be argued that their contribution is crucial to democratic tradition because it unsettles its male-centrism and widens the focus of democracy to recognise and represent women and their experiences within democratic tradition. However, their lack of consideration for the importance of conflict and the potential of opposed performativities of gender to politicise that which they are performing, as well as the overlooking of the way in which their remaking of democratic theorising through sexual difference might contribute to the reification of the structures they are trying to address, does not allow to fully deepen and radicalise democracy in the way that Chapter six shows. In other words, and like the following chapters will show, if feminist theorising wants to follow the sweaty questions that feminist mobilisations are asking democratic tradition, it must consider the role of conflict and the disruptive performativity of embodiment and affect.

Chapter 2: An agonistic feminism?

Introduction

The previous chapter showed that feminism has long relied on the notion of women for the demands of rights and the pursuit of equality, utilising women as a closed political category has been critiqued because of the way it homogenises experiences further reinforcing power relations and subordination between women (hooks, 1981; Anzaldúa, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1988). Others have also argued that locating the category women as a subject that feminism ought to emancipate contributes to reproducing the same structures that feminism is trying to dismantle in the first place, locating it into a constructed binary and contributing to the perpetuation of exclusion and boundaries (Butler, 1990; Fraser, 1996b).

Moreover, following this line, positing women as a foundational subject of feminism has been found especially problematic by some other feminist theorists aiming to link feminism together with democracy from a perspective that privileges demands over identity. These authors, that as I will elaborate below I will be referring to as agonistic feminists, would tend to argue that a feminism of identity politics can contribute to a democratic politics of closure that constrain and restrict political transformation (Honig, 1994; Brown, 1995; Zerilli, 2005), contrary to what the authors discussed in the previous chapter argued. Throughout the thesis, with closure I refer to a process of establishing a specific meaning presented as universal, erasing the contingency of the political process of meaning making behind it.

While section 2.1 will go into detail on what I mean by agonistic feminism, here it suffices to say why it is important to consider these authors and the issue of agonism in relation to the discussion started in the previous chapter. Because of its recognition of conflict as ineradicable and desirable for democracy, agonism allows continuing to tend towards democracy from a feminist perspective that accounts for difference (like in the previous chapter), while also revealing and challenging the limitations and exclusions that come with it. This allows for further deepening of

democracy through openness and conflict, which the difference democrats discussed in the previous chapter overlooked. Therefore, agonistic feminists as discussed in this chapter are able to challenge the return to women as a foundational category of feminism, while still recognising the importance of difference in democratic practice and theorising.

In doing so, agonistic feminism (as defined in section 2.1) and the authors discussed in this chapter, not only recognise the dimension of conflict, but are able to start pointing into the direction of ensuring openness and probing into some of the questions that feminism mobilisations are posing to democracy today: how is it possible to radicalise democracy in the absence of a common subject, and with different, sometimes conflicting, demands?

For this, the chapter will start with a discussion on the idea behind agonistic feminism. It will then move to engage with Bonnie Honig's suggestion of approaching feminism as a performative agonism that rather than representing and (re)producing identities as stable and foreclosed, agonistically generates those identities. This allows feminism to move away from stable identities and towards the dispute of meanings, practices and politics to produce these same categories, which ultimately become the articulatory principle of feminist politics, while avoiding reification.

Following a similar line, Linda Zerilli aims to start a conversation between feminism and radical democratic theory to work through the shared constitutive tension between the contingency of their articulations and the partial closure in their claims to representation. Zerilli incorporates the dimension of judgements as crucial to practices of world-building, where the pursuit of freedom becomes an end in itself for the construction of public spaces that are more egalitarian and democratic.

Despite the valuable insights of these approaches, the chapter will argue that their agonistic approach is focused on a struggle over the de/reconstruction of identity, of *whoness*, rather than on the demands. This, the chapter will argue, reduces feminism and the potential of agonism to a matter of building (instead of finding, like before) the subject of feminism, rather than building a project of transformation for society.

Following Wendy Brown (1995), this chapter will move on to argue for a feminism that pushes away from the wounded attachments that call for reparations and identity (like those discussed in the previous chapter), and towards a demand-focused agonistic feminism that aims to articulate different claims that struggle for a process of transformation of neoliberal politics. Here, I will be reading Wendy Brown (1995) together with Kathi Weeks' (1998) reconsideration of standpoint feminist theory because, although it is true that Weeks' main aim is to develop a non-essentialist theory of feminist subjectivity, her approach towards the standpoint as an ontological, rather than epistemological tool that allows organising the agonistic struggle around "what we want" rather than "who we are". This section will also engage with Verónica Gago's (2019) theorisation of the feminist strike as potentia, where she argues for the importance of a feminist body that is gathered together in the strikes as a place to desire for an alternative arrangement of the political order.

Finally, the chapter will engage with recent developments in feminist theory that find the democratic potential of recent feminist mobilisations in its articulation of demands opposed to neoliberal governance (di Marco, 2019; Palop, 2019). This follows the lines of Wendy Brown (1995) when arguing for a feminist project based on the hetereogeneous demands of trasformation of a specific (in this case, neoliberal) political order. This group of authors is very heterogeneous and differs in the way in which they argue that the agonistic feminist body is ensembled. While di Marco argues for a feminist people *à la* Laclau, understood as an articulation of feminist demands organised around the idea of abortion and against an antagonistic other, Palop calls for the importance of the politicisation of care as an enabler of this agonistic feminism. Nevertheless, they both agree in the sense that feminism cannot be based on a single subjectivity to be emancipated, but rather in the articulation of different demands and movements that are opposed to a neoliberal hegemony and offer alternative articulations of the principles of liberal democracy. Hence, they emphasise the importance of claim making and practices of signification for the agonistic project of feminism.

However, the chapter will end up by concluding that despite some recent developments in the literature (Eklundh, 2019), the affective and bodily dimensions of the articulations of agonistic projects tend to be overlooked. Although it is true

that most theorists of radical democracy aim to destabilise the rational actor model, few of them engage with a theorisation of affective practices in these articulations (Eklundh, 2019), and this also happens in these theorisations of the democratic potential of agonistic feminism. Hence, the chapter will point out to the gap in the literature that it aims to fill: the role of affective and bodily practices in contributing to holding the agonistic body together and radicalising democracy.

Ultimately, this chapter will engage with authors that share a conceptualisation of an agonistic feminism where the agon overlooks the affective and bodily dimensions of both democracy and feminism. As a result, they favouran approach that focuses on the linguistic dimension of meaning and claim-making, although it is true that there are some recent developments in the literature of radical democracy that aim at trespassing this linguistic focus (Eklundh, 2019). This favouring of the linguistic dimension is of extreme relevance because it jeopardise the possibility of openness by excluding other practices of meaning making that are highly bodily and affective, and reinforces a division between the rational and the emotional that has traditionally associated the rational with the white and male (Ahmed, 2004).

As the methodology section already elaborated, the chapter will not discuss the work of Chantal Mouffe or Judith Butler. As explained, this is not an overlooking of the importance of their theories and their contribution to both agonistic and feminist literature. In fact, their work is crucial and aligned with some of the aspects that I address as central to the agonistic feminists that I will discuss in this chapter (namely agonistic politics for Mouffe, and Butler's influence of Arendt and the notion of assembly). Rather, this responds to a choice to read their work more carefully in the following chapters, in relation to both the role of the body and radical democracy.

2.1 Agonism and feminism: what bring us together?

Agonism is a political theory within the tradition of radical democracy (Tambakaki, 2015: 578) that theorises a way to bring about social and political change in pluralist democracies. In this context of pluralism, agonism believes that difference is ineradicable and constitutive of the political, this is, it is not something that can be

transcended or settled, emphasising the need to account for conflict and contestation as an ontological constitutive of the political.

Hence, their account of democratic change is built around the idea of conflict and contestation, the idea of the agon. The agon represents an ongoing way of taming conflict into democratic practice, ensuring that there is a possibility to account for the ineradicable difference that is usually concealed in pluralist democracies. Thus, for agonists the way to work around difference is not to eliminate it, or to ensure that there is a way of including all differences into the political arena at the same time. Instead, it is about making sure that there is a constant destabilisation of fixities through the conflict that emerges out of differences, while also maintaining the openness to contestation that disrupts concealed exclusions and deepens democracy through the constant consideration of alternatives.

Hence, agonism's vision for democratic change is directly linked to the idea of ensuring democratic openness through the possibility of contestation, which enables both destabilising the current order and also bringing forward alternatives to it when considering those differences that are excluded and concealed by power (Tambakaki, 2015: 582). Moreover, and because of this ongoing contestation, agonism also allows questioning those alternatives that are brought forward by differences, and highlighting the exclusions that they also entail.

Hence, agonism allows imagining accounts for change that call for both examining exclusions and constructing alternatives that do not jeopardise the possibility of openness (Tambakaki, 2015: 2). This demonstrates that through agonism it is possible to engage with the disruption and disarticulation of the established political orders and the rearticulation of political alternatives, while remaining mindful of the potential exclusion that these transformative projects might entail. Therefore, agonism is seen as a way to both expose the precarity of political articulations, and to tame the conflict that arises from radical difference to enable openness (Mouffe, 2013).

It is true that there are many accounts of agonism with diverging conceptions on the way in which the agon contributes to ensuring openness. However, the aim of the

chapter is not to engage in an in-depth discussion on the variations of agonism, but rather to understand how agonism can be read together with feminism to further disrupt and deepen democracy. In this sense, the chapter will focus on three main aspects of agonistic theory to build on the idea of agonistic feminism: its recognition of ineradicable difference and conflict in democracy, the commitment to ensuring openness through the contestation of concealed universal foreclosed categories, and the possibility of articulating alternatives. This, together with agonism's focus on social mobilisations as an important place for their democratic politics of contestation, allows further probing into the discussion on the previous chapter: how can feminist theorising contribute to the disruption and deepening of democracy, accounting for (sexual) difference without risking replicating the same power structures that it is trying to dismantle, and articulating the demands of feminism for an alternative world in the absence of a shared identity?

Hence, I will use the concept of agonistic feminism to refer to those feminist authors who aim to unpack the relationship between feminist and democratic theorising in a way that accounts for the three dimensions mentioned above: ineradicable difference and conflict, ensuring openness through contestation, and the possibility of rearticulating of alternatives. This is not to say that all authors discussed have the same approach towards democracy or feminism, or that they all put the same emphasis in their work on these areas. Rather, their commonality lies in their recognition of conflict, the value of difference as leading to openness and the articulation of alternatives. This allows to read all of them through an agonistic lens, and in doing so it raises the potential to further enquire into feminist ways to approach democratic tradition without risking reproducing the power relations ingrained in the return to the category of women.

In doing so, I argue that agonistic feminism disrupts and deepens democratic tradition beyond the widening of its borders to include women in them as another universal subject that reproduces the same power relations than the universal concealing of men did. This is, by turning to recognising the dimensions of conflict, I argue that agonistic feminists are able to approach democratic tradition focusing, not in the inclusion of women within the borders of democracy, but instead in the

way that such borders are constructed and ensuring that they remain malleable, and it is possible to contest them and rearticulate them in alternative ways.

Their moving away from the horizon of women does not mean that the authors in this chapter do not seek a common ground for political action when they approach democracy, but rather that they do so beyond the horizon of women as the main fixator of difference. As argued earlier, this is not to say that agonism tries to transcend difference, or that it does not account for it. However, unlike the authors discussed in the previous chapter, feminist agonism does not make (sexual) difference a foreclosed category, or a category that harmonises the identities, experiences and demands of (female) bodies that share such difference. Instead, in understanding difference as unavoidable, it locates in it an opportunity for democratic change and contestation. This is, rather than eliminating difference or fixating it, this reading of feminism together with agonism embraces the challenges emerging out of difference and locates in them the possibility for deepening democracy, while also furthering feminists aims. In doing so, this approach is able to start pointing the way to thinking of the feminist contribution to democracy as one that is not restricted to the development of women's rights, allowing to further engage with the reality of feminist mobilisations like the ones described in Chapter five.

2.2 An agonistic feminism of freedom

Hannah Arendt has become a controversial, although very relevant, figure for political thought. Although she never considered herself to be a feminist, nor identified with the "question of women" (Kristeva, 2001: 25), her work has been interpreted by a number of feminist authors (Dietz, 1990; Disch, 1994; Elshtain, 1995; Honig, 1992; Pitkin, 1998; Zerilli, 2005) in different ways. This chapter, however, will primarily focus on the work of Bonnie Honig and Linda Zerilli, since they build on Arendt to reflect on the relationship between agonistic feminism and democratic politics, which is the main focus of this thesis.

2.2.1 Bonnie Honig, performative agonism and identity

Bonnie Honig argues that it is possible to think of feminism as a politics of contestation of the gender and sex categories, as well as of the prevalence of identity for political action, calling for a reading of democratic theory together with feminist and queer theory, to be able to further understand and rethink equality (Honig, 2013: 9), which she considers to be the central cause of feminism (Watson, 2013: 112).

Bonnie Honig builds on a poststructuralist reading of Arendt and Nietzsche to envision her idea of politics and agonism. In fact, she works with an interpretation of Hannah Arendt as a theorist of performativity, privileging action to the agent, and locating identity as the product of actions, rather than as its grounds. Her agonistic approach to feminism builds on Connolly's conceptualisation of agonistic democracy (Connolly, 1991) and aims to establish a democratic practice where contestation plays a central role (Ling Lee, 2001: 47). It is this reading of both Arendt and Connolly's agonism that she uses to formulate her idea of agonistic feminism, which is more focused on contestation and alliances on the basis of solidarity than in action determined in terms of identities.

Honig builds on Hannah Arendt to understand and read political actors as unstable and incomplete, seeking self-realisation in the identity that they gain as a consequence of their political actions. According to this reading, political actors do not act according to specific stable identities behind them that define and shape their interests and actions, but instead it is their interests and actions that shape and define their identities, which are always unstable (Honig, 1992: 141). Thus, Honig argues that we should not think of collective political action as emanating from a stable, shared and previously constituted community. She believes that by adopting this view that aims to act on the representation of a pre-established community identity, feminists (and democratic theorists) are disregarding the agonistic production of the subject and over-focusing on the representation and reproduction of those normative subjects that already exist and producing a false idea of commonality and heterogeneity that disregards pluralism and forecloses the possibility of politics (Honig, 1992: 149). Therefore, she believes that feminism should adopt an agonistic approach to identity that recognises that it is produced through contestation, and that

this is what gives place to the multiple, contradictory demands and claims of the feminist body itself.

Following on from this, Honig argues that communities based on stable identities "threaten to close the spaces of politics, to homogenize or repress the plurality and multiplicity that political action postulates" (Honig, 1993: 237). She believes that the only way to avoid the foreclosing of politics and pluralism is to adopt an agonistic stance that ensures the heterogeneity of identities and the discontinuity of political communities, avoiding the normalisation of homogenised constructions of subjectivity.

Consequently, for Honig it is important to think of contestation as intrinsic and crucial to politics. In fact, she believes that it is not contestation and conflict that we should condemn in politics, but the attempt to shut them down and conceal them (Disch, 1994: 176), which, as argued earlier, forecloses the possibility of openness. This follows from her concepts of the displacement of politics and virtú politics (Honig, 1993), that she uses to argue that plurality and contestation should be the basis for political and democratic action (Honig, 1993).

It is important to mention that for Honig contestation is not aimed at settling differences (since this would foreclose pluralism and, consequently, the possibility of politics), but at engaging and disengaging with the constitutions of differential identities instead. This outlines Honig's agonistic feminism, perceiving identity as a constant engagement of disruptive practices of destabilisation. It is this route that feminism should take, according to Honig, to adapt to globalisation and the gap between territorial and non-territorial feminist politics (Honig, 1992: 2-3)[9].

From Honig's focus on contestation and agonism we could argue that she sees feminism as a form to pursue the disruption of the categories of gender, hoping to move from a representative practice of feminism and democratic politics, to one that

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[9] For Honig, feminist territorial politics are those that are concerned with creating spaces for women in existing structures, institutions and systems. Non-territorial feminist politics are those concerned with challenging gender and identity categories and their boundaries.

focuses on contestation and conflict as crucial parts of building political identities and coalitions. This means that Honig's feminism targets not only a patriarchal structure, but also the current institutionalisation of liberal democracy (Ling Lee, 2001: 48), focusing on the construction, contestation and instability of collective agonistic subjectivities to do so. However, a the chapter will develop in the following sections, Honig's approach is still focused on an agonistic building of the subject of feminism, that risks reducing feminisms to a dispute of what feminisms are, or who they are, rather that what they want.

2.2.3 Zerilli's agonistic feminism as the freedom to world-building

Zerilli aims to start a conversation between democratic theory and feminist theory. She argues that both feminism and democracy are defined by contingency and judgement, and that there is an ineradicable constitutive tension between the openness of this contingency and the closure of claiming for representation and speaking on the name of others. This tension, Zerilli argues, should not be eradicated and feminists should find a way of working with it instead (Zerilli, 2005: 170).

Zerilli questions the "coherence of the category women as the subject of feminism" (Zerilli, 2005: ix), arguing that the current structural economic and social changes, like globalisation and late capitalism, have foreclosed the possibility of reading identities through the sole lens of gender.

She argues that it is possible to have a politics that is not based on a unified and pre-given subject, but only if we move away from a liberal understanding of democratic political movements that believes that they must be found on a category, which is known before the struggle itself, and whose aim is to advance the rights and recognition of certain sociological pre-defined groups (Zerilli, 2005: 6-7). It is precisely this liberal understanding of the *raison d'être* of democratic politics, and feminism, that she aims to engage with and destabilise through a reading of Hannah Arendt (Zerilli, 2005: 14), arguing that it is not an identity what democratic politics should be about, but the politicisation of that identity instead. And, what is more relevant, the fact that this identity gets politicised constituting a common "who" in a

public shared space, where plurality is not about an ontologically numerical matter, but a political relation that determines the way in which individuals relate to each other (Zerilli, 2005: 20). It is this public and contingent relationships in between that actually constitute politics, according to Zerilli.

Thus, instead of thinking of women as subject, Zerilli understands women as a claim to speak on someone's name. It is this posited claim, which aspires to universality, to be accepted by everyone, which allows dealing with both closure and openness (Zerili, 2005: 173). The category women, thus, does not exist prior to the action of speaking and claiming in its name. According to Zerilli, this is due to the predicative moment of politics, in which speaking politically means claiming to speak for a community as a whole in an anticipatory manner, such as, in a way in which we solicit agreement, but cannot compel it (Zerilli, 2009: 91). This speaking for, and the possibility of speaking back, is what constitutes a democratic politics: it is in the making of universal claims in the name of a community and accepting their refusal, that feminism finds it radical freedom and a radical potential of democracy lies. Hence, for Zerilli, by, on the one hand, positing universality and, on the other, ensuring that this closure of universality, this claim which is only anticipatory and can only be done by speaking politically, it is possible to deal with the tension in feminist and democratic politics (Zerilli, 2009: 92).

It is important to note here that universality is conceived by Zerilli not as the erasure of particulars and by categorising them under general norms, but as making political claims in a public space. Zerilli argues that these political claims are not objective nor based on criteria of truth, but on persuasion. It is crucial to recognise their anticipatory structure, and the fact that they act by aspiring to reach universal agreement on the claim. It is by doing this, by speaking on the name of women aiming to aspire to a collective agreement, that the community of women is materialised (Zerilli, 2009: 93).

Consequently, for Zerilli, through recognising this anticipatory structure it is possible to speak in the name of women without turning to women as a pre-existing category that homogenises and unifies all the claims that are made on their name.

But for Zerilli, there is no claim that is intrinsically political. What is important is not the claim itself, nor the result. Nor the identity or the subject either. What matters, according to Zerilli, is the process of politicisation (Zerilli, 2005: 125). It is through these processes of politicisation of realities, claims, subjectivities, etc. that it is possible to bring about the politics in a public space, it is possible to build a world and establish relationships between people and individuals that did not exist before (Zerilli, 2005: 23). And, following Rancière (1999), by being part of that process of reorganisation of political relations, of world-building, it is possible to also practice our freedom. Hence, for her, and as the section will elaborate on further below, freedom becomes world-building, the act of establishing political relationships between elements, since it is only when we are part of this process of politicisation that we are being democratic and free (Zerilli, 2005: 125).

This idea of *speaking on behalf of* is similar to the concept Iris Young discussed in the previous chapter, whereby she argued that affinity groups come together through the act of speaking on behalf of a group of individuals, women in the case of feminism, who share a lived experience of injustice and decided to gather to make their claims (Young, 1990: 176). However, there is a significant distinction between Young's and Zerilli's approach that captures the differences between the authors discussed in the previous chapter and in this one. While Young argues that the act of speaking on behalf of a group comes as a result of the shared experiences of injustice of certain individuals, Zerilli argues that it is in the making of the claim that it is possible to build such a group.

In other words, for Young the process of speaking on behalf of women is conceived as one where a group of individuals that share a difference gather to convey that difference, and it is precisely this recognition and conveying of difference and the claims that result from it that matters. There is a community that is waiting to be represented and to convey its demands once the proper mechanisms are put in place. For Zerilli, however, it is the act of speaking on behalf of a community that contributes to constituting that community that did not exist before, and in doing so, through that process, it is possible to disrupt democratic foreclosings and articulate new ways of thinking about them. There is, according to Zerilli, an important process

of politicisation resulting from the act of speaking on behalf of, which is what matters when it comes to ensuring democratic openness.

Following this reflection on the importance of politicisation, Zerilli argues that feminism's problem with its attachment to specific categories can be found in the way in which feminist theory relates to creating totalising hypotheses. Following Castoriadis (1987), she calls for a rethinking of theory in terms of the "creation of new figures of the unthinkable" (Zerilli, 2005: 63). These figures are not aimed at theorising reality as a complete object, but instead as an exercise of radical imagination that brings about new realities and new relationships between people, to politicise.

Consequently, an action-centred feminism based on world-building through freedom would be built on this shift from understanding, from generating knowledge, towards imagination as a way for transformation and claim-making (Zerilli, 2005: 63). This, Zerilli argues, is possible as a result of the exercise of freedom and demonstrates the possibility of changing things as we encounter them, recognising the contingent character of what we considered necessary. This does not mean that through the recognition of contingency it is possible to bring about transformation. Instead, what Zerilli argues is that resulting from our freedom, we have the capacity of imagining new things from those that were already established, the capacity of making contingent what we deemed necessary.

By imagining new figures and social relationships and letting them be taken up by others in ways that we cannot control or predict, it is possible to transform political realities (Zerilli, 2005: 64). It must be noted that Zerilli has, here, a mainly linguistic focus, when she refers to the change of the meaning of certain concepts (and hence political and social relationships) through the introduction of words in different contexts. Chapters 3 and 4 will further dive into the importance of moving beyond a linguistic dimension to consider affect and the body. However, at this point it is important to note that limiting the process of claim and meaning making to a linguistic one is leaving outside bodily and affective claims. This, as Chapter 3 will argue, further perpetuates the rationalist dimension on which democratic tradition is built on, and which excludes other forms of meaning making related to the body and

emotions. In doing so, chapters three and four will argue, not only that there is an exclusion of certain claims and demands that are integral to feminist theorising and that play an important role in feminist mobilisations, but there is also a perpetuation of the power structures that regulate the norms of what counts as a democratic claim and demand, and what does not. These norms, ultimately reflect what lives and bodies count, and their reification is also the concealment of the working of power in a way that does not foster openness.

With this reading of freedom, Zerilli moves away from the Western and liberal conception of freedom as sovereignty or property. Instead, she calls for freedom as a practice of world-building, of radical imagination: of creating political relationships where before they were none (Zerilli, 2005: 95). This conceptualisation of freedom, and feminism, as world-building, leads Zerilli to approach issues such as sexual difference as a contingent relationship of power, one that naturalises the grouping of women according to their gender, rather than other attributes. Hence, sexual difference becomes the result of a practice of freedom, since it institutes political relationships that could have otherwise not been so (Zerilli, 2005: 95). This means that sexual difference can also be challenged by exerting our freedom, providing alternative modes of world-building in which sexual difference is not such a thing (or is something different). This line of argumentation resonates with that of other scholars, like Judith Butler's call for subversion of concepts by reintroducing them in new contexts (Butler, 1990), which Zerilli surprisingly rejects (Zerilli, 2005: 57).

Zerilli argues that these acts of freedom involve creating a shared space where there is the capacity of judgment and making and keeping promises. It is this freedom of world-building that, according to Zerilli, we should focus on maintaining (Zerilli, 2005: 118-119). Zerilli further equates this idea of rights and sexual indifference to the politics of equality, which she is wary of. This is because Zerilli argues that without the possibility of freedom (and constantly fostering radical imagination and claiming), the politics of equality end up being reduced to a sole affirmation and assimilation of subjectivities into the law, that has no transformative power (Zerilli, 2005: 121), and is aimed at perpetuating and securing itself, rather than securing the freedom that allowed imagining it.

For Zerilli, these claims to rights need to be accompanied by the capacity to make judgements. She argues that the exercise of freedom leads to different judgements, which might be incompatible or contradictory. Zerilli argues that, unlike most people's reading of Arendt, she does not claim to seek validity or agreement. In fact, Arendt differentiates between the possibility of reaching agreements disputing through giving evidence and proof; and the possibility of reaching agreements through persuasion, equating the latter to the domain of politics (Zerilli, 2005: 132-135). This capacity of judgment and claim-making is essential to understand the deliberative dimension of Zerilli that Bonnie Honig disregards. While Zerilli focuses on the importance of the process of making claims and judging them to create common public spaces and ensure contingency and openness, Honig disregards this aspect that is central to Arendt's philosophy and is mainly concerned with uncovering the contingency behind collective identities (Ling Lee, 2001: 47).

Zerilli then suggests a feminism based on the radical claim to political freedom, understanding freedom not in the liberal sense of individual liberties, but as the capability to make claims in the public space instead (Zerilli, 2009: 91). Consequently, Zerilli argues that it is necessary to bring the practice of claim-making back to the centre of feminist theory and praxis. This is because, it is through these claims that are made in the name of women, it is possible to bring about the feminist category (Zerilli, 2009: 92).

Nevertheless, this raises questions as to why it is making claims in the name of the category women that brings about the feminist movement, once again equating and reducing the subject of feminism to women. As the next section will show through Brown's and Fraser's analysis, returning to the category of women as the category from which to build feminism still risks reifying some of the power structures they are trying to dismantle. Even if this return comes from an agonistic approach that accounts for openness, conflict and the possibility of bringing forward alternatives, like Zerilli does, it still concerns the identity of women, and does not allow for space over contestation on whether such identity should become the grounds on which to build feminist theorising. Instead, by building this agonistic feminism around that

which feminism wants, its desires and demands[10], rather than women, it is possible to start probing into the way in which feminism can further deepen democracy by building alliances with other struggles and concerns that go beyond what has been traditionally linked to women's rights or feminist concerns.

This is, even if both Honig and Zerilli aim to further understand the relationship between feminist theorising and democracy moving away from the focus on the category of women as a foundational subject, their agonistic accounts end up focused on the struggle over the who-ness of feminism, rather than on the struggle over the demands and the matter of "I want this for us" (Brown, 1995: 75). Honig's agonism is, as the section showed, focused on building a subject of feminism that is open to contestation and pluralism. Similarly, Zerilli argues for freedom and world-making as the process of bringing about the category of women as subject of feminism through claims-making. The focus is, in both cases, on the agonistic building of the feminist subject. Despite the importance of this kind of discussion to ensure that there is no foreclosing of political categories that might lead to concealment of difference and the reification of power structures, it falls short at putting forward what is it that feminism wants as a political project. It could be argued that, by overseeing this dimension of demands, their feminist theorising does not bring forward alternatives to the world that they are living in, but instead becomes an exercise of asking for recognition and inclusion. This risks reducing feminism and feminist debates to the struggle over building the feminist subject, rather than on bringing forward alternatives that further contribute to openness around what the world should look like.

2.3 A feminism of agonistic desires

This section engages with three authors who, when approaching democratic politics from feminism incorporating an agonistic feminism as described in the first section

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[10] Throughout the thesis I will use the terms demands and desires indistinctively, since the scope of the research does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the different uses of both concepts. Even if the term demand tends to be purposive, and the term desire used to refer to more instinct-based wants, I am not interested in the origin or agency behind the wants of feminisms, but rather how they affectively circulate. The choice to maintain both terms is to accommodate the language of different authors who employ the different concepts.

of the chapter, no longer focus on subjectivities but on the demands and desires for social and political transformation. Therefore, rather than considering the role of conflicting differences in bringing about openness and alternatives to redefine feminism and how it comes about, the authors discussed in this section emphasise the alternatives that feminism brings forward.

Their approach allows moving from questioning how to redefine the categories of feminism in a way that it accounts for pluralism and openness to questioning how the demands of such feminist body come together in the absence of a fixed or closed identity. By focusing on what it is that feminism wants, rather than women, it is possible to start probing into how is it possible to bring together demands that escape the traditional remit of women's concerns and that might be conflictive?

The section will start with Wendy Brown's analysis of wounded attachments and state of injuries, and then move on to explore with Nancy Fraser's call to consider social inequality. The section will then nuance this approach with Kathi Weeks' reformulation of the standpoints as demands, and Gago's reading of the feminist strike as a place of feminist potentia, where there is an articulation of politicised desires that contribute to bringing about alternative social and political arrangements.

2.3.1 Wendy Brown, wounded identities and desires

Wendy Brown starts her analysis of feminist theorising in "State of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity" (1995) exploring how certain political and theoretical projects aimed at deconstructing power structures, amongst them feminism, instead contribute to reifying and redrawing these same power structures that they are wanting to dismantle (Brown, 1995: ix). She argues that their emancipatory aims are reproducing the elements of male domination that they are trying to subvert. (Brown, 1995: xi). Thus, Brown attempts to raise a "radical democratic alternative" to the discourses and practices of domination in the contemporary political landscape (Brown, 1995: xi) in a way that does not reify those power structures that they are trying to dismantle.

Wendy Brown has not claimed to be writing within the field of agonistic theory, which may raise questions about the choice to read her work on feminism and democracy through this lens in this chapter. However, I argue, that in Wendy Brown's theorising of feminism and democracy it is possible to find the three dimensions that I outlined as common to all the agonistic feminists in this chapter: ineradicable difference and contestation, commitment to openness and the production of alternatives.

Brown aims to examine the way that feminist theorising and practice, when building their work around the category of women, is mirroring the power structures that it opposes and limits them. For this, she inquires into the role of desires, collectives and the "realization of substantive democracy" (Brown, 1995: 4), moving away from the freedom-centred approaches of Arendtian authors discussed in the previous section. In fact, Brown is very critical of taking the concept of freedom as central to any emancipatory project, and she argues that the calls for freedom as a way of contesting concealment and exclusions in democratic politics are linked with the perception of the subject that is calling to be freed as one with an injured identity, an identity that is constrained by a specific regime of power configurations (Brown, 1995: 7). Consequently, Brown draws a paradoxical relationship between the idea of freedom and identity, and the way the former is supposed to address the social injuries of the latter, since the "imaginings of freedom are always constrained by and potentially even require the very structure of oppression that freedom emerges to oppose" (Brown, 1995: 7).

With this, Wendy Brown does not mean to argue that the notion of freedom is irrelevant or negative, but that it requires a complex analysis of the interplay between structures and agency, desires and identity to be able to understand such paradox (Brown, 1995: 9). After a genealogical analysis of the concept of freedom, Brown insists that it is important to keep in mind that the notion of freedom does not transcend nor overcome power, and hence it cannot be analysed outside of it (Brown, 1995: 25). Therefore, when feminists are positing a politics of freedom, trying to escape the concealed exclusion of sexual difference, they are incurring in a fallacy of thinking that it is possible to act outside regulatorily powers. She adds that this return to a politics of freedom that locates the main goal of emancipatory politics in

achieving a freedom understood as the escaping or opposition to exclusion and oppression, is very dangerous for democratic practice and theorising. She argues that this is because of the way in which the lack of recognition of power enables a moralising tendency in politics that reinforces injury, which she believes perpetuates power relations of domination further (Brown, 1995: 27).

She argues this leads to a politics that favours freedom as opposed to power in this context, fixing the identities of those injured as a social position, rather than an effect of power, and forecloses the possibility of changing and overturning these meanings and social positions without reifying them. This is because emancipatory politics would begin from a moralising position aimed at blaming for suffering rather than at transforming the conditions of this suffering. Moreover, by formulating an identity of the oppressed that seeks the freedom from the oppressors, the reproduction of this oppressed/oppressor binary is always going to be present in their emancipatory projects, leading to a project of revenge and reaction, rather than one of construction of alternatives.

Moreover, when it comes to feminist theorising, Wendy Brown also builds a critique around the feminists who, in adopting an injured position of identity as the foundation of their feminism, fail to recognise pluralism. Brown argues that by abandoning the idea of a unified and coherent subject, feminism abandons the rational actor model of liberalism and gives up the presumed right-baring subject that liberalism is continuously aiming to secure and reproduce (Brown, 1995: 50). Moreover, she argues that by abandoning the idea of homogenising particular experiences under this subject, we also abandon the oppression that comes from the positing of one single and unique truth (Brown, 1995: 41). Through recognising the constructed and discursive-mediated dimension of *women's experience*, Brown argues that it is possible to replace the mandates of truth with those of politics, replace "method with contesting interpretations, privileged and systematic knowledge with a cacophony of unequal voices clamoring for position" (Brown, 1995: 43).

In this sense, it could be argued that Brown points towards the fact that the feminism that returns to the horizon of women to widen democracy by putting forward ways to

recognise difference, like that of the first chapter, fails to engage with the political dimension of conflicting differences. Instead, she argues, it posits women as an injured identity, one where there is no possibility for contestation and that needs to be freed from oppression. In doing so, they fail to account for the way in which they are already replicating the same oppression that they are trying to escape, as there is no room for accounting for regulatory and normative power: the way in which gender does not exist before the regulation of gender, that difference does not exist before the regulation of difference (Brown, 2005: 123). And therefore, the way to ensure that difference does not get reified is not by aiming to transcend it, but by allowing for the norms and regulatory power around it to be contested.

As a result, Brown argues in favour of developing a feminist politics without ressentiment, where domination is contested with a vision of a collective project rather than with a moral condemnation (Brown, 1995: 47). This concept of feminism should be aimed at creating political spaces that question political norms and identities (Brown, 1995: 49), pointing towards a contribution of feminism to the disruption and widening of democracy, beyond the assertion of women's rights.

Thus, it can be argued that Brown urges feminism to abandon advocating for a mode of liberal politics based on rights-bearing subjects with a pre-constituted identity based on a true experience of womanhood subordinate to those in power and that wants to be freed. Instead, it should aim at creating a democratic political space that is heterogeneous, with different contesting views and open to develop the judgments needed to produce discourses that do not rely on a fixed ontology nor epistemology, with public conversations:

> *"arguing from a position of the common ("what I want for us") rather than from identity ("who I am"), and from explicitly postulated norms and potential common values rather than from false essentialism"* (Brown, 1995: 51).

It is important to note here that when envisioning agonistic contestation that exposes the closures in feminism, she points to focus on the common demands or alternatives put forward, rather than on the shared identity. This constitutes one of the main

differences with Zerilli and Honig's feminist agonism, which aimed at redefining the category of women. With this move, Brown can further start considering the issue of articulation, and the way in which feminist projects might account for demands from those who do not identify as women, or that would not be considered to be a feminist or even women concern, like Chapter 5 will show.

Brown calls to abandon this form of political claims and identities that are based on the language of "I am" (Brown, 1995: 75), which represents a defensive take on identity, that insists on fixed identifications and moral positioning, and take on the language of "I want this for us" (Brown, 1995: 75). This language based on the desire, on what we want, is not formulated by Brown as following the liberal ideal of competing self-interest, but rather aimed at building a political common desire. The introduction of a promissory politics moves away from the wounded attachments to fixed identities and reparatory politics, to one that seeks to imagine, desire and construct alternative realities and articulations of power based on a destabilisation of the current political reality (Schaeffer, 1996: 849; Brown, 1995: 75).

Consequently, by introducing the notion of wants and demands, subjects would be understood as a project that is in constant motion and contingent, likely to be deconstructed and reconstructed otherwise. This allows another level of openness through the considering of the coming together of demands, desires or alternatives that are not traditionally linked to feminism or to women.

However, despite pointing in the direction of reframing feminist politics and theory in relation to the demands and desires, the way to reimagine the shift from an identity politics to a politics of desire and demands remains under-theorised in Brown's account. Brown does highlight the importance of bringing forward alternatives to relationships of domination through politicisation. However, she does not fully capture the way in which, in the absence of a shared identity or a shared demand, these different alternatives might come together into a unified, albeit open and contested, body, like Chapter five shows. What is it that brings different desires and demands together into a feminist body in the absence of such identity? And, how are those demands put forward?

2.3.2 Nancy Fraser's agonism of social equality

Nancy Fraser, while also not working within the remit of agonistic theory, develops a critique to feminist theorising and the way in which the shift towards an approach that recognises difference and conflict as unavoidable, and favours deconstruction, needs to also include a consideration of social inequality to fully address the way in which feminism can build alliances with other struggles to further deepen democracy. Therefore, even if Fraser does not work directly on agonistic theory, when approaching the conversation between radical democracy and feminism she still emphasises the ineradicability of difference and conflict, the importance of openness and the possibility of bringing about alternatives. Nevertheless, as the section will show, she adds another dimension: that of materiality and inequalities within those differences that constitute feminism. Hence, in turning towards her literature it is possible to start questioning another dimension in the deepening of democracy. Accordingly, it is not only about what differences are concealed, and how do different demands get to be articulated together; but about what differences struggle to be uncovered and articulated? In other words, it is not only about considering the way power is at work in the constituting of feminist theorising (whether in the agonistic category of women, like Zerilli and Honig argued; or in the desires of feminism, like Brown argued), but also the importance of acknowledging that unequal distribution of power throughout the process of building alternatives.

Fraser argues that radical democracy must be concerned with two main barriers to democratic engagement: social inequality and the concealment of difference (Fraser, 1996b: 198). She then argues that the focus of radical democracy on difference fails to account for the dimension of inequality, by overfocusing on deconstruction of difference. She argues that feminism has had to abandon the exclusive focus on gender difference to account for different structures of powers that are intersecting and the way in which the struggles of feminism also intersect with other political struggles that could not be understood in isolation (Fraser, 1996b: 202). In this sense, she claims that feminism should transcend its traditional concern with women's rights and look for other power struggles with which it might share objectives. This shift, I argue, allows looking into feminist mobilisations today, like the ones in Chapter five, and the way in which they succeed at bringing together struggles that

would seem to be disconnected before encountering each other under the umbrella of feminism. Thus, it points towards feminism as more than a movement to further women's rights, but as one that allows building alliances with other movements that are struggling to disrupt the status quo and to provide an alternative arrangement of it.

Thus, Fraser's analysis engages with the feminist debates of the 1990s, celebrating the shift towards the recognition of a plurality of intersecting differences that she argues pushed feminism to look outside of its borders and consider other struggles and other difference that need to be considered in feminist theorising (Fraser, 1996b: 202). She argues that radical democracy has the capacity of bridging the tension between multiple differences, which she considers to be an ineradicable dimension of politics and to require the articulation of alliances, and the need for strong political alternatives that contest the hegemonic orders of democracy.

However, she argues that this project must "connect a cultural politics of identity and difference to a social politics of justice and equality. Unless it manages to connect them, however, it will not succeed in forging democratic mediations among multiple intersecting differences" (Fraser, 1996b: 203). Fraser argues for the importance of putting forward justice and equality. Her attachment to such goods represents a difference from most agonistic scholars who are mainly concerned with the idea of openness as a way of bringing about alternatives, rather than focusing on equality.

Fraser, however, considers that those approaches that focus on group identity and difference as being discursively constructed through performative cultural processes. She argues that, from this perspective that understands difference as performativity, the only political practice that can come to contradict it is that of the constant deconstruction of difference (Fraser, 1996b: 204). This Fraser suggests, turns the aim of feminism to be the disruptor of gender difference and the identities that arise from it, and to consider the articulation with other political struggles only insofar as they are also concerned with disruption (Fraser, 1996b: 204).

Even if Fraser values the contribution of these authors to feminist theorising, and the importance of performativity, she argues that the deconstructive approach that they

posit to expose concealment of differences and ensure openness falls short to address an important issue: the way that these discursive and performative differences are related to social structures of domination and inequality (Fraser, 1996b: 204). In arguing this, Fraser points towards a dimension that has not been addressed by any of the authors discussed so far: how are demands articulated? And may concealments happen in this process? Chapter 3 will look further into this problem by asking feminist approaches to democracy: what bodies matter? However, at this point it is important to note that Fraser pushes to deepen democracy further when asking agonistic feminists like those discussed here to move from a primarily linguistic and cultural focus to one that considers material inequalities.

It is because of this difficulty to bridge difference to politics of justice and equality that Fraser argues that feminist theorising needs to build a new understanding of difference that connects it to social equality, developing an alternative that does include normative judgements about the different value of difference, and the way in which these are linked to material inequality (Fraser, 1996b: 208).

2.3.4 Kathi Weeks competing feminist desires

Kathi Weeks, in "Constituting Feminist Subjects" (1998) aims to reconsider the issue of the subject in feminism moving away from the modernist/postmodernist debate that had shaped the discussion between second and third wave feminists (Weeks, 1998: 1). She calls for a move away from the humanism and essentialism that had identified these debates, aiming to construct a non-essentialist theory of feminist subjectivity by building on authors such as Nietzsche, Foucault and Butler, and social feminism (Weeks, 1998: 121).

Although it is true that Weeks' main interest is to reformulate the feminist subject, I choose to read her work here as providing some further insight into the role of articulation of demands. This might seem a controversial choice, since several feminist authors, amongst them Brown, are critical of feminist standpoint theory as she considers that they privilege a very specific point of view that they posit as the truth (Brown, 1995: 41). Nevertheless, Weeks is committed to reinventing the

standpoint, by rejecting an epistemological reading of it, contrary to what most of feminist standpoint theories have done. Instead, she aims to develop a project that is more interested in what we can become, rather than what we know (Weeks, 1998: 9).

Consequently, she is more interested in their practices, demands and desires, than in their knowledge, turning her interpretation of the feminist standpoint into an project that builds antagonistic projects with passions, interests, demands and desires that are opposed to the current order and structures, and aim to seek and imagine alternatives (Weeks, 1998: 10).

It is precisely this interest in the different demands and the contestation of demands, desires and interests to build different projects that can be useful to explore the dimension of articulation between desires that authors like Brown, discussed above, can risk overlooking. Weeks' privileging of demands, of that which feminism desires, over identity, becomes clear when she argues that:

> *"Confronting the ongoing gendering of work and its subjects would*
> *thus be more a matter of expressing feminist political desire than*
> *repeating gender identities." (Weeks, 2007: 148)*

For this, Weeks advocates for a standpoint approach towards her theorisation of feminist theory because of three main concepts that these theories revolve around: totality, labour and the standpoint (or the multiplicity of them) (Weeks, 1998: 4). Totality is seen as important since it allows understanding the interaction between subjects and structures, the co-constitutive process between them, and the way in which they legitimise and maintain each other. This approach of totality allows thinking of alternative ways of subverting the power structures of subordinations (Weeks, 1998: 5; 92). This is something that Brown also explores, when she tries to understand the way in which producing certain subjectivities also entails reproducing certain power structures within the emancipatory projects of feminism (Brown, 1995: 51).

Weeks addresses the possibility of working within structures of power to envision for ways of subversion when she thinks of labour. She starts by perceiving labour as, not

only the production of capital, but also the production of social reality. Thus, she believes that labour is a place of potentiality, where it is possible to build and imagine alternatives to the current order (Weeks, 1998: 6). However, her move away from a narrow definition of labour towards the direction of a broader understanding of it, including the production of socialisation and social practices and structures, brings her close to Brown's idea of a public space for struggle and contestation, where to articulate the different demands and desires for an alternative configuration of power. Interestingly, this also resonates with Zerilli's lens of world-building, where the imagining of alternative relations of power where there were previously none, exposing contingency and providing alternative is what Weeks considers to be the labour of her standpoint theory.

Finally, this approach towards labour and totality, in which it is possible to analyse the relationship between structures and subjects, and to transform them through the constituting of new ones, is linked with the approach of the feminist standpoint that Weeks adopts. Rather than thinking of the standpoint as a way of accessing a specific natural or core knowledge intrinsic to a specific subject position, she thinks of the standpoint as a collective political process of building practices, meanings and knowledges in relation to the reworking of certain subject positions (Weeks, 1998: 8). This approach is not a matter of gathering knowledge from a particular privileged perspective, but instead about understanding the different interactions between the various practices and subject positions (standpoints) that constitute feminist politics. Consequently, she argues that by putting the focus on both labour and the standpoint, while simultaneously keeping in mind the importance of totality, we can envision a feminist political project that is based in the gathering of the different demands, desires, practices, knowings and beings that arise from feminist labour (Weeks, 1998: 8).

There are two aspects of Weeks' theorisation of the standpoint that I think can be useful to further consider articulation in agonistic feminism. Firstly, the suggested interrelation between the concepts of totality and labour, which can help to analyse a dimension beyond wounded identities in the perpetuation of power structures within feminist struggles, and addresses the comments of Fraser mentioned above. Weeks starts by engaging with Butler's ideas of performativity and subversion and creating

an analogy with her conceptualisation of labour. Nevertheless, she differs from Butler when she argues that the discursive practices need to be considered from within, and together with, a socioeconomic matrix (Weeks, 1998: 125).

Secondly, there is a dimension of struggle that Brown mentions but does not fully develop in her theorisation. When theorising the standpoint, Weeks describes it as a collective project of social transformation that focuses on feminism, rather than women, and that emphasises the plural (Weeks, 1998: 136). Although Brown does mention that it is important to think collectively and from a variety of positions, with different desires, she does not mention the striving dimension that is present in Weeks' work. In fact, Weeks points out to a relationship of antagonism between sometimes mutually excluding and negating demands and desires. It is this dimension that I find crucial to be able to build a feminism with antagonistic demands that avoids the foreclosing of contestation for the closure and favouring of one specific demand or identity. This will be further developed in the next section.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that Weeks' approach fails to explicitly consider any process of articulation between these demands, dreams, desires, passions and interests that exist within the standpoint. Hereby, she acknowledges the potential antagonistic dimension between the different demands, as well as the antagonistic dimension between the demands and the structures, but she does not analyse the potential points of agreements or alliances that can be built and help to articulate the competing demands. In other words, Weeks' approach can be used to account for the dimension of strife, conflict, and competition between the different demands of feminist mobilisations. It is precisely this acknowledgment of competing desires that can be deemed useful to acknowledge the competing projects amongst the bodies that gather in feminist and to envision an agonistic feminism that does not foreclose democratic categories.

2.3.5 Verónica Gago's feminist strike as potentia

Verónica Gago has worked on an analysis of the feminist strike that builds on a theorising of a feminist body with conflicting demands where the possibility of desiring for alternative power configurations enables deepening democracy through

social transformation (Gago, 2019). Thinking within the context of the recent feminist strikes in Chile (and the world), she develops an understanding of feminism as the aggregation of numerous politicised demands and claims to transform patriarchal society. Gago is part of a wider group of authors that is trying to reformulate feminism paying attention to street politics, protest and mobilisations from a theoretical lens influenced by post-Marxist thinkers (Serra, 2018). Although she also does not work within the limits of agonistic theory, she considers the importance of conflict and openness through the exposing of what she calls violences, as well as the need for feminist politics to bring forward alternatives. Moreover, the choice to situate her in this section, responds to the importance that politicised desires have in her feminist theorising. As the section will show, Gago understands the feminist body that disrupts and deepens democracy as articulated around what she calls "feminist potentia", which she argues is the "desire to change everything" (Gago, 2019: 22). In this sense, Gago places emphasis on the conflict and articulation around what it is that feminism wants, and the project that it desires, rather than the definition of what feminism is. In doing so, she contributes to the conversation that started this section by looking at the way in which this agonistic feminism of desires takes place through, in this case, feminist strikes.

Verónica Gago introduces the idea of "feminist potentia" as an alternative theory of power based on the displacement of the limits that structure our societies (Gago, 2019: 13). Furthermore, her concept of feminist potentia refers to an understanding of power as the possibility of enacting a counterpower, an alternative configuration of power relations. In this sense, she emphasises the importance of (the ability and the possibility to) desire, which ultimately allows reimaging counterpowers, alternative configurations of societies and the displacement of borders (Gago, 2019: 14). It is this ability to desire alternatives that, Gago argues, displaces bodies collectively. Although it is true that this research project does not focus on the way that the ability to form desires of alternatives might constitute a foundation for political action, there is an important role of the affective readings and performances of the way that bodies would want the world to be (and feel) like when it comes to disrupting and deepening democracy. In this sense, Gago's theory here allows

thinking of agonistic feminism as a project that gathers around a claim that there is a desire[11] for the world to be differently.

Gago takes the feminist strike as the main point of analysis of contemporary feminist movements. She does so following Rosa Luxembourg's argument that every strike entails a specific political movement and political thinking, a set of characteristics that enable the strike and the movement, and that require to be analysed and thought of (Gago, 2019: 16). In this sense, Gago does not conceive the feminist strike as an isolated or specific event, but rather as a continuous process of refusal. She argues that the strike, once taken beyond the traditional workers' demand-oriented focus, where it was mainly a tool of negotiation for increased rights or improved conditions, becomes a tool for refusing current configurations of power relations, which can be transversal and include numerous subjectivities and demands that are shaping both what we are and what we are against (Gago, 2019: 24).

There is no clear institution or oppressor that the feminist strike refers to, instead, she argues that the antagonist other to which it is opposed is constituted through the refusal of particular situations. Gago argues about the importance of the dual process of the strike, where on the one hand there is a refusal of the current configurations of power and subordination that, on the other hand, imply, the imagination and therefore the reconfiguration of alternative power relations (Gago, 2019: 38).

She argues, however, that what allows this strike and the gathering of bodies and demands to happen is the collective desire for an alternative configuration of power, a collective desire for social and political transformation (Gago, 2019: 14). Gago believes that it is important to situate desire, not as the opposite of that what is possible, but as a continuation of it, as the force that lies behind it and pushes

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[11] Here, the choice of the phrasing "claim to desire" is intentional and important. I intend to argue that, although this thesis is not concerned with desires themselves, the claim that there is a desire to change, to a different reality (or a different affective reading of the world, as the thesis will develop over the following chapters) can allow to further understand the gathering of feminist bodies in the streets. In this sense, Gago's work allows adding a dimension of a shared desired alternative into the agonistic feminism discussed in this chapter, which will later allow exploring how, if at all, it might contribute to bringing feminist bodies in the streets that deepen and disrupt democracy.

possibilities to materialise in alternative realities (Gago, 2019: 16). It is the "desire to change it all" (Gago, 2019: 14)[12] that brings all these demands together to imagine alternative ways of living and enforcing a radical change (Gago, 2019: 46). Thus, for Gago desiring as a political practice becomes the articulatory process of both the strike and the feminist body: the desire to end violence against women, the desire to greater autonomy, the desire to more sustainable forms of living, the desire to more institutional representation… (Gago, 2019: 46). All these desires contribute to, on the one hand, politicising realities by showing that they are contingent, that they can be arranged and imagined otherwise; and on the other hand, to articulate demands into a wider story of transformative and radical politics (Gago, 2019: 46).

Consequently, Gago argues that through the consideration of desire, possibility and impossibility, the feminist strike is able to explore different demands that are not traditionally linked to the idea of feminism, like the sovereignty of indigenous people, and encompass them into a project of radical imagination and transformation of political boundaries (Gago, 2019: 244). Nevertheless, like Brown and Weeks, she does not leave room to accommodate the potential contestation of demands, for a dimension of strife between different, sometimes opposed, desires that, as Zerilli argued, are aiming at universality.

2.4 Feminist agonism destabilising neoliberalism

This section aims to engage with some feminist authors that have been writing in the present context of feminist mobilisations, who find a radically democratic potential of these mobilisations in the articulation of contesting demands and desired opposed to, and aimed at destabilising, neoliberal governance. They all agree in the sense that it is not based on a single subjectivity to be emancipated, but rather in the articulation of different demands and movements that are opposed to a neoliberal hegemony and offer alternative articulations of the principles of liberal democracy. Hence, they emphasise the importance of claim-making and practices of signification when approaching democracy from a perspective of agonistic feminism that accounts for conflicting differences, openness and the imagination of alternatives.

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[12] Translation my own. Original reads "el deseo de cambiarlo todo".

2.4.1 M. Eugenia Palop and the democratic politics of a common care

M.Eugenia Palop (2019) is concerned with the lack of deliberation and contestation in neoliberal democratic societies and institutions in the West, and she believes that feminism can contribute, and is contributing, to revitalising and re-politicising society (Palop, 2019: 9). She argues that the current political situation of democratic societies is one where there has been a displacement of politics in favour of what she calls "business politics", whose main aim is to citizens' attention during election time and capitalise votes by targeting specific citizen groups, delimited according to an essentialist drawing of their identity (Palop, 2019: 11). This, she argues, moves towards a simple management of democratic politics, foreclosing the space for any kind of political activism and lacking democratic engagement (Palop, 2019: 11).

She argues that this new neoliberal dynamic that reduces democratic politics to the gathering of votes and voters' sympathy in pre-election time has pushed emancipatory movements to approach politics through two main strategies: one that emphasizes the politics of identity, and one that emphasises class politics and materiality (Palop, 2019: 14). The failure to envision a political strategy that builds on both is, according to her, the main reason behind the lack of politicisation and radicalisation of democratic societies, which further perpetuates exclusions and oppressive power structures. In the face of this, she suggests a form of active citizenship, which she conceives as any kind of politics that creates common interests by recognising the important of the public and the common. (Palop, 2019: 14-16).

Building this form of active citizenship to confront neoliberalism and radicalise democracy is a task that, she argues, feminism has been doing in the last few years. She believes that it is possible to deepen democracy through feminism by articulating and disarticulating demands that are previously unrelated through what she calls a feminist politics of care. This feminist politics of care, she argues, exposes the limits of neoliberalism and confronts the exclusions and de-politicisation that take place in neoliberal societies (Palop, 2019: 8). For this, Palop analyses the recent mobilisations of feminism in Spain and Latin America, and outlines the possibilities of building a feminism of the common based on her formulation of a politics of care.

Analysing the feminist mobilisations of the 8th of March (8M), Palop argues that they took place as a response towards the inefficiency of institutional feminism, which had been prominent in Spanish politics in the previous years (Palop, 2019: 47). This institutional feminism, she argues, had mainly focused on the legal recognition of women, and their introduction in the labour market, which she problematises because it takes a standard of womanhood that is portrayed as universal and does not consider aspects such as race, sexual orientation or disabilities (Palop, 2019: 47). Moreover, following Nancy Fraser (1996b), she argues that this kind of politics, despite the progress and big transformation that it brought about, does not address the causes of discrimination, but instead co-opts the feminist movement and contributes to reinforcing neoliberalism (Palop, 2019: 47-48).

Nevertheless, Palop argues that what makes this feminist mobilisation different from this institutional feminism is that, rather than seeking recognition or a mere extension of rights for a previously constructed concept of woman, like those approaches from Chapter 1, it seeks to politicise and destabilise the way in which communities are constructed (Palop, 2019: 49). This new feminism has pointed towards a politics of care, through which care serves to politicise the interdependence between bodies and the importance of vulnerability, precarity, interdependence and the porosity of, not only female bodies, but the feminist body to articulate demands and ways of living from a perspective that opposed neoliberalism. Thus, for Palop, care is the political act of emphasising the ineradicable interdependence between living beings that constitute our communities, as well as their openness to affect and be affected by others (Palop, 2019: 89). Consequently, it is not possible to envision a democratic politics that does not base itself in the principles of mutual care and openness, since it is only through the recognition of this dimension that it is possible to address the inequalities and oppressive structures that emanate from a neoliberal system that negates them (Palop, 2019: 90).

This conceptualisation of care as a form of politics that contests neoliberalism on the basis of interdependence and openness is quite different to the feminism of care that was discussed in the previous chapter (Elshtain, 1981; 1982). Here, care becomes not just a mere characteristic of women or a role that contributes to the reification of

social and gender inequalities, and structures of power, but a tool that can be used for social change (Palop, 2019: 43). Moreover, it is not conceived in terms of motherly politics, selflessness nor feminine virtue. Instead, it is seen as a way of both acknowledging the gendered dimension of carework and denaturalising the role of women in taking over this kind of tasks. Furthermore, care becomes the realisation and evidencing of radical interdependence, which according to Palop is not approached from a moralistic point of view that equates it to women and the private sphere, but instead to a universal and ineradicable political condition of our world (Palop, 2019: 45).

Hence, Palop highlights the importance of interdependence in defining and reconceptualising the organisation of democratic communities and politics. This is because putting interdependence at the centre of political projects challenges the individualistic, isolating and depersonalising rationality that neoliberalism is built on (Palop, 2019: 90). Moreover, Palop argues that accepting the interdependent character of people, and the centrality of care to ensure that our societies survive, also highlights the need for the state to ensure that there is access to care by all citizens. Moreover, through feminism, it has been possible to denaturalise the portrayal of women as the natural caregivers, allowing to politicise this assumption, as well as demand for further public investment on public services that can take over these responsibilities to keep societies alive (Palop, 2019: 91). These are the demands of many social movements, movements that have been articulating themselves with, and incorporating the demands and discourses of feminism, like domestic workers, pensioners, ecologists, etc.

Hence, for Palop the concept of care is closely linked to that of the common, since it is through the politics of care based on the public and the common that it is possible to confront neoliberalism and produce an alternative arrangement of political relations (Palop, 2019: 92). She argues that this concept of the common is also central to feminism, not because women are more caring than men, but because it has been feminism that has served to politicise this condition of care and this interdependence between living beings. The importance of the concept of the common in rebuilding a feminist politics of care is evidenced further when Palop argues, following Laval & Dardot (2019), that the common is a form of politicisation

because it arises as a consequence of the participation in a common activity. Hence, for Palop it is the involvement in such a common activity (like the feminist politics of care) that forms a community, rather than being the community based on a common identity that allows for participation or belonging. Therefore, contrary to what other feminists like Young (1990) had argued when she described her affinity groups, Palop argues that participation becomes the cause of community. Hence, for Palop it is crucial to engage in building an alternative to neoliberalism through a feminist politics of care that both denaturalises the traditional role of women in taking up care work, and the individualism and isolationism that characterises neoliberal orders (Palop, 2019: 92). Only through these means, she argues, is it possible to articulate a feminist project that can really address the root and structural causes of inequality and discrimination, as well as the depoliticisation of neoliberal democracies (Palop, 2019).

Nevertheless, Palop states that this kind of politics corresponds to a moment of post-hegemony, like Beasley-Murray (2010) has argued, and she argues for a society and social movement that is unmediated and built exclusively on emotional connection (Palop, 2019: 55). This is problematic because, on the one hand, it does not recognise the dimension of power and hegemony that operates in the naturalisation of political orders like neoliberalism that she wants to challenge through her politics of care; and on the other hand, it presents emotions as apolitical, failing to recognise the importance of power in producing affective ties (Ahmed, 2004). As Chapter 3 will argue, interdependence is a highly political concept since not all bodies have the same ability to affect and be affected. Failing to account for this political dimension of what Butler calls the unequal distribution of precarity (2015) also means failing to address any potential to disrupt and deepen democracy and the power structures that sustain it.

Chapter 4 will further elaborate on the political dimension of affect and emotions, and the fact that they cannot be considered separate from ideology. This is because, as Chapter 4 will argue, affect and emotions are not goods that individuals have unmediated access to, but instead arise from the interaction and encounters between different bodies, which are always mediated and created by power. In this sense, assuming that it is possible to build a feminist politics that deepens democracy

outside power would lead, as Chapter 4 will show, to the concealment of those exclusions, silences and marginalisations that are produced by and with affect. Whereby it would move from concealing power under identity to concealing it under affect and emotions.

Consequently, despite Palop's contribution to reading together feminism and democracy through a politics of care that accepts difference and contestation, calls for opening and questioning of neoliberalism, and brings forward the possibility of thinking of alternative democratic arrangements through a politics of care that brings together different demands, her turn towards the idea of affect as separate from the political sphere risks reifying power relations and foreclosing her idea of politics of care to the contestation and conflict that she considered defining of present feminist mobilisations.

2.4.2 Graciela di Marco's feminist people

Graciela di Marco analyses the trajectory of feminism in Argentina through the mobilisations that have been taking place since the *piqueteras* movement, including the demonstrations for the legalisation of abortion, the #NiUnaMenos protests and the feminist strikes of the 8th of March. She aims to develop a way of understanding these feminist mobilisations that allows reading the articulations between different movements and demands, which are sometimes opposed and fighting against each other to become hegemonic, to become recognised as the main demand of the feminist body.

Following Laclau's theory of populism (Laclau, 2005), for di Marco, the feminist people took form as a political identiy as a result of a chain of equivalences that was articulated in a moment of political and institutional dislocation (di Marco, 2019: 63). This feminist people included subjects beyond the category of women, although this category is in fact a nodal point for the articulation.

In other words, di Marco believes that the existence of a moment of dislocation and antagonism (di Marco, 2017: 124), marked by increased political tensions in Argentina, due to the contradictions intrinsic to a neoliberal and patriarchal system,

allows an opening up of the political arena that enables the emergence and articulation of popular struggles that had remained in the margins. She identifies this movement in the crisis of 2001, that showcased the public discontent of people with the party system that had been imposed since 1983 (di Marco, 2017: 122). This is the case of the feminist movement, which, building on the years of feminist struggles and the proliferation of a number of varied social movements at the time (popular assemblies, self-managed companies, unemployed workers…), was able to articulate itself through a chain of equivalences that exceeded the category of women while retaining it as central for the articulation.

Barros and Martínez, following di Marco, argue that feminism has become a way of popular identification. They suggest that it allows building a form of identification that goes beyond and exceeds the particularities of its demands, and it gets universalised following a politics of hegemony. Whereby, feminism no longer represents a specific demand or subjectivity, but instead is an ever-changing form of identification in a constant expansion to add more and multiple demands that get articulated creating a wider signification inscribed under the name of feminism. (Barros & Martínez, 2019: 87)

Nevertheless, di Marco differentiates between two important concepts and political formations: a popular feminism, and the feminist people. A popular feminism, di Marco argues, is an important moment in the formation of the feminist people, referring to the popularisation of what had previously been a reduced and limited mobilisation of feminist bodies. This depicts the process where the feminist demands started to be taken up by other movements and integrated by them, making them transversal and popular (di Marco, 2017: 126). Following Mouffe (2000) she argues that feminist politics is to be understood as the pursuit of feminist demands articulated with other demands, rather than in the mere recognition of women and the extension to rights and notions of citizenship that are uncritical with the oppressive power structures that constitute them (di Marco, 2017: 126).

Consequently, di Marco does not argue for a single form of feminism, but for a notion that allows understanding the articulation of different chains of equivalences[13] that allow the emergence of a feminist people that transcends the category of women while acknowledging the central role of feminist mobilisations in the constitution of such a people (di Marco, 2017: 126). However, the emergence of a popular feminism where the integration of feminist demands into other movements, and the expansion of the feminist logic in the political arena, does not equate to the formation of a feminist people, which would ultimately lead to a radicalisation of democracy through the building of a counter-hegemonic project opposed to neoliberalism.

For the feminist people to emerge, the popular demands that conformed the body of the popular feminism need not to be integrated into a rights discourse through institutional solutions, but instead, di Marco argues, they need to remain unaddressed by the hegemonic order (di Marco, 2017: 135). This is because when demands are institutionalised into rights and policies, they lose their subversive potential. However, if they remain unsatisfied, they will continue to get articulated with other demands, attempting to create a new hegemony, one that challenges the current political order (di Marco, 2017: 135; Laclau, 2005).

In the Argentine case, di Marco points out to the institutional integration of most feminist demands that referred to unemployment and poverty. However, she argues that the failure to address the demands for abortion was key in making the feminist

[13] Here, she uses the concept of chain of equivalence following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985).Chains of equivalence are the processes through which different elements are discursively connected by subverting their differences in favour of a common feature (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 142). This is not to say that they become homogeneous, but that they point "through equivalential links, to the totality of the other demands" (Laclau, 2005: 37). Their differences can be substituted by each other, they can be subverted, as long as they are opposed to a collective discourse that negates and threatens all of them (Mouffe, 2018: 67). This is why chains of equivalence, and consequently collective identities require an antagonistic other that threatens them and impedes their realisation (Laclau, 1985: 33). This also means that antagonism only exists as a potentiality, as a discursive construction that allows the identification of a chain of equivalence in negative terms, in relation to what they are not (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 127-128). Hence, the antagonistic other needs to be conceived as a product of articulation of elements through chains of equivalence, while at the same time producing this chain of equivalence itself.

body keep articulating itself with other movements and other demands. To be able to understand this, it is important to keep in mind another one of di Marco's main points: the simultaneous process of construction of an antagonistic other opposed to the feminist people. Di Marco argues that, together with the construction of the feminist people, the adversary was also constructed politically. This adversary incarnated the traditional and particular Catholic values and was represented as opposed to a (feminist) people (di Marco, 2019: 65). Consequently, for di Marco when the unaddressed feminist demands were stopped because of a neoliberal regime that, although presenting itself as progressive and accommodating of certain demands for improved conditions of life was still negating others in relation to a conservative and traditional religious conception of society, they were able to articulate themselves with other demands that faced the same, or a similar, antagonistic other (while still remembering and politicising all those demands that had been addressed) (di Marco, 2017: 136).

Hence, di Marco argues that through this articulation of the demand for abortion with other unaddressed popular demands and actors towards the neoliberal Argentinian political order, it was possible to articulate a larger 'us' that gave place to the feminist people.

One key aspect that di Marco highlights of this people is its instability regarding its identity and the porosity of the borders that define it. In other words, di Marco conceives the identity of the feminist people as a process and product of the different political articulations that conform it, constantly including and excluding subjectivities and demands under the political project of the feminist people. This, she argues, makes the boundaries that conform this identity permeable, and interlinked, allowing the articulation of demands and identities from a multiplicity of origins and perspectives, in relation to a common identification as opposed to patriarchal structures and neoliberalism (di Marco, 2019: 67).

Ultimately, it could be argued that for di Marco the democratic potential of feminism is its capability to articulate itself with other movements and other demands, building a counter-hegemonic project that challenges the configuration of a neoliberal and patriarchal political order. For this, it is very important to the construction of an

antagonistic other and, paradoxically, the failure to address demands institutionally and to prove recognition. This adds another dimension of strife that was missing in the previously discussed authors, where the different demands that are incorporated into the chain of equivalence, and the political borders that arise from there, are in constant flux and contest between them to become the nodal point.

However, despite introducing this dimension, she does not explore it and reduces it to a mere annotation in her complex discourse analysis. Moreover, di Marco's approach to analysing the formation of this feminist people overly focuses on the linguistic aspect in the construction of the demands and the collective "we". Rather than interrogating the importance of street politics, the bodily and affective dimensions of feminist politics, she limits her analysis to claiming for a linguistic discourse analysis of the way in which the demands are articulated into a chain of equivalence.

2.5 Conclusion: Beyond speaking feminist agonistic demands?

All the authors in this chapter aim to theorise an account of feminism that moves away from a conceptualisation of women that contributes to closure by overlooking the dimension of conflict amongst differences. In this sense, and building on my understanding of agonistic feminism, the chapter has engaged with a variety of scholars that approach femnist theorising by underscoring the ineradicability of conflict and difference, the commitment to openness to avoid reification of power relations, and the possibility of building alternatives.

The feminist authors discussed have aimed to challenge the return to women as a foundational category of feminism, while still recognising the importance of difference in democratic practice and theorising. This has allowed them to tend towards some of the questions that feminist mobilisations are asking democratic tradition: how is it possible to build feminist bodies that do not contribute to foreclosing political categories and recognise difference? How can such feminist bodies come together in the absence of a common subject and, sometimes,

conflicting demands? And is it possible to bring together struggles that go beyond the traditional remit of feminist and women's concerns?

While all scholars start their theorising from readings of different authors and schools of thought, they all end up putting forward similar versions of what I call an agonistic feminist project: a political project that contributes to ensuring openness through the recognition of conflicting differences and the ensuring that this conflict has a space to expose concealments of power and bring forward the possibility of alternatives.

Bonnie Honig and Linda Zerilli both develop an understanding of agonism that is based on the assembling of different views on who we are, generating an agonistic identity and turning feminism into a place of dispute over it, moving away from subjugating categories of women towards an open and contested one. Honig suggests the contestation of different forms of identification, where contestation is not opposed to cooperation, but instead is part of the same continuum that expose the contingency of political orders. Zerilli, on the other hand, reads agonistic feminism as a process of world-building through freedom, where it is possible to rearrange power relations by imagining them otherwise and creating a feminist community by speaking on the name of women, and allowing for the contestation of these claims.

These two approaches, the chapter argues, are very valuable since they allow the consideration of the dimension of conflict over differences as crucial and ineradicable in the constitutions of feminist projects. Nevertheless, this gives place to a theory that is ultimately focused on defining what feminism is and who feminists are, rather than what feminists want. Even in the case of Zerilli, who does recognise the importance of making claims for her feminist theorising, the contestation is not raised over the claims, but instead over the way in which those claims redefine the category of women, thus returning to that same horizon than the authors on the previous chapter. Hence, this approach risks overlooking the dimension of what it is that feminism wants beyond the building of a feminist subject. In doing so, it risks reifying some of the problematics exposed in the previous chapter, reducing the feminist struggle to one of defining feminist identity, and assuming that in the

making of an identity there will be an automatic building of a demand, on what it is that feminism wants.

Rather, the chapter continued to engage with authors that focus on this dimension of feminist demands and desires. As a result, this second group of authors argued that the contestation of difference should not revolve around identity, but around demands instead, around the proposals and claims of feminism to democracy. Here, it is crucial to ensure openness around feminist demands, regardless of the different identities posing them. In this sense, the aim of agonism is not to ensure openness around the idea of women, but around the vision of feminism, what it is that it wants.

Brown (1995) starts her theorising from a critique of the politics of wounded attachments and ressentiment, and she argues for a feminism that abandons identity politics and seeking empowerment for identity-defined groups, and instead builds a project of feminism that is based on the collective demands and desires for alternative orders. Nevertheless, despite her powerful critique of identity-based feminism, she does not develop her alternative feminism of demands in detail. The chapter then engages with Nancy Fraser (1996b), whose approach to radical democracy and feminism constitutes a critique of the lack of consideration for what she calls social inequality. Fraser (1996b) argues that it is key for feminist theorising to recognise the importance of the ineradicability of conflict, and the intersection of differences and power structures, to be able to articulate itself with other struggles on the basis of the shared demands, that shall go beyond deconstruction. Here, Fraser (1996b) points towards recognising the way in which feminism comes together, also with other collective struggles, around the contestation of demands, rather than the identity of women or feminism. However, she argues that those authors who are approaching radical democracy theorising from feminism are overlooking the dimension of social inequality in their theorising. This is important because it raises questions on what is it that counts as claims, and how these claims get articulated.

Fraser (1996b) illustrates the fact that there is a certain level of social inequality even amongst those different demands or desires that Brown (1995) argues need to be put forward, and that this needs to be addressed. In doing so, it is possible to ask questions on the way that demands get articulated with other demands, as well as on

what demands are privileged in that contestation, which ones are concealed and excluded. In short, considering this dimension of social inequality allows asking: what bodies count? And in doing so, further contributing to openness by highlighting the concealing and workings of power within the agonistic body, like chapters three and four will show.

Moreover, the chapter moves on to explore Kathi Weeks' reinterpretation of the standpoints. Despite Weeks' aim to develop a theory of subjectivity, I read her rethinking of the standpoint as one focused on the ontological level, on highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between structures and subjects and the production of meanings and concepts in this context. Furthermore, she also calls for a feminist project that allows the articulation of desires for alternative political orders, that are in a constant struggle and strife. On these lines, Verónica Gago (2019) rethinks the recent feminist strike as feminist potentia. She argues that it is the capability to desire alternative arrangements of power and society that has allowed a rethinking of the methodologies of striking, to gather feminist bodies in the streets that are no longer asking for an improvement of their working conditions, but a different way of living and organising life instead.

However, despite the relevance of these approaches to identify the risks of basing a feminism in the definition of the subjects and identities, rather than in the claims and demands of the feminist body, they fall short when providing a detailed theorisation of the articulation of the feminist demands with other demands that are not inherently feminist. What is sustaining the feminist body and how does the struggle take place? How do the demands get together, and how do we account for the inequality that underlies such demands?

Through an analysis of M. Eugenia Palop (2019) and Graciela di Marco (2019), the chapter aims to answer this question. Palop argues for a feminism based on the politics of care, where it is possible to confront the neoliberal rationality of individualism through a process of highlighting the ineradicability of interdependence and the need for a project of the common. On the other hand, di Marco follows Laclau when analysing the recent history of feminism in Argentina, to argue for the construction of a feminist people opposed to neoliberalism and

conservative politics, where abortion is the empty signifier that allows articulating the feminist movement with others that are also opposing such a political order. Despite the differences between these two approaches, they both aim to engage with a reading of feminism that contributes to radicalise democracy by producing an alternative political order that challenges neoliberal hegemony. Moreover, they both consider that the articulation of feminism with other emancipatory social movements is, precisely, what allows the reimagination of such a political order, which needs to be opposed to an "other", in this case, neoliberalism.

Ultimately, M. Eugenia Palop and Graciela di Marco thinking within the current context of feminist mobilisations, they aim to articulate a feminist project that aims to dismantle the neoliberal order. The feminist projects that they propose, although very different, aims to reconstruct an agonistic approach that creates a feminist community that challenges neoliberalism and its individualising and precaritising rationalities. While Palop argues for an agonistic feminism constructed in the basis of care, di Marco proposes building a feminist people in terms of unaddressed demands and a logic of hegemony that articulates itself with other movements. Nevertheless, Palop and di Marco assume the fact that there is a unified other that feminist agonism opposes. However, as Chapter five will show, this is not always the case, especially when it comes to the fragmented and diverse feminist mobilisations like some of the most recent ones. Rather, as Chapter six will argue, the idea of affective reading and an affective politics of precarity can allow envisioning the articulation of different conflicting and sometime opposed demands in the absence of both an identity and antagonistic other.

Hence, all these scholars tend to democratic tradition from feminism by following the idea of agonistic feminism described in the first section: considering difference and conflict as ineradicable, advocating for openness and for the possibility of producing alternatives. Honig and Zerilli do so arguing or ensuring the openness of feminism in the definition of what the subject of feminism is and what women are. The second group of authors focuses on the demands of feminism, and the inequality existing between those demands. Ultimately, the third group of scholars point towards the possibility of articulating a feminist body opposed to an other that brings differences together while allowing a certain degree of openness.

The authors discussed in this chapter not only share this conceptualisation of an agonistic feminism, but they also share the fact that in conceptualising the agon they have overlooked the affective and bodily dimensions of both democracy and feminism. As a result, while not attending directly to the affective and bodily dimensions of feminist and democratic theorising, the authors are favouring an approach that tends to focus on the linguistic dimension of meaning and claim-making. Although it is true that there are some recent developments in the literature of radical democracy that aim at trespassing this linguistic focus (Eklundh, 2019), the affective and bodily dimensions of agonism tend to be overlooked. This becomes evident, for instance, in Zerilli's approach, where she refers to the possibility of overturning meaning through conflict between words that are introduced in a context different to the one that they are traditionally associated with. In giving preference to this linguistic dimension, and as chapters three and four will argue, Zerilli is also privileging the rationalist model of democracy and reifying the mind/body divide in which it is built. This is of extreme relevance because, not only does it jeopardise the possibility of openness by excluding other practices of meaning making that are highly bodily and affective, but it also reinforces a division that has traditionally associated the rational with the white and male (Ahmed, 2004).

In all fairness, I do not intend to argue that the authors discussed are only focused on language. In fact, some of them have pointed towards the importance of striking, like Gago, of practices like that of mourning, like Honig, or social inequalities, like Fraser. All of these have an important bodily and affective component. However, their lack of meaningful engagement with the bodily and affective aspects of agonism when theorising the way it misses the opportunity to fully account for the way in which power works through them both through excluding certain bodies and claims, but also by exposing the workings of power in doing so, and potentially subverting it or bringing alternatives. Even if these authors acknowledge the fact that bodies and affect are present in agonistic formations, they do not probe into the way in which they might contribute to the process of agonism: How are they enabling agonistic articulations? And what moves us to act agonistically in the absence of a shared identity or a shared demand? The next chapters will further investigate the

role of the body, performativity and affect in trying to understand this and fill in this gap in the literature.

Chapter 3: An agonistic assembly of bodies?

Introduction

The previous chapter ended asking how are the bodily and affective dimensions enabling agonistic articulations? What mobilises bodies and articulates them? This chapter aims to engage with this dimension of the body, and the way in which it might be central to disrupt and deepen democracy, with the goal of trying to answer some of the questions that have been previously raised. In doing so, the chapter will not only highlight the importance of engaging with the body to understand the way in which feminism can contribute to disrupt and deepen democratic tradition, and in doing so, it will serve to later reflect about the role of the body in feminist mobilisations contribution to disrupting and deepening democracy.

For this, the chapter will start recognising the body's absence from discussions about politics and democracy. Most mainstream Western political theory and philosophy has tended to relegate to the margins, if not disregard, the role of the body in politics. This is mainly due to the fact that the body has been understood as something pre or apolitical, opposed to reason, which has been regarded as the main foundation of political subjects (Eklundh, 2019; Spelman, 1992: 100). Eklundh (2019) has argued that with the Enlightenment came the rejection of a God-given power in favour of human agency understood as rationality, as the foundation of political affairs and subjects, embracing the Cartesian ego cogito. In the field of democracy, Habermas' deliberative model of democracy (1973) is a clear example of the way in which reason becomes the defining feature of political actors who, in this case through rational deliberation, aim to reach truth.

It can be argued that the body has been disregarded in the democratic tradition, leaving to mainly feminist theories (as well as theorists of postcolonial studies, critical disability studies or queer studies - who engage with bodies who tend to also be presented as feminised) the task of interrogating and to destabilising the body/mind split (Spelman, 1992: 120). Like those authors in Chapter one, who took

on the task of disrupting democracy by approaching it with a feminist vision that asked: 'where are the women?', authors in this chapter approach democracy also through feminism and asking: where are the bodies? Because of the focus of this research on the way in which feminism contributes to radicalising democracy, the chapter will mainly engage with those scholars who write from a feminist perspective and approach democracy trying to disrupt the mind/body dualism, asking where are the bodies? And which bodies count?

At this point, it must be noted that not only feminist authors were concerned with the role of the body in democratic tradition, even if it was mainly those who write from feminism that did. It is true that, as the chapter will show later, phenomenology started putting the body at the centre of analysis, being considered a valuable source of knowledge of lived experience and being in the world. However, and as the chapter will argue later, this does not mean that the body/mind dualism was questioned or destabilised by this work. In fact, many phenomenologists reproduced this divide in their reading of the body as materiality, linked to affect and emotions, and the mind and subjectivity as linked to reason (Eklundh, 2019). This, they emphasised was the value of this distinct kind of knowledge achieved through the body, but they also kept perceiving it as different from the mind, which was related to signification and language. In this sense, as the chapter will argue later, phenomenology reified the mind/body dualism by perceiving the body as only a means to achieve knowledge. Rather, the chapter will argue in favour of reading the body as an object of study per se, which is also subject to the working of power and therefore, play an important role in ensuring openness in the agonistic articulations.

The conceptualisation of the body as a material canvas where social meanings and norms are printed and imposed will help to structure this chapter. This is because, reflecting about the role of the body as either a canvas that is separated from social meaning, which then acts on it; or as one that also responds and affectively relates to that social meaning, co-constituting it, allows us to think about the way in which these bodies relate to resistance and the role that they play in forming agonistic articulations for the radicalisation of democracy.

As mentioned, it has mainly been feminist literature that has been concerned with bringing attention to the issue of the body, which was approached through many different angles and in relation to different debates within feminist theorising such as the differentiation between biological sex and gender (De Beauvoir, 1948), the perception of the body as technological (Haraway, 1991), or as a place of free labour and capitalist exploitation (Federici, 2004; Davis, 1981). It has also been analysed in relation to race (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981), sexuality and trans politics (Halberstam, 2018; Preciado, 2019) and disability (Garland-Thomson, 2001). Moreover, feminist engagements with literature about the body have involved thinking about it as a place of violence, policing and resistance, with extensive debates about abortion and reproductive rights (Cornell, 1995), motherhood (Firestone, 1970) and sex work (Smith & Mac, 2018).

In contrast, democratic theory has tended to consider the body as a distinct and separate domain to that of reason and rationality, where democracy tended to be located. However, a number of authors have started questioning the link between biopolitics and current neoliberal democracies. Building on Foucault's concept of biopower (Foucault, 1978), they analyse the way in which current democracies are based on the disciplining and control over bodies.

This chapter will aim to explore the role of the body in the formulation of a feminism that contributes to the radicalisation of democracy, exploring alternatives to a foundational subject in the articulation of feminist demands. To do this, the chapter will start by engaging with a group of feminist scholars that have analysed the body and its gendered dimension as a necessary part for understanding lived experience and politics.

These authors, despite their different understandings of the body, put the emphasis on reading it as an entity that is acted upon by social meaning, disregarding interdependence between bodies or the way in which these bodies react and produce the social meanings themselves. Consequently, despite the added value of their phenomenological analysis of the body to understand the power structures that surround it, they do not allow for an understanding of the way in which it is also contributing to perpetuating or disrupting those power structures, thus overlooking

the possibility of engaging in a conversation of the potential of bodies in deepening democracy through openness, which is crucial to avoid the reification of power relations and to understand the contribution of feminism to democracy, as argued in the previous chapter.

The section will start by engaging with two different accounts of phenomenology. Firstly, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist take on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of the body. Secondly, it will engage with the work of Mariana Ortega and her phenomenological take on chicana feminism, understood as contributing to disrupting whiteness. After analysing her proposal for a form or embodied coalitional politics, building on the work of Martín Alcoff, it will argue that it still builds on the idea of a body that is limited to the reflection of language and social norms, rather than also an actor that perpetuates (and therefore has the possibility of interrupting) such acts of power.

This will lead to the third section, where the chapter will engage with the work of Judith Butler and their proposal of performative bodies which are vulnerable and interdependent as a way to assemble against the differential distribution of precarity. The section will argue that a performative understanding of vulnerable bodies that gather in the street to contest the unequal distribution of precarity allows probing into the potential for feminist mobilisations to build alliances that deepen democracy beyond the horizon of women. In this sense, the chapter will build on Leticia Sabsay's reading of Butler, to point towards the importance of articulation and antagonism in delimiting the porous skin that forms the community who gather in the street and performatively brings about a body that disrupts and deepens democracy.

This opens up new questions: how can we understand the way in which we constitute the porous border that articulates feminist bodies[14], and how this is constantly expanded and challenged? And what might be the role of bodily and affective politics in building that porous divide? This will be explored in the next chapter and allowed to build the idea of affective politics of precarity.

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[14] See discussion on the use of feminist bodies throughout the thesis in the introduction.

3.1 (Re)acting bodies

This section starts approaching the body through a feminist lens by engaging with a group of authors who understand the body as being acted upon by social meaning and norms. Here I chose to use the term *(re)acting bodies* given the way that the authors discussed in this section understand bodies as responding to, rather than being part of, the production of social reality and social norms. This has a big implication for the way in which we can read feminist mobilisations, since these authors do not account for the way in which bodies that are excluded from democratic tradition are not just shaped by power but also contribute to shaping it. It suggests that they do not recognise the possibility of bodies that when assembling in the street, like those in Chapter 5, might be contributing to destabilising the norms and power structures that regulate them. In other words, they overlook bodily claims and only understand democratic emancipation as the transcending of their (feminine) bodies, rather than the acting from within it.

3.1.1 Simone de Beauvoir

Phenomenology refers to the "tracing of the logic of things as a phenomena, as they appear in time and place for a perceiving subject"" (Doyle, 2001:xviii). Phenomenological approaches to politics have been considered outdated and deterministic by post-structuralist authors who claim that they reinforce masculinist and essentialist takes on identity (Fisher, 2000). Although this is a valid claim, here I want to formulate phenomenological contributions to feminism in a more fluid way that reads bodies as a central part to the process of signification and to shaping the way in which we relate to each other and the world that surrounds us. This reading allows enquiries into the way in which bodies contribute to reinforcing or destabilising the power structures that constitute and regulate our reality.

Simone de Beauvoir (1948) takes on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to develop what some have called a phenomenology of sexual difference (Allen-Collinson, 2011), which analyses experience as "lived and felt in the flesh" (Young,

1998). It can be seen as the foundation that served to develop a feminist phenomenology, taking into account the constraints that social structures, such as gender, impose in the way that bodily experiences are lived in a specific time and context.

Arguing that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", de Beauvoir has been seen as the pioneer of discussions about sex and gender, a debate that was taken on by Judith Butler years later (1990). With this, she is not questioning the reality or the existence of women, but instead challenging the foundations of the shared assumptions over a female way of being, and the way in which this being is instead a process of becoming (Heinämaa, 1999: 122). This is especially relevant because it pointed towards the idea that bodies are not born with certain social meanings, but that they acquire these social meanings when they relate to the society and the norms that constitute it. Thereby, highlighting the belief that there is a social reality that is imposed on bodies, and that determines the way in which these bodies are taught and expected to act, behave, live, feel…(etc.)

De Beauvoir understands this phenomenon as having two-folded implications. On the one hand, certain bodies are expected to behave in certain ways, existing in the world as both a material being and living experiences, which are conditioned by the social meanings imposed on them. On the other hand, since specific bodies are expected to relate to the world in specific ways, they clearly have differentiated experiences of that world (de Beauvoir, 1948: 39). Thus, de Beauvoir argues that they also acquire a particular point of view of reality, a perspective that results from the lived experiences that are imposed on their bodies.

This has important implications for the way in which de Beauvoir approaches meaning. Since all bodies have different lived experiences, and it is this lived experience that determines how we see and know the world, subjects are the ultimate agents of meaning. With meaning seen to be subject-dependent, or lived-experienced-dependent. Thus meaning is defined through the lived experience, but the lived experience is determined through the process of otherness that imposes norms and expectations on subjects. Thus, even if de Beauvoir acknowledges this

bidirectional dimension, lived experiences are ultimately determined by the social meanings imposed in a body.

This process of otherness is, in fact, the key to understanding de Beauvoir's take on the phenomenology of sexual difference. As mentioned, de Beauvoir's phenomenological approach has received many criticisms, since it can be read as taking a simplifying approach to bodies that lacks intersectionality (Bergoffen, 2018: 331). Although this might be true, it is in her formulation of women as otherness that we can find an alternative way of reading her phenomenology in a way that allows for finding unity in difference. As Vintges argues (1999), de Beauvoir can be read closely alongside other contemporary feminist thinkers who call for the deconstruction of fixed identities in favour of a more fluid understanding and formulation.

De Beauvoir presents this idea of otherness in "The Second Sex" (1948). She understands women as an other, dependent on men: the subject. Rather than locating an origin or historical process of subordination of women, she argues that they have always been presented and described in relation to, and as subordinates of, men. This is, women are reduced to lack, they are that which men are not: a non-person, a body that represents an extension of men and their (rational) subjectivities. This is extremely important, and it allows understanding the shared lived experience of womanhood and femininity as one of otherness and alienation. This reading breaks from accounts of womanhood like those discussed in Chapter 1, that assumed a more biological or deterministic approach to femaleness.

Resulting from this, de Beauvoir understands sexual difference as a lived experience that solidifies as a consequence of a process of otherness, and that is mediated by the body as both the materiality that determines the lived experience, and the material means through which it is lived. In other words, the process of othering of women occurs through the body, the way it is perceived and the way it lives, which conditions the way in which life is perceived too.

Hence, although it is true that she problematises concepts such as femininity, womanhood and sexual difference as embodied processes of otherness (Heinamaa,

1999: 115), she overlooks the way in which such otherness, as well as that the process of othering, can serve to sustain and disrupt certain power relations. This, as the next sections will show, is crucial to understand how to contribute to further openness, and to ensure that the process of othering is not perpetuated.

Subsequentlly, it can be argued that de Beauvoir does not leave any room to explore the way in which the orientation of women's bodies relates to their surroundings and living actions (Young, 2005: 29), and how they can contribute to disrupting or deepening such (political) surroundings. In this sense, de Beauvoir's bodies are like a canvas upon which there is a process of signification imposed on them that determines the limits of their actions, according to social expectations.

It could be argued that her approach is similar to the approach of those authors from Chapter one, where there is a set experience of oppression that determines womanhood. In this case, there is a shared process of othering, of becoming a woman, which settles such category, which is to be overcome through its transcendence. In this regard, for de Beauvoir the goal of feminism is about emancipation, freedom from that process of othering, that relationship of subordination from men. The overlooking of the disruptive potential of such process of othering, as well as the possibility for conflicting processes of othering under the category of women, or similar processes of othering with other categories, also limits the openness of such category, as well as comprehending the way in which it can be destabilised, and alternatives can be brought forward. Understanding this would have been crucial to, on the one hand further analyse the role of embodied processes of meaning making to disrupt and deepen democratic tradition (through, for example, the coalition politics that the next section will explore), and, on the other hand, approach how feminist mobilisations like those in Chapter 5 might be sustained by processes of embodiment.

In essence, Simone de Beauvoir's conceptualisation of feminism revolves around the idea of women's liberation from the constraints of patriarchy and gender norms, produced through an embodied process of othering. Despite her important contribution to understanding embodied processes of meaning-making, her focus on

the body as a marker of difference that needs to be transcended risks reifying power relations by closing certain political categories (woman) that cannot be contested with alternative process of (embodied) meaning making, or othering. Therefore, the body becomes a reacting living surface that conditions experiences and does not leave room for overturning those experiences and the societal norms and expectations that condition them.

3.1.2 Mariana Ortega's embodied coalitions and Chicana feminism

Mariana Ortega (2016) has also explored the way in which recognising the body can allow to disrupt and deepen democracies by analysing the possibility of building coalition politics around it. Ortega does so in a way that, not only challenges democratic tradition, but also destabilises the whiteness that is intrinsic in de Beauvoir's and other feminists who wrote from the perspective of a unique women subject.

By building on scholars like Matin Alcoff (2006) or Anzaldúa (1987), Ortega's work is especially relevant because she disrupts, not only democratic theorising, but also feminist theorising when considering the role of the body and race to destabilise the category of whiteness intrinsic to most unitarity formulations of womanhood as identity.

This work of destabilising the category of whiteness in feminism was first undertaken by black feminists who brought attention to the fact that feminism has been traditionally concerned with one type of (female) body: white bodies.

Black feminism has, since its origins, disrupted the understanding of feminism as concerned with a category of women constricted to that of white women. Authors like bell hooks (1981), Angela Davis (1981) or Audrey Lorde (1984) have problematised the notion of womanhood built around whiteness, exploring interconnected systems of oppression and arguing for the inseparability of the intersection of categories of gender and race, amongst others. Here, I do not refer to black feminism as a strand of the literature that represents a homogeneous or

coherent standpoint of Black women that eliminates differences between their identities or experiences. Instead, following Collins (2000), I point towards a Black women's collective standpoint, that attempts to accommodate the tensions between the diverse responses and demands to collective challenges of gender and race structures in a way that highlights the plurality within the collective (Collins, 2000: 28). Although an in-depth discussion on black feminism falls beyond the scope of this research, since its contribution to feminist theorising and the questions it raises constituents a large body of work that covers debates beyond that of the disruption and deepening of democracy, it is important to underscore that black feminists questioned the focus and concern of feminist theorising, by turning to it and asking: what bodies matter (to feminism)?

In doing so, they have disrupted the white female subject concealed under the category of women, as well as the privileging of female identity over other identities, and patriarchy over other structures of oppression, like Pateman's account of feminism discussed in Chapter one did. This, black feminism has argued, contributed to an exclusion and silencing of black women's struggles and concerns within feminism, which were usually considered to be second-class concerns (hooks, 1981: 12; Martin Alcoff, 2006: 210). Furthermore, beyond disrupting the understanding of women through whiteness, they also underscore the lack of consideration of race when formulating demands like those of equality. Like Alcoff says, in the demand of liberal feminism for equality with men, there is a demand for equality with white men (Alcoff, 2005: 210). This has been previously raised, when in the first chapter feminists argued for a model of citizenship that equated the category of women to that of men, they did so thinking and theorising from and towards whiteness.

With this disruption of whiteness in feminism, they contributed to what Alcoff picks up on as an analysis of raced and gendered identities as manifesting through difference in "bodily comportment, in habit, and perceptual orientation" (Alcoff, 2005: 106). Highlighting the bodily and affective dimension of racial and gender difference, Alcoff moves on to argue that social identities involve different orientations to the world which, ultimately, act as the background from practices, knowledge and meaning, thus directly linking bodily experiences with the

understanding of the world and locating the origin of differentiated knowledge in the body (Alcoff, 2005: 107).

The concept of orientation was taken up by Sara Ahmed to formulate her queer phenomenology (2006) and her phenomenology of whiteness (2007), and will be further discussed in the next chapters with the aim to understand how bodies are oriented or, in my words, moved, when encountering different affective readings of the world. However, at this point, it suffices to note that through this idea of bodily movement, orientation, there is a disruption of the whiteness underlying feminist and democratic theorising, that is put into question for its presumed neutrality or unity.

Similarly, affect and emotions have been a central way for black feminism to disrupt democratic tradition. The role of affect and emotions in feminist theorising will be further developed in the next chapter, but it is important to note how feminists of colour, like Audrey Lorde and her discussion on the anger of black feminists towards racism (1948) contributes to disrupting feminist and democratic theorising. Lorde (1948) argues that when her anger because of racism encounters feminists, it is often read as violent, and leads them to assume a defensive position against, not only anger, but black feminism, thus reinstating their whiteness and disregarding her anger. The idea of *affective politics of precarity* developed in the following chapters will allow understanding how Lorde's anger could already represent a claim in itself, one that argues that her body is being moved by an affective reading of the world that rejects its power arrangements, and that claims that the world should be different. However, at this point it can be argued that Lorde's anger, as well as the disregard of her anger, points towards the way in which attending to the interplay of affect and structures of power, can contribute to destabilising and disrupting feminist theorising.

Athough Ortega does not frame herself within the category of black feminism, I here chose to read her work around latino/a phenomenology (Alcoff, 2006) and *Chicana* feminism aligned with the wider goal of black feminism of disrupting whiteness in feminist theorising through the bodily accounts of racialised realities. This will allow uncovering ways in which it is possible to disrupt whiteness through accounting for bodily politics and the role of bodies in democratic and feminist theorising.

Ortega begins looking at phenomenology in the context of *Chicana* feminism, which has been considered to include an important phenomenological and existentialist dimension (Ortega, 2016) in its formulation. In fact, Ortega aims to think the work of *Chicana* feminists together with that of phenomenology to probe into the multiplicity of the self that they develop, and the ways in which this can serve to build coalitional politics, challenging the unitary and homogenous (white) subject of feminism.

One of her main influences is Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa has written extensively about the body and the way in which it is lived as an experience of in-betweenness (Anzaldúa, 1987). Andalzúa explores the intersection of power structures through her lived experience, what she calls *autohistoria* (self-history), and she pays attention to the different ways in which she is labelled and defined by the people that she (and her body) encounters, and the way in which this affects her identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). In this sense, it could remind us of the previously discussed account of the body as lived experience of Simone de Beauvoir: different bodies are experienced and understood differently through their social signification. What is interesting about Anzaldúa's take on this phenomenological approach to the study of identity is the fact that she destabilises the conception of a body understood in relation to a main social signification (i.e., gender for de Beauvoir), and instead thinks of her own identity as the embodiment of an in-between space that she calls la frontera (borderland) (Anzaldúa, 1987).

It is true that Anzaldúa's conception of the self and identity has evolved alongside her writings. Nevertheless, what is crucial to take from it, is the fact that she conceives it in a sense of multiplicity. Developing her concept of *new mestiza*, she aims to move away from the traditional take on mestizaje as race-mixing, to put forward instead an idea of it as living in-between. Speaking from her position as a woman of Mexican descent in the US, she engages with her experience living in the middle of different cultures, races, genders, social classes, etc (Ortega, 2016: 25). Analysing everyday bodily experiences, such as eating cake with a spoon rather than with a fork, and the dissonance that this causes, she develops a phenomenological conceptualisation of the self as one of ambiguity and plurality (Ortega, 2016: 60). This, I argue, allows capturing the conflicting differences in a way that does not

privilege any of them, nor attempts to foreclose any category of meaning. Instead, it embraces the conflicting bodily differences as an ineradicable and constitutive part of her conception of the self.

Thus, Anzaldúa approaches the body as a material given, that is situated in the in-between of different cultures and peoples (and their norms), and that therefore suffers this clash between them and is bound to experience and live a life that is marked by this clash in its own flesh. As she puts it in one of her poems:

> "1,950 mile-long open wound dividing a pueblo, a culture,
>
> running down the length of my body,
>
> staking fence rods in my flesh,
>
> splits me splits me raja me raja. . . .
>
> In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures."
>
> (Anzaldúa 1987: 81).

This poem reflects Anzaldúa's idea of the corporeal and embodied in-betweenness that I outlined before, what she has called a "theory in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983: 23). The self is found in the flesh split by a cultural clash, a clash of races, genders and other structures that are experienced as a wound. This all points towards the bodily dimension of the self, to its openness and its ambiguity, and to the importance of the experiences of these wounds, which are portrayed as dividing the peoples, directly pointing towards the emotional and affective dimension of relating to the other. This idea of in-betweenness that Anzaldúa develops is crucial to understanding Ortega's formulation of embodied coalitions, since it is based in the relationality and openness that comes with the multiplicity of identifications resulting from this situatedness in the in-between.

Consequently, Ortega also takes the body to be a material entity that acquires signification through a social matrix that then conditions the way in which this body experiences the world. This social matrix is political and intersectional, demonstrating that for her it is through the intersection of several social structures that bodies are situated in different positions and relations of power, and therefore

access knowledge in a different way. Interestingly, Ortega does take a step beyond those theorists that mainly focus on the way in which the social and signification impacts the body, to recognise the importance of the way in which bodies react to other bodies. This is crucial to understand the way in which she perceives identification and stems directly from the concept of in-betweenness that Anzaldúa developed (Ortega, 2016: 148). For Ortega, bodies and their situatedness in the socio-political matrix highlight the fact that there is no body that is situated according to only one axis of power. This means that all bodies are seen to be marked by multiplicity, and the "being in" thus also means "being in between" worlds (Ortega, 2016: 145).

Consequently, when it comes to identity, Ortega's phenomenological account of the self incorporates a relational and social aspect: it is not possible to define one body without understanding how it is located in relation to other bodies. Therefore, for her, the I/We divide is blurred in favour of an understanding of the fluidity of bodies and identities, which could allow a potential form of coalitional politics that could, I argue, contribute to disrupting and deepening democracy through ensuring a certain level of coherence between conflicting differences.

Mariana Ortega has suggested building an embodied coalitional politics following Alcoff's (2006) conceptualisation of identity as horizons. Alcoff (2006) turns to Merleau-Ponty (1982) to analyse the way in which identity, and the self, are constituted through embodied experience of historical and cultural practices (Ortega, 2016: 151). Combining this phenomenological approach with that of hermeneutics, she develops the idea of identity as a horizon, which can serve to build coalitional politics through the shared experiences of bodies, since she argues that every I, and every self, is already integrating the other in its definition in relation to its relationship with other bodies (Ortega, 2016: 150).

For Alcoff, the horizon is "a site from which one is open to the world, a site from which one must engage in the process of meaning making" (Alcoff, 2006: 43), and these horizons, are not to be reduced to something linguistic or discursive, but need to consider their material situatedness, therefore, the body (Ortega, 2016: 152). To put it simply, horizons are specific points of views from where to experience and

apprehend the world that surrounds bodies, and this occurs differently according to the characteristics of such a body (Ortega, 2016: 151). This understanding weaves identity with knowledge and the situatedness of experience lived through the body, which provides every body a particular perspective that is shared by other people with the same or similar social identities. In other words, there is a shared embodied knowledge that allows creating alliances between the self and the other which are not necessarily conflictive or opposed (Ortega, 2016: 151).

Nevertheless, this is not what I refer to when I suggest that we should look at the potential of embodiment to further disrupt and deepen democracy. As the chapter will later argue, I intend to refer to the potential of bodies in both exposing the working of power through the concealing and exclusion of certain bodies, on the other hand, to the possibility of bringing forward alternatives that subvert the power that regulates such bodies. Instead, Ortega's reading of Alcoff could be read as resembling the modes of feminist coalitions discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, based on shared identity, knowledge or oppression. Here, returning to a shared embodied knowledge as a basis on which to formulate coalitions to overturn power relations might fall into the same trap as those authors who argued that sharing an identity or oppression contributed to the possibility of forming alliances assuming there would be a shared political will and overlooking the process of politicisation.

Instead of speaking about fundamental categories or subjectivities, Ortega here suggests taking embodied knowledge and perspective as the place where it is possible to find a common, shared experience that allows building a politics based on solidarity and mutual understanding. It is true that this mode of constructing coalitions does not limit identity to one single understanding of "women", as discussed before. To put it in her words:

> "Despite our differences, we can struggle against oppression, not
> necessarily because I identify with your values or your identity
> markers but because our standpoints intersect in ways that lead us
> to recognize how we stand within relations of power and how
> working together with a good sense of our differences (or

understanding the zones where contact is uncomfortable, challenging, and even hurtful) might provide avenues to undermine oppression". (Ortega, 2016: 168)

And yet, unfortunately Ortega does not explore this path of a coalition based on a shared embodied experience of resistance much further. Instead, she analyses the possibility of establishing a system that facilitates a "complex communication" (Ortega, 2016:165) in between different horizons, different groups, that recognise that there is a certain overlapping between their horizons. Ultimately, to put in her words, there needs to be a recognition of a "common location within power relations" (Ortega, 2016: 165) that results in a "shared oppression" (Ortega, 2016: 165). It is this recognition of a shared oppression which enables the communication and understanding between different embodied groups that conform the coalition.

Therefore, rather than developing a theory of agonistic embodiment based on the affective connection with others through the shared embodied experiences of resistance, as she firstly seemed to suggest with the work of Alcoff, she engages with modes of coalitional politics that are possible only in the case of a shared agreement over a shared embodied positionality. This forecloses the possibility of articulating contesting experiences, demands or identities, or in other words, contesting horizons that are sometimes contradictory. Instead, it returns, like those authors in chapter one, to the assumption that a shared (in this case bodily) experience of oppression could lead to a shared demand or claim.

While I am sympathetic to Ortega's reading of Chicana's phenomenology, and I welcome her account of the horizon to develop an embodied coalition for resistance, I wonder whether this approach allows disrupting and deepening democracy or, instead, it contributes to further reifying the power relations that it is trying to dismantle by failing to engage with conflicting differences. It is here where Judith Butler's account of performative assemblies and vulnerability can be useful to start envisioning such a form of embodied coalition based not only on the being, but on the relations and connections with the other with whom we do not seem to share a common horizon.

3.2 Performing vulnerable bodies

This section aims to take this possibility a step further by enquiring into the work of Judith Butler. Butler conceptualises gender as performative, as producing the norms and discourses that regulates it through its enacting in Gender Trouble (1990), where she argues that gender is the result of a repetition of acts within a normative framework that settle to produce that which is being repeated over time (Butler, 1990: 25). In this sense, they criticise those accounts of feminism that believe in identity as something constructed but static, to argue that gender is instead an act of doing, conceived not as the acting out of a pre-existing identity, but instead as producing that which is being acted out (Butler, 1990: 25). This is what Butler conceives to be the performativity of gender, the bringing about of certain categories though a repetition of its enactment, which brings about that which is being acted out, and which did not exist prior to it. Making norms not something that are imposed on bodies, nor that are constraining the way that bodies acts, but rather a result of acting according to a repetition of previous acts.

This also means that, in taking a category like that of women, as the foundation on which a project of emancipatory politics is built, there is a reproduction of that subject which aims to be emancipated. This therefore underscores the risks of formulating feminism around the category of women, even if it moves towards a more fluid or open understanding of such category. For Butler, thus, the possibility of challenging norms and power relations is not to be found outside the bodies, but instead in the bodily enactment of alternative performances that expose the working of power in normalising contingent performances (Butler, 1990). This shows that through the repeated subversion and overturn of gender performances it is possible to question and disrupt gender, bringing about alternatives to it.

Consequently, and because of the role it has in performativity and resistance, the body has always been central for her theorising of feminism. Butler considers bodies to be vulnerable and interdependent and, as the following sections will show, she turns towards this interdependence, and the ability of bodies to performatively act in concert, to probe into how feminist politics can contribute to deepening and disrupting democracy (Butler, 2015).

3.2.1 Vulnerable and grievable bodies

It is important to start this discussion with Butler's examination of vulnerability and grief. In "Precarious Life", Butler thinks about violence and human life in the context of the aftermaths of 9/11 (Butler, 2004: ii).

They start reflecting about the fragility of human life, mourning and the category of loss. They argue that it is human loss, death and the threat or immanent possibility of it, that highlights the vulnerability of human beings to violence, and our reliance on infrastructures to survive. In the sharing of the capacity to grief, there is also an implied shared experience of love and pain, which, according to Butler, turns everyone into a collective "we". This "we" is vulnerable to being affected by others and by their absence, thus making our bodies constituted by social vulnerability, through our attachments to others and the risk of losing those attachments (Butler, 2004: 20).

However, they mention that this presupposed shared humanity, this ability to grieve and to be grieved, is not shared to the same degree or in the same way by all bodies (Butler, 2004: 20). Butler suggests that there are some lives that are more grieved than others, to the extent that some losses are, not only not grieved, but indeed celebrated (Butler, 2004: 32). It is important to remember that Butler is thinking in the context of 9/11 and the high securitisation of US politics that followed, and therefore she starts thinking about this differential distribution of vulnerability in the context of the War on Terror. Nevertheless, they quickly apply this to the lives of LGBTQ people, and relates it to movements like that of Black Lives Matter, which render evident the way in which some lives are more grievable than others, in the sense that they are less expected to be lost (Butler, 2020). This does not mean that when certain lives are lost, nobody grieves them nor suffers their loss. Instead, it means these lives are denied a publicly grievable life. This, they argue, becomes evident when thinking of obituaries after 9/11, and how they tended to reflect a white and straight nation, rather than recognise as heroes those who were queer or immigrants (Butler, 2004: 34). Thus, Butler argues that these lives become un-

grievable, they become un-buriable, and are therefore denied their humanity, they are denied their intelligibility for other human beings (Butler, 2004: 33). They are prescindible, they do not affect us, and therefore they have no value for us.

One of the most interesting points that they make is not just the fact that there is a differential distribution of vulnerability, but that this distribution changes over time. Therefore, what is now deemed not grievable, might be grievable tomorrow. The dehumanisation that comes with un-grievable lives is not inherently given, but rather an effect of the social vulnerability that constitutes us and that, according to Butler, is subject to regulatory norms (Butler, 2004: 37). This reading of vulnerability, injurability and precarity allow Butler to rethink these categories moving away from the liberal ethical reading of bodies that presents subjects that are in the need of protection by other subjects (Butler, 2009: 2).

Understanding this reading of such concepts is crucial to be able to grasp the way in which Butler conceives the body, which will serve to understand how bodies that gather in the street might contribute to disrupting and deepening democracy through an embodied and performative claim. In fact, it points out in the direction of what they consider to be the main defining characteristic of bodies: openness and interdependence. They argue that, when speaking about ontology, and especially about the ontology of a body, we cannot aim to theorise an unmediated description of it, which is separate from the social and political structures in which it is immersed. It is precisely this that constitutes the ontology of the body that Butler refers to, the openness to these political and social norms, structures and significations that shape and produce bodies in specific contexts. Henceforth, the ontology of the body is a social ontology, one that understands the body as always being exposed to the historically constituted social and political norms and structures that "maximize precariousness for some, and minimize precariousness for others" (Butler, 2009: 3).

At this point, it might be worth clarifying what Butler means by precariousness. They do not use the terms precariousness and precarity indistinctively, although they are both interrelated in their framing of vulnerability and the body. Butler argues that there is a "shared precariousness that calls into question the ontology of

individualism" (Butler, 2009: 33), meaning that life is dependent on infrastructures that render us vulnerable in their absence, therefore making us interdependent, as opposed to the rationalities that neoliberalism is based on. In doing this, Butler takes as a starting point the body understood as a social phenomenon, as one that is open to affecting and being affected by others. This allows conceiving the body as more than a surface that is impacted by social meanings, like De Beauvoir (1948) would have argued, but instead as a social entity that responds affectively to a world that is, at the same time, defining its responses (Butler, 2009: 34). By doing so, it breaks the duality that assumes the body to be a mere material entity that acquires a social signification. Instead, the body changes this social signification, being shaped and shaping it at the same time. Therefore, precariousness becomes a condition intrinsic to a social body that conditions and is conditioned, and sustains and is sustained, by the world where it is inscribed, relating to it through affectively. In Butler words:

> "precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world; responsiveness-and thus, ultimately, responsibility-is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world." (Butler, 2009: 34)

I will be returning to the idea of affect as central to the body and the way in which it shapes and is shaped by its reality and its interaction with other bodies and objects in the next chapter. For now, what is important to take from this reading, is that precariousness is a condition that constitutes life, a life that is lived by bodies that are social and that are interdependent. Nevertheless, if we go back to the differentiation between precariousness and precarity that Butler draws, we shall note that this precariousness is not lived and experienced by all bodies in the same way. Instead, there are political conditions that shape the way and the level of precariousness that bodies are exposed to, and consequently our constitutive precariousness is distributed differentially, making some bodies more open to being affected by the infrastructures that sustain and allow our lives. As Butler argues,

"Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. In some sense, this is a feature of all life, and there is no thinking of life which is not precarious […] Precarity designates the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death." (Butler, 2009: 25)

Ultimately, this leads to the argument that there are some lives that are more liveable than others. This, they believe, results from the structures and the normative power that render our world intelligible. In other words, normative structures such as gender, class, race or disability contribute to rendering bodies legible in relation to what is considered to be normal, acceptable or appropriate. Consequently, some bodies are more legible than others, they are closer to fitting into the normative bodies that are being regulated and produced by these structures, they fit better into the institutional support that is given and required from them at the same time. This idea of the differential distribution of precariousness points into the direction that these bodies are produced and regulated in a space that is not neutral, that produces some bodies as more open than others[15].

3.2.2 Radicalising democracy: the performative assembly of bodies

When analysing democratic politics, and the exclusions intrinsic in their construction, Butler builds on this conceptualisation of the body as vulnerable. They argue that democratic politics should be concerned with who counts as the people, and who is left outside of it. Exclusionsare intrinsic to this process of construction of the people, since the demarcation of a people implies the demarcation of a border that signals who is part of this people (Butler, 2015: 5). Many of these exclusions are

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[15] The concept of bodies being social entities fitting into normative moulds could be read together with Sara Ahmed's (2004) idea of the orientation of bodies that are passing through the space, and open to affect and being affected by other bodies and objects.

reified without knowledge that they are being reified, since they are naturalised and taken as reality[16].

In this context, Butler argues that the goal of radical democratic politics is not to find these exclusions and to include them by simply extending recognition to everyone, like some of the authors in Chapter one would have argued (Young, 1990; Pateman, 1989). Instead, they believe that radical democracy must go a step further, understanding and transforming the logics through which the notion of the people is articulated. Only through these means, by engaging with and questioning this notion, it is possible to achieve the goal of equality that radicalises democracy, and to address the ways in which categories like inclusion and recognition contribute to further perpetuating the inequality of democratic struggles (Butler, 2015: 6).

Butler starts this discussion on the radicalisation of democracy analysing the protests and forms of assembly that have been taking place in world politics in the last decades, from the Occupy movement, to Tahrir Square and the Indignados[17]. They argue that these demonstrations allow us to think of political meanings beyond discourse, and incorporates the body into this analysis (Butler, 2015: 8). They point towards ideas of embodiment and embodied action as producing signification too, and she notes that they are "neither discursive nor prediscursive" (Butler, 2015: 8). This is because they argue that the act of assembling, of gathering, already constitutes a demand that is signifying prior to any of the other demands made. In other words, it signifies in excess of what is said, by gathering, being in silence, or leaving spaces, bodies are already signifying a collectivity that is performed, that comes into existence through this act of gathering.

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[16] This could be read through Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's hegemony, which puts forward the idea that there are contingent articulations of collective subjects that are posited as universal and accepted as the natural order to which there is no possible alternative (1985)

[17] In the 2010s, there was a wave of global protests such as Occupy Wall Street in theUnited States, the Indignados movement in Spain or the Tahrir Square uprising in Egypt that articulated a collective discounted with the realities of neoliberalism: inequality, corruption, injustice, etc. These movements tended to be horizontally organized, without clear leaders, and reclaimed the use of public spaces (mainly squares) to call for greater democratic accountability in the face of these challenges.

Hence, Butler argues that the people that democracy should be concerned with, is not just formed by its vocalised claims, but also by their appearance and the conditions that allow it. They add that this form of bodily performativity is not completely separate from linguistic performativity, but it cannot be perceived as being the same either. Instead, they argue that bodily actions (whether they imply movement, stillness, interruption or orientations) do not happen in one body alone, but in the relation in between different bodies, objects and spaces, in the in between space (Butler, 2015: 9). Furthermore, they suggests that it is possible to read bodies acting in concert as an embodied way of challenging and contesting the power structures and relations that organise and govern the political field (Butler, 2015: 10-11). But what is this structuring of the political that allows some bodies to appear but not others? Here, as it will be discussed later, they mainly refer to the differential distribution of precarity that sustains and is sustained by neoliberal governance. The process of assembly is related to precarity in two main ways for Butler: on the one hand, assemblies contest precarity through the acting in concert and appearing in public spaces; on the other hand, these bodies are precaritised and they take this precarity as the conditions that mobilises them to act in concert (Butler, 2015: 18).

Although Butler recognises the distinct character of all these different demonstrations and protests, they state that they do not aim to overlook these differences but to point towards the fact that they all exercise a "plural and performative right to appear" (Butler, 2015: 11), putting the bodies at the centre of the political sphere and demanding better economic, social and political conditions to make life more liveable.

Henceforth, it could be argued that there is a precarity that runs through these movements. It might not be the same or concern the same lacking structures, but it does point towards a shared unequal and unjust distribution of vulnerability, and the claim to transform this inequality (Butler, 2015: 17). This does not mean that the act of showing plural bodies gathering in the streets translates into the overcoming of precarity, following the idea that more bodies make them stronger. In fact, as it will be argued later, precarity cannot be overcome. Instead, it means that precarity serves to articulate bodies through the notion of a shared unjust distribution of this precarity. Furthermore, this understanding of precarity as shared, poses a challenge

and contests the neoliberal rationalities that favour individual action and self-sufficiency by highlighting that these bodies are marked by interdependence (Butler, 2015: 18).

Here, it could be argued that the shared unjust situation captured through precarity that Butler refers to resembles Ortega's notion of shared embodied experiences of oppression. However, Butler's precarity, despite also building on and resulting from unequal power relations and structures of oppression, is very different from Ortega's conceptualisation. This is because it does not require the sharing of an experience, nor an identity, a demand or a specific embodied knowledge. Instead, it is built around the sharing of an unequal distribution of precariousness, whatever may be the causes behind it.[18]

At this point it is important to discuss how Butler understands the idea of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism plays a crucial role in Butler's theory of assembly and performativity. In fact, Butler is thinking within the current conjuncture of neoliberalism when she argues that radical democratic politics should be concerned with the structures that create and reinforce exclusions, making some lives more valuable than others, resulting in some populations being considered disposable. Butler does not provide an in-depth discussion of neoliberalism, however, she points towards two main aspects that must be considered. On the one hand, an understanding of neoliberalism as a process of the unequal distribution of disposability, making it not only an economic process affecting materiality, but also one that changes psychic reality, producing a feeling of expendability in certain subjects (Butler, 2015: 15) . On the other hand, the idea of responsibility and self-reliance, individuality, that Butler argues denies the crucial role of interdependence as constitutive of living beings as dependent on each other and other structures. Neoliberalism, they argue, negates these structures and presents an ideal of self-sufficiency and independence that should be obtained for progress and individual gains, ultimately deeming them more or less disposable (Butler, 2015: 20).

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[18] This is different from the idea of affectively reading a shared precairty, which will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Resulting from this reading of neoliberalism, precarity is central for the way in which some bodies are excluded or included from democratic politics. The main aspect to consider of precarity is the fact that it is not an objective or neutral truth, nor an identity, but instead is a social and economic condition that is experienced differently and in different intensities by different people, since some are exposed to more and higher levels or precarity than others (Butler, 2015: 21; 218). At first this might seem a contradiction to the argument that everyone is vulnerable and thus dependent on others and other structures to survive. However, it is important to nuance the fact that dependency, for Butler, is constitutive of our human existence, and hence it does not immediately mean subjugation (Butler, 2015: 21), even if it can turn into it should there be an unequal distribution of vulnerability (as there is under neoliberalism).

Consequently, and since interdependence is central and unavoidable, it is important to understand that then vulnerability and deprivation highlighting the fact that what is the failing of the systems, structures and institutions that organise and distribute this vulnerability unequally, making individuals become "differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2015: 33). With this shift of understanding, it is possible to read precarity as requiring, not an ethos of individual responsibility, but one of solidarity that looks for a democratic distribution of precariousness, relying on the interdependence that constitute us as relations and social beings that aim to build collective networks of mutual aid. Therefore, should we want to contest the current differential distribution of vulnerability, it is important to recognise this dimension of interdependence that challenges the neoliberal deployment of vulnerability, not with the aim of transcending or overcoming interdependence and precarity, but making it more liveable (Butler, 2015: 45; 218).

When bodies assemble, Butler argues, they both reject the economic and social precarity that they are exposed to and claim the performative right to appear and live more liveable lives (Butler, 2015: 24-25). These bodies are exposing themselves to claim that "we are not disposable, whether or not they are using words at the moment; (...) we are still here, persisting, demanding greater justice, a release from precarity, a possibility of a livable life" (Butler, 2015: 24). Thus, it is through a reading of assemblies as the rejection of a differentially imposed value in lives,

performing the right to appear, and therefore claiming for a different and more equal distribution of vulnerability, that we can understand the relevance that assemblies have for Butler's project of radicalisation of democracy.

Precarity, thus, acts as a place to build alliances beyond identity coalitions, that allow contesting, contradictory and agonistic views and demands to gather. And this is expressed in Butler's recognition of a shared vulnerability and the calling for putting their lives back at the centre, claiming that they are persisting, and demanding better conditions for life, whether they agree or not about what conditions these are (Butler, 2015: 27). By grasping this shared vulnerability, we can think of these gatherings and these assemblies as plural, moving away from a reductionist approach that perceived the need of a shared identity and a unified voice. Instead, we can recognise the plurality of demands and voices that conform a greater body of politics. Henceforth, for Butler we cannot understand what holds these gatherings together if we do not account for the shared injustice and vulnerability, which is followed by a "shared intimation of the possibility of change, there is also a desire to produce a new form of sociality in the past. These mobilizations make their claims through language, action, gesture, and movement; through linking arms; through refusing to move (...)" (Butler, 2015: 183).

Now, as it has been discussed, there are many ways in which such claims can be put forward. Butler, following their theorisation of assembly, focuses on the bodily enactment of such claims in practices of assembly, action and resistance (Butler, 2015: 49). An important dimension of Butler is the performativity of claims, through which the claim is constituted and comes to being through the claiming itself, where the appearance in an assembly becomes a bodily claim that disrupts the understanding that certain bodies do not matter. This also means that, because of the differential distribution of precariousness, not all bodies have the same capacity to make such claims, to appear and disrupt such inequality. In fact, there are structures of power that regulate such access, making some bodies more likely and more prone to appear and to claim than others.

This constitutes a central point of Butler's critique and analysis of assemblies, since it highlights the fact that disrupting and deepening democracy requires an

engagement with the structures that regulate such possibility of appearance, and which in many cases is done through the act of appearing itself. In other words, for Butler, appearing to claim to make precarity more livable and equally distributed when your life is considered disposable, already constitutes a critique of the differential distribution of power and vulnerability. Alongside this, the act of appearing already challenges the value that has been imposed on their lives, and it is done in opposition to the expansion of these inequalities (Butler, 2015: 135).

Moreover, the fact that there is a need to engage with the structures that regulate the possibility of appearing, or assembling, means that Butler also understands that the process of disrupting and deepening democracy is not one where all bodies are equal, but one where the unequal distribution of precarity that the bodies are trying to subvert is already regulating what bodies are able to show up, or which ones are considered to be making a valid claim. This points towards the idea of power as being performative, which will be discussed later in the section. However, it is important to note that this concept requires assemblies ensure openness in a way that is also disrupting and deepening to their own practices of assembling, being aware of the way in which they might reproduce precarity within.

Butler argues that the gathering to claim for equality is performative (Butler, 2015: 52). This means that it brings into being what it seems to represent through the act of representing itself. They take this idea of performativity discussed at the beginning of the section when analysing the "embodied political claim to equality" (Butler, 2015: 52). They argue that the collective acting in the absence of a pre-existent collective identity, in the absence of an a priori constituted *we*, is a way of enacting this collective in the first place, a way of bringing about the community that produces a different configuration of equality, freedom and justice. Hence, the act of assembling of different bodies that are persisting, contesting and reconfiguring the current articulations of equality and freedom by claiming access to a public sphere are constituting a "we" where before there were only individualised "I" (Butler, 2015: 52). For Butler, as the chapter will show, this process is performative precisely because of its ability to bring about a collective form of politics, a community that did not exist before its gathering as a community, before their collective appearance in the public sphere.

Here, it is important to point out two main ideas. Firstly, Butler has repeatedly emphasised that there are always bodies that do not physically appear in these assemblies, and that does not mean that they are not part of this performative assembly claiming to appear. Here, they suggest it does not mean that there is a strict correlation between those who physically gather in the street and those who conform part of this "we". With this, Butler aims to bring attention to the role of traditional and social media, as well as to those bodies whose precarity does not allow them to appear in the streets, and who are nonetheless included in the claim for a more democratic distribution of vulnerability (such as prisoners). Secondly, this approach brings light to the bodily dimension of performative politics. Speech becomes one of the ways for bodies to act, through speaking, but not the only one. The acts of gathering, marching, being silent or singing are also ways to act politically and to oppose the failing arrangement of the structures of support, making what traditionally was considered a background of the political life (access to food, shelter, remunerated labour, care) become the main object of this performative politics (Butler, 2015: 207-208).

Hence, it is possible to read the struggle of new social movements, such as feminism as aiming to "a politics in which performative action takes bodily and plural form, drawing critical attention to the conditions of bodily survival, persistence, and flourishing within the framework of radical democracy" (Butler, 2015: 218).

The idea of performativity is crucial to understanding the way that Butler approaches resistance politics for another reason. Butler believes that through performative politics it is possible to question and claim power, and in doing so, there is already a disruption of the current configuration of power and articulating new ones.

This means that the performativity of an assembly that claims to appear is a form of acting from precarity and against precarity. By acting politically and collectively from a place where there is a recognition of this shared vulnerability, and the simultaneous claim to end it, to value lives otherwise, there is a concurring claim against precarity and an alternative arrangement of it. The claim for a different distribution of precariousness is performative since there is no claim outside of the

claim itself. Consequently, the acting, of assembling and gathering, is a way to claim for a different distribution of power, and to enact it. It constitutes a way of questioning and contesting the structures that (fail to) support bodies and their relation to it, and to put forward alternative arrangements of them (based on interdependence). To put it in Butler's words "acting in the name of that support, without that support, is the paradox of plural performative action under conditions of precarity" (Butler, 2015: 65). Resulting from this, the body becomes a place from where to think vulnerability and agency together (Butler, 2015: 139).

It is important to understand that the "we" that is performed in these assemblies is not a "we" understood in the sociological sense, with a corresponding a priori defined and limited homogenous group of people that are part of it. Instead, it is a contingent political construction, where not everyone that conforms it agrees or shares the same demands. In the case of feminism, not everyone that is gathering in the streets and co-creating the feminist body agrees on the demands of feminism, like Chapter five shows. Rather than it being a disadvantage or a failure of these assemblies, it should be approached as the condition that allows the politicisation and democratisation of the movement in the first place, and the deepening and disrupting of democracy. It is here that the demands are constantly renegotiated and at the risk of being appropriated and dismissed, raising the possibility of a struggle over these claims, the way they are articulated, which ones appear, and which ones are disregarded.

It is important to take into consideration this struggle, because this means that every *we* is a potentially failed *we*, one that does not represent all the claims that are made, and that would never be able to do so. If it is to remain a political and democratic "we", it should be always open to the contestation that allows it reconfiguration and expansion, that allows the struggle over alternative contingent articulations of these demands, thus constituting it in a political way. Thus, through the contestation of the different claims that come together in assemblies, it is possible to bring about a feminist body that did not exist prior to the assembly, and that contributes to ensuring openness within.

But how does this contribute to further radicalising democracy? Leticia Sabsay (2016) argues that it is not just the act of gathering in an assembly what automatically translates into a deepening of democracy, despite its disruptive potential. Rather, it is the fact that in doing so there is a performative construction of a *we* that is opposed to something (Sabsay, 2016: 297). This antagonistic other that it opposes to determine the borders of the community that its being brought about and therefore allows radicalising democracy in a way that, as argued in the previous chapter, not only ensures the possibility of contestation and disruption, but also bringing forward alternatives to that which it is contesting.

This is not to say that Sabsay contradicts Butler or rejects her reading of embodied performativity. In fact, she argues that Butler's account of embodied assemblies is extremely valuable since it allows understanding feminist mobilisations like Ni Una Menos by rethinking democratic space. Whereby, it enables understanding the embodied knowledge and claims produced by certain feminist mobilisations in a way that disrupts the democratic tradition and its understanding of demands as being linguistically articulated towards a specific institution. In doing so, it presses democratic tradition to consider new ways to engage with it.

When, building on this dimension, Sabsay highlights that the potential for radicalising democracy in Butler's account of embodied performativity is not to be found just on the act of appearing in the street and gathering to formulate a claim. It is the fact that, according to her, in formulating a claim together (even if that claim is the acting in concert), there is an opening up of the possibility for an articulation that allows a hegemonic struggle. It is in this articulation, she argues, that we can find the potential of performative and embodied articulations to radicalise democracy, bringing forward alternatives that challenge the neoliberalism that Butler located at the origin of the unequal distribution of precarity. And, therefore, it is the possibility to read the gathering of bodies as a site for articulation that allows understanding the potential to deepen democratic tradition and practice (Sabsay, 2016: 295).

Chapter 6 will go into a more detailed discussion of the process of articulation and the idea of hegemony in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's work (1985), around which Sabsay builds her reading of Butler's assemblies (2015). However, it is

important to note at this point that, for Sabsay (2016: 295) following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the moment of articulation is a one when different elements that have no a priori relationship or correspondence come together giving place to signification of meaning. This articulation is not just linguistic, but also includes, in this case, processes of embodiment.

Therefore, for Sabsay it is about the process through which, when gathering in the streets, different bodies are giving place to a meaning, one that articulates together as a community that is opposed to something (the unequal distribution of precarity in neoliberalism, if we follow Butler). In other words, it is this moment of translation of the gathering into a claim that also performatively brings about a *we*, that is opposed to an antagonistic other and delimited by it, that allows further deepening and radicalising democracy. This moment of translation will be picked up again in chapters 5 and 6, where it will be analysed through an affective lens which aims to understand how it is possible for it to allow the erasing of the porous border between certain bodies, and the construction of one between others, giving place to agonistic or antagonistic relationships.

Hence, for Sabsay, it is important to consider the way in which the performative gathering allows producing an antagonistic division in democracy (Sabsay, 2016: 296), since this is what determines the limits of the community that is being brought forward. Since, as mentioned, she builds her understanding of radical democracy on Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and their idea that every articulation has implicit in it the exclusion of all other possible articulations, it is precisely through its relation to antagonism that an articulated "we" can determine its borders that come about at the limits that separate them from that what they oppose. Therefore, for her, to grasp the radically democratic potential of feminism mobilisations, it is important to question how the bodily and affective processes that result from a shared feeling of precarity pushing for bodies to gather in the street can contribute to a reconfiguration of the porous skin of such bodies and to producing agonistic or antagonistic borders.

Thus, to understand the way in which feminist mobilisations might contribute to radicalising democracy by disrupting and deepening democratic tradition, it is crucial to understand the way in which their embodied performative appearing could become

a place for political articulation of a *we* that is opposed to the unequal distribution of precarity resulting from neoliberalism, and that would want it to be otherwise; as well as probing into the role of affect, emotions and the body in redrawing the porous skin of bodies giving place to the agonistic and antagonistic borders that delimit the performative assembly and that what it opposes. This is precisely what the following chapters will be exploring, starting with an analysis of affect and emotions in Chapter four.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the role of the body in the formulation of a feminism that contributes to the radicalisation of democracy, inquiring into the possibility of an articulation on the basis of the gathering of bodies in the street that performatively bring about a claim and that could contribute to building a we/they antagonistic relationship.

For this, the chapter started engaging with a group of authors that have analysed the body, and its gendered dimension, as a reacting object, one that is acted upon by social meaning. The section engaged with Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) feminist take on Merleau-Ponty's (1945) phenomenological reading of the body, and with the work of Mariana Ortega (2016) and her phenomenological take on Chicana feminism. After analysing both proposals it argued that, despite their differences, they both build on the idea of a body that is ultimately the reflection of language and social norms, rather than also an actor that perpetuates (and therefore has the possibility of interrupting) such acts of power.

The second section engaged deeply with the work of Judith Butler (2015, 1990) and their proposal of an ontology of performative bodies which are vulnerable and interdependent to assemble against the differential distribution of precarity. This was a crucial part of the chapter of the body, since it explored some of the main theoretical concepts that allow for an alliance based on relationality and bodies, rather than identity. Moreover, it also highlighted the importance of recognising the

ability of bodies to act before empowerment, from a place of vulnerability. This, the section considered, is central to enable the articulation of a feminist project that aims to radicalise democracy. Lastly, the chapter engaged with the work of Leticia Sabsay (2016) which considers the reading of Butler together with the importance of articulation and antagonism, to argue that it is the moment of translation of the performative claim of gathering into a collective will that is opposed to an antagonistic other which determines the possibility of such performative gathering to disrupt and deepen democracy. Here I question the role of, not only the body, but also affect and emotions in contributing to delimitate the profound boundaries of articulation.

Chapter 4: The affective politics of precarity

The previous chapter analysed the feminist theorising of the body and how it might allow disrupting and deepening democracy, probing into the way in which the assembling of bodies in the street could constitute a bodily claim that performatively brings about a community opposed to precarity. I argued, following Sabsay's (2016) reading of Butler (2015), that in performatively producing such community opposed to precarity, there is a moment of translation of their collective will that constitutes it opposed to an antagonistic other, a moment of articulation. This raises questions about the constitution of such articulation: how are the bodies held together? And how are the porous boundaries between bodies that gather in the street redrawn in defining the feminist bodies that opposes precarity, and what is the role of affect, emotions and the body in it?

By aiming to further engage with this concept, and to answer these questions this chapter will develop a model of *affective politics of precarity* which, I argue, will allowing probing into feminist mobilisations an understand how they contribute to disrupting and deepening democracy. The affective politics of precarity that I will be engaging in this and the following chapters, I argue, allows exploring how the circulation of affect contributes to bringing the feminist body together in the absence of a shared monolithic foundational category of the subject of feminism (as discussed in Chapter 1), and an explicit linguistic constitutive demand around which contesting demands are articulated (as discussed in Chapter 2), through an articulation of different bodies, demands, signs and meanings that goes beyond the performativity of appearing together (as discussed in Chapter 3), to consider the affective drawing of boundaries of that which the feminist body is, and that which it opposes.

In order to do so, it will start by engaging with the idea of affect and affective politics. It will clarify the terminology used in the chapter and explore the social and political dimensions of affect. The chapter will then move to start setting out the model of affective politics of precarity, by examining the way in which precarity can be read as an affective object that circulates reorienting bodies, through what I call

affective reading. For this, it will engage with Sara Ahmed's notion of circulation and the political economy of affect (2014), as well as with Lauren Berlant's idea of cruel optimism (2011). This will lead to argue that feminist bodies are reoriented by their affective readings of precarity, and this could be understood as bringing about the feminist body and outlining and redefining its borders.

Finally, the chapter will move on to suggest a second level of affective circulation, that which takes place when the bodies that are reoriented by precarityencounter each other and, in doing so, are also being relationally reoriented by these encounters. Building on the work of Da Costa (2016) and Bargetz (2015), as well as Sara Ahmed's (2006) concepts of *awayness* and *towardness*, it will suggest that there is another level of affective circulation around precarity, where those bodies that are moved by the affective politics of precarity encounter, read and are reoriented towards and away from each other (as well as from their demands, claims, etc.). This, as next chapter will show, will allow probing through an affective lens into the redrawing of boundaries between bodies and the contestation that occurs in feminist mobilisations.

Ultimately, this model of the affective politics of precarity would allow recognising the possibility of common ground for political action and mobilisation, while also understanding the plural and sometimes conflicting bodies, demands and signs within it, allowing space to explore the way in which the politics boundaries of the feminist body are produced and blurred, contributing to openness and bringing about alternatives that, altogether, disrupt and deepen democracy.

4.1 Affective politics: to be emotional or to be affected?

There is an extensive body of literature on emotions and affect, which ranges from cultural studies to psychoanalysis, biology and feminist studies. In fact, it has been feminist scholars, and specifically queer and black feminist scholars, who have for a long time brought attention to the importance of understanding and theorising emotions as being entangled with racism and other forms of oppression (Lorde, 1981; Collins, 1986). This focus on emotions in feminist scholarship can be read as

part of the feminist ethos of second-wave feminism, as well as a continuation of the challenging of the public/private divide, on the one hand; and the rethinking of epistemology beyond the rationality/emotionality and objectivity/subjectivity dichotomies, on the other (Collins, 1986; Haraway; 1988; Jaggar, 1989; Harding, 1987; 2008; Wright, 2010).

However, before starting the discussion, it is important to clarify the terminology that will be used throughout the chapter and the thesis. Although this thesis is not focused on theorising the ontology of emotions or affect (what emotions and affect are), nor does it intend to offer a comprehensive analysis of the literature on the differences between affect and emotions, it is important to clarify the terms used. This is because, while some scholars acknowledge a distinction, which is often hierarchical, between the terms of affect and emotion, others believe that such distinction is nothing but a product of the prevalence of rationality and the dismissal of the body in scholarship discussed in the previous chapter. This thesis choses to use both affect and emotions interchangeably, as it will be explained below.

The distinction between affect and emotion can be traced to the so-called affective turn (Clough, 2008). With the essays of Massumi (2002) and Sedgwick (2003), there was an increased interest in social sciences towards the concept of affect to move beyond the post-structural turn and bring focus back to the subject. Most scholars, inspired by Deleuze and Spinoza, recognised a division between affect and emotions. For these authors, emotions refer to particular and short-lived feelings that we are conscious about, and we can name and acknowledge; while affect reflects a wider state of being, an affective intensity that is present in the way in which we relate with and change through the encounter with other bodies, be they animate or inanimate (Hemmings, 2005: 551; Clough, 2008: 3). Affect is thus conceived as something that is different from and transcends emotions, with the latter being the phenomenological reflection of a specific experience, and the former something that precedes it and that relates to the ability to affect and be affected. This is, emotions are the phenomenological manifestation or interpretation of affect, which is perceived to be a wider state of being (Probyn, 2005).

As mentioned, one of the authors who called for the duality of affect and emotions, arguing that they are to be understood as two different concepts, is Brian Massumi. Massumi (2002), builds on Deleuze and Spinoza to conceptualise affect as separate from emotion, although he draws this distinction further than them. He argues that affect cannot be reduced to emotion or to discourse, as it in fact exceeds both categories taking the form of material intensity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994)[19]. Massumi thus describes affect as an intensity of experience that is registered at a preconscious level, hence rendering affect pre-subjective and autonomous, leading bodily responses that escape social signification (2002). Emotions, on the other hand, are for Massumi the sensation that reaches our conscious awareness and that involves some level of acknowledgement and awareness about the experience. To put it in his words, emotions are "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" (Massumi, 2002: 28).

Although he does specify that this does not imply that the autonomy of affect means that it is necessarily pre-social, in the sense that it is prior to the social (Massumi, 2002: 9), his account of affect renders it outside the structures and spheres of linguistic, cultural and social signification (Massumi, 2002). In this sense, he reinforces the split between mind and body, and he understands bodily reactions as not responding to the political and social reality in which they happen. Consequently, turning to affect as an object of enquiry, means opening up to the indeterminacy of the body and its responses, thereby, accepting the random bodily responses, and embracing the political potential behind them.

Many feminist authors reject this emotion/affect distinction or even question the affective turn altogether. Ann Cvetkovich (2012) is cautious to use the term affective

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[19] For Deleuze, affect and emotion are to be separated, since emotions are a somatic experience that, as a consequence of being mediated by the body, is already incorporating social interpretations, logics and expectations. Thus, for Deleuze, emotions are a phenomenological instance, whereas affect is an intensity that is pre-social and immanent, this is, we have access to that affect (whether or not we are able to fully comprehend it or to be fully conscious about it is another issue) outside of the social world, through the increase or decrease of our ability to affect and be affected by others (Deleuze, 1997: 181).

turn, since it implies that there is a certain novelty about the work on affect which had been carried out by feminist authors for a long time. In such a way, the affective turn, together with the reformulations of affect as something different from, or even opposite to, emotions[20] can be seen as a way of moving away from the feminist and queer work on the matter, which attempted to rethink the relationship between the body and the rational subject.

By privileging affect over emotion as its object of study, the affective turn can be understood as a turn away from emotion, giving place to what can be interpreted as a gendered distinction between emotion and affect (Ahmed, 2014: 207), where affect is equated to the objective and the rational and opposed to the subjective and irrational character of emotions. Feminist and postcolonial literature has shown how this devaluation of emotions is tightly woven into theories of modern capitalist politics and tied to gender, race, sexuality and class (Bargetz, 2015: 583; Lorde, 1984; Ahmed, 2004; Skeggs, 2005). Thus, feminist research aims to critically engage with the exclusions that might result from this emotion/rationality division bringing attention back to the role of emotions and reclaiming the use of this concept as a continuation of affect.

Therefore, following this feminist ethos, and rather than taking a reading of affect as distinct to emotions, this thesis will follow the work of feminist authors that try to break the dichotomy between signification and bodily affects (Ahmed, 2004; Brennan, 2004; Thien, 2005). I will hence be using the terms affect and emotion interchangeably, without any intended semantic, conceptual or political distinction between the two. This is partly due to the belief that affect, and emotion are linked to signification through both the body and discursive. Hence, separating them would imply creating an ontological division that poses difficulties to understanding the chiasmatic relationship that exists between bodily processes and signification. To put it in Sara Ahmed's (2014: 2010) words:

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[20] Sara Ahmed (2014: 206) argues that Massumi's (2002) conceptualisation of affect points towards, not only a distinction from emotion, but one where they are defined as opposites. Where affect is seen as pre-personal and non-intentional, emotions are seen as personal and intentional, mediated by signification.

"The activity of separating affect from emotion could be understood as rather breaking an egg to separate the yolk from the white (...) we have to separate the yolk from the white because they are not separate (...) That we can separate them does not mean that they are separate".

This becomes more evident when looking at the empirical work of the thesis analysed in the next chapter. Avoiding making a distinction between affect and emotions allows understanding bodily reactions and emotions within feminist mobilisations as part of the same continuum of bodies reacting to bodies within a socio-political matrix, where they are reoriented towards and away from each other, creating, reifying or blurring political boundaries. As the next chapter will show through the testimonies and interviews of people who participated in feminist mobilisations, it becomes clear that bodily reactions, affective and emotional states that arise from encounters between different bodies are all part of a myriad of processes of affective readings and politicisation that contribute to signification.

However, although the thesis chooses to build its discussion on both affect and emotions indistinctly, it will not build on a very specific understanding of affect. As mentioned, Massumi's approach to affect as pre-social and non-conscious makes it difficult to think of the way in which it is interlocked with the social and its structures of power (Hemmings, 2005). This is, the way in which affect might be strictly bound to, and binds us to, structures of power.

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this thesis is not to uncover the ontology of affect and emotions to understand what they really are, or what the difference between them is. Instead, this chapter is interested in understanding the political effect of affect and emotions, beyond their definition. Rather than engaging with the "what-ness" of affect and emotions, the chapter aims to investigate their political effects, the ways in which affects, and emotions have political effects over some bodies and objects by moving them, producing meanings and specific bodily orientations within a given social and political context.

Hence, this approach requires conceiving affect and emotions as having a social dimension, rather than being an immanent individual experience. In this sense, the thesis will not reject the concept of affect altogether, but it will explore it by building on the reinterpretation of affect by authors like Laurent Berlant (2000), Cvetkovich (2003) or Sara Ahmed (2014). These scholars have thought of affect through the notion of difference (Liljeström & Paasonen, 2010), and understand the affective dimension as contributing to creating political boundaries. Thus, I choose to build on queer and feminist research on affect that situates affect and emotions within the social and the political. Here, affect and emotion become an inquiry point into the political that allows questioning how power structures are engraved into our everyday affective and bodily practices, and how affects can become a site to build a feminist body that disrupts and deepens democracy-which is the main interest of this thesis.

When I say that affect and emotions are social, I follow Sara Ahmed's (2004) model of the sociality of emotions. As mentioned, I do not conceive affect or emotions as an individual pre-social phenomenon to which we can have access outside of the power structures that organise the social and the political spheres in which we are embedded. Like Ahmed, I also move away from the literature that understands emotions as being an internal psychological state of the individual, which belongs to a subject and is located inside its body awaiting to be released (through crying, anger, laughter, etc.). This model is built on a logic of outward emotional movement: feelings have their origin in a body and are externalised, making themselves known to others. Once these feelings are made known, they can jump from one individual to another, creating different reactions and responses from other subjects, or even following a logic of contagion (Tomkins, 1962).

On the other hand, there is a body of literature that argues for the sociality of emotions as seeing that they originate in the collective moment, and they are later taken in by the individual. Here, emotions are social because they are what keep the collective together, it binds or separates individuals (Collins, 1990: 27). In other words, there is a group that has certain emotions, and the individual becomes part of that collective by taking in, sharing or being affected by those same emotions.

Both the inside-out and outside-in approaches described above, despite partly considering the social dimension of emotions - in the sense that they acknowledge their collective dimension- do not really acknowledge the way that structures of power are intermeshed with these emotions. This is, in these cases affect becomes something that is originated by an object (whether inside or outside the individual) and that then travels (either outwards or inwards), making there be an objectively and clearly pre-defined object who *has* the feelings (whether that is the collective or the individual). This might allow answering why some people in the crowd may or may not adhere to feminism (because there is a shared individual feeling, or because a specific public feeling gets picked up by people in a crowd; because they are affected by a shared emotion in a crowd, or because they share an emotion that is taken by other people too). But it does not leave room for questioning how the boundary between the collective and the individual gets drawn in the first place, and what is the role of that affect, understood as interlinked with structures of power, plays in it.

Rather, I follow Ahmed and argue that emotions do not just arise *in* the individual, or *in* the crowd, but are precisely what constitute them and their (somewhat) porous boundaries and surfaces, understood following Butler's idea of vulnerability (2015) discussed in the previous chapter. To put it in Sara Ahmed's words:

> "emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to others and objects, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (Ahmed, 2014: 10).

Therefore, and following Ahmed, rather than locating the origin of emotions inside or outside the individual, I argue that emotions and affect are a form of relational in-betweenness that shape the limits and boundaries that constitute the individual, the collective and how we understand them. We come into contact with other bodies and make sense of them through our emotional and affective knowledge and reactions. By being reoriented in relation to them, we therefore constitute those objects that seem to be the origin of the emotions themselves. Thus, if for Ahmed emotions

appear in the encounter between bodies and objects, defining the boundaries of those bodies and objects in the first place, this model of the sociality of emotions emphasises how the social itself, the inside and outside and their surfaces and boundaries, is imprinted and shaped by the emotional encounters between bodies and the circulation of those emotions (Ahmed, 2014: 11).

However, it is important to note here that, even if I choose to conceptualise emotions as in-betweenness, there is a process of affective or emotional reading that comes with the embodiment of these emotions through which we attribute meaning to them by locating a cause to it (Ahmed, 2014: 13), situating this cause somewhere and drawing its boundaries and surfaces. This process of reading can be understood as a reaction to the contact and encounter of different bodies and objects that are shaped and moved by this encounter and understand the encountered other as the source of the reorienting emotion. Although this will be discussed later, it is important to note here that this process of affectively reading some objects as the cause of certain emotions is not random, but instead responds to a reiteration of this allocation of causality. In other words, and similar to Butler's idea of performativity (1990), there is a particular history of previous and repetitive encounters carried by the objects, which reorient us and our new encounters (Ahmed, 2014: 13). In doing so, it also reorients the way in which we experience, live and make sense of the world. Hence, an affective reading happens when bodies are affectively moved by an encounter (with other bodies, signs, objects, norms, etc.), and locate the origin of such movement in that which they have encountered, proceeding to read it as its cause. There is thus a process of reading, of translation, in which reading an object as an origin of such an emotion, moves the body (closer, or further or not at all - not being moved is also a way of being affected by an encounter). In doing so, this process of reading redraws the porous skin between the bodies. Thus, the process of affective reading, that moves bodies, reorienting, redirecting them or repositioning them in relation to the affective encounter and, in doing so, redraws the boundaries of their porous skin, is crucial to understand the affective politics of precarity as an affective process of politicisation that might contribute to disrupting and deepening democracy[21].

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[21] This will be further developed in Chapter six.

As mentioned, the process of reading affective encounters is built on a history of previous and repetitive emotional encounters, highlighting the importance of performativity, which will be explored in more detail in the following section. As discussed in the previous chapter, according to Butler performativity does not take place in a vacuum of power (Butler, 1990). Instead, it takes place within, and is part of, the structures of power that shape the world that we live in. Consequently, through our affective and emotional encounters, bodies are reorienting themselves in relation to those structures of power that they are part of and trying to dismantle. It is here where the concept of affective politics comes into play. Although the concept will be further developed through the chapter, it is important to note that with it I do not refer to the way in which emotions and affective reactions might be employed or manipulated for political purposes (Thrift, 2004: 64). Instead, I want to inquire into the way in which the attribution of meaning, that affective reading of the world and of objects and our relation to them, is not random but responds to the enmeshment of structures of power, thus making those emotional responses and their consequences political, and having the potential to disrupt and rearticulate those relations of power. I thus refer to a complex myriad of affective and emotional readings that work to disrupt and rearticulate structures of power, whether intentionally or not, in relation to specific objects that carry particular histories of a repetition previous encounters.

4.2 A circulating precarity

This section aims to build on the idea of the circulation of affect. It will start by engaging with the concept of circulation of emotions developed by Sara Ahmed (2014). Setting this as a framework to understand how, through an accumulation of intensity of affect, certain objects, bodies and signs, circulate creating signification. This framework will then be applied to the idea of precarity discussed in the previous chapter. It will build on Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism (2011) and Sara Ahmed's concept of happy objects (2010) to think of precarity and precariousness affectively, as a circulating object that moves bodies and reorients them. Ultimately, this would lead to argue that there is a shared affective reading of precarity that moves feminist bodies in a way that rejects the current configuration of precarity,

and, in doing so, brings the feminist bodies (and their demands, claims, complaints…) together.

Here, I build on Sabsay's (2016) reflection on the importance of antagonism and how the boundaries that separate the feminist body from that which it opposes are drawn are crucial to disrupt and deepen democracy. However, I am not concerned with the antagonistic other that comes about, but instead with the affective process of renegotiation of such boundaries. In addition, I do not aim to uncover what the antagonistic other that the feminist body opposes is. In fact, as the next chapters will show, it is difficult to pinpoint one single antagonistic other that bodies are opposing. Instead, I argue that in the rejection of the current affective reading of the world, which moves bodies away from it, there is an affective process of rearranging the porous divides between bodies, and in between that which they read to be causing that affective movement. It is this process that I explore in the following section.

4.2.1 Circulating emotions

When arguing that emotions circulate, Ahmed does not refer to a model of emotional contagion in which an emotion arises in one individual and then it spreads onto others, influencing their emotions and making them adopt the same emotional state. This idea of emotional contagion was developed by Silvan Tomkins (Tomkins, 1962). Tomkins was discontent with the way that affect had been theorised as private or individual, and approached affect as a complex process which is, ultimately, contagious. Tomkins continues to suggest that it can travel from one subject to another, as it is quickly communicated through both bodily expressions and voice (Gibbs, 2008: 191). And, in being transferred from one to another, it deepens and impacts the relationship between subjects, thus becoming a relational experience that locates subjects as a continuation from each other, enabled by the contagion of affect. Thus, affect circulates in between subjects and it connects them to each other.

Rather than following Tomkins' (1962) idea of emotional contagion, Ahmed develops a model of circulation defined by the accumulation of intensity (Ahmed, 2014: 10). Ahmed's understanding is not based on the sharing of the same emotion

by a group of people, as if there was a specific emotion that circulates and jumps from one body to another. In fact, it is often the case that everyone in that room has different ways of reading that feeling, of relating to it and being reoriented by it (especially if we attend to the performativity that comes with emotional encounters).

Instead, by approaching circulation as intensity, Ahmed shifts the focus from the emotion as passing and circulating, to the object or the body that accumulates the intensity of that feeling. This is, it is no longer about sharing the exact same feeling that moves from one body to another, but about sharing an intense reaction and reorientation to the way that the object or body is moving (Ahmed, 2014: 10). Thus, it is objects and bodies that circulate, and emotions and feelings move through that circulation of objects and bodies, attaching themselves to some, which are as a result saturated with intensity of affect, while sliding through others.

Here it is important to highlight that circulation is about movement the same way that it is about stillness and attachment (Ahmed, 2014: 11). If we think of emotions as reorienting bodies, we can understand how the movement that comes with certain emotional reactions to bodies and objects can reorient them towards each other, making them attached to that which they might perceive that is moving them. On the other hand, by reading emotions as flowing from a certain object, there is a fixation of the meaning of the object as the causes or recipients of those emotions, or as having specific characteristics that cause those emotions, etc.

But how does circulation happen? Drawing on psychoanalysis, Ahmed shows how the circulation of emotions involves a process of movement and association, "whereby feelings take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted at the present" (Ahmed, 2014: 45). In other words, through associations with other signs, bodies and objects, we can produce a specific reading of the meaning of certain affects. This does not mean that all those associations of meanings are always explicit, in fact, many of them build on a past history of associations that has been naturalised and hidden as a result of its repetition. Hence, we can come to perceive emotions as a form of capital, whereby the value does not reside in the object, body or sign but it arises as a result of the circulation and movement between signs, thus causing a rippling effect through relationships of

difference and displacement of meaning (Ahmed, 2010: 45). It is precisely through this movement between different signs, objects and bodies that affect arises; it is in the in-betweenness that defines boundaries and surfaces that affect resides, rather than in the object or the bodies whose boundaries it is defining.

Thus, if we argue that affect does not positively inhabit any signs or objects, but is produced as an effect of circulation, of relationships of difference between different signs, then the affective value of a sign increases the more affective flows circulate through it. In short, the more that a sign is attached to other signs through affective flows, the more movement that there is, the more affective it becomes[22]. Resulting from this, objects, bodies and signs that circulate within this economy of affect and allow affect to circulate through them creating affective intensity, act as a nodal point, a point of encounter, where the value does not reside within them but is created through the porosity of the surfaces that allow the transpiration and accumulation of affective value and signification.

It might be useful to think of the different signs, objects and bodies as porous surfaces that are in constant movement. When they encounter each other, there are affective flows that read them, that give them a certain meaning and a certain role (the ones causing the emotion, receiving them, injured by them, etc.), and that move them in certain directions. Through these encounters, it is not always the same sign that is producing the reaction, the reading, but the way in which the sign we encounter is affectively linked to other signs. This is, the way in which, knowingly or not we relate it to other signs that have caused that affective reaction before. The more that we encounter those porous surfaces, and we relate them to other ones, the more porous they will become and the easier it will be to substitute them for another.

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[22] It shall be noted here that when referring to attachment between signs and affects, this does not always result in a movement of proximity. In fact, Ahmed differentiates between two different types of movements (Ahmed, 2004: 45): sideway movements, through associations of signs, bodies and objects; and forwards/backwards movements, within temporality (to past histories or histories of the future). I would add here that those movements of attachment are sometimes movements of repulsion or rejection. This is, sometimes the association between signs produces an affective response of bodily disattachment or distancing. Nevertheless, this does not indicate that there is no affective attachment, since there is still an accumulation of affect that, subject to certain specific readings, moves bodies and makes them circulate.

As mentioned, some signs, objects or bodies produce more affective value than others. Their surfaces are more porous in some way, they have more affects circulating through them and reading them as attached to other signs, objects and bodies. Ahmed calls this for an emotion to stick, and for a sign to become sticky (Ahmed, 2014: 90). In this sense, signs are not sticky per se, stickiness is not an attribute of the sign, but instead it is a result of histories of affect circulating through it, as a result of histories of contact and displacement. The more that one sign is substituted by another through an affective flow, the stickier it becomes. This porosity, this stickiness, is therefore not a characteristic of a surface, but a result of relationality, involving different bodies, objects and signs that encounter each other. We can argue that stickiness is a result of a transfer of affect between signs, where, even if it might seem that one came before the other, there is no real active or passive side, but just a relational and mutual remaking of their surfaces, a remaking of their porosity.

Following this idea of stickiness, we can see that stickiness becomes an effect of repetition, as a result of a history of repeated articulation that makes the sign accumulate more affective value, and as such become more porous. However, it is important to remember that the accumulation of value is not random, it responds to other objects circulating that they have previously been associated with, they have previously encountered, or similar ones that they can be substituted for. Circulation does not happen in a power-free arena, but instead is a social practice that therefore involves power relations. This means that not all objects or bodies circulating accumulate the same intensity of emotions. As mentioned before, some stick to certain circulating objects, while others slide through them. Ultimately, "some bodies become stickier than others given past histories of contact (...) and (....) generate effects by 'binding' signs to bodies as a binding that 'blocks' new meanings" (Ahmed, 2004: 92).

There is, thus, a history of accumulation of intensity that generates affective value as a consequence of the repetition of circulation, which is erased when we read emotions as residing in objects, rather than as producing a reading of the object. Thus, following Butler's account of performativity explored in the previous chapter

(Butler, 1990), there is an accumulation of affective intensity overtime, produced as a by-product of the repetition of the circulation of affect through certain objects and bodies, that is concealed, and responds to structures of power. And as such, concealing generates a specific reading of an object or a body as being the cause of certain affective reactions.

In other words, through a concealed history of repeated affective accumulation there is an affective reorientation of bodies that solidifies signification in regards of the perceived cause or reaction behind that affective reorientation. And this performative action that generates, and is generated by, affective reorientation and previous affective encounters is deeply bound to structures of power. Thus, in tracking how objects of emotions and bodies circulate and generate effects of reorientation through their moving, sticking and sliding we can also understand how emotions can attach us to the conditions of subordination, but simultaneously open doors for subversion of those conditions (Ahmed, 2004: 171). Similarly, it allows probing into the affective reactions and intensities that move people to adhere or to move away from collective articulations (Da Costa, 2016: 34).

4.2.2 Precarity as a circulating object

This idea of a circulating body, object or sign that moves other bodies will be used to argue that there is a circulating notion of precarity, of unequal vulnerability, that generates affective investments and reactions, and gathers and moves bodies around it. This raises a series of questions, such as, is it possible to conceive a circulating notion of precarity that works to align some bodies, subjects, demands with others? And how can this help with understanding the way in which the feminist body comes about?

The previous chapter already introduced the notion of precarity, following Butler's (2009) understanding of it, through which bodies can assemble and construct a performative "we" around the challenging of the current distribution of precarity. This section aims to suggest that precarity understood as the unequal distribution of vulnerability, is a sticky object that circulates between bodies, moving them and

generating strong emotional reorientations and attachments. It is important to note here that, as the section will develop, I slightly distance myself from Butler since I do not argue that is precarity per se that assembles bodies through performativity. Instead, I argue that it is an affective reading of that unequal distribution of precariousness that moves bodies away from precarity and towards each other. In other words, it is about the process through which bodies are moved affectively by the encounter of the unequal distribution of precariousness and recognise the movement of other bodies as also being caused by the same precarity that they reject.

Thus, it is the affective encounter between different bodies that situate the cause of that emotional reorientation in precarity that allows mobilising bodies and performatively (and affectively) to produce a claim that rearranges the porous skin between bodies into feminist bodies and opposed to precarity. Such an affective encounter, I argue, is translated into a reading of precarity that turns it into an affective and circulating object, as a place of encounter between different affective flows, that sticks to different bodies, demands and realities, and in doing so brings them together. Therefore, it could be argued that with my understanding of the affective politics of precaroty, I aim to add to Butler's conceptualisation an affective dimension, making precarity an affective object that circulates sticking to different bodies and demands and bringing them together.

Thinking of precarity and precariousness as affectively loaded concepts is something that authors such as Lauren Berlant have previously done. Lauren Berlant thinks of precarity as a "magnetizing concept" (Berlant, 2012: 165). They identify different dimensions in precarity. Amongst them, they emphasise that precarity can serve to materialise and articulate the different demands and conflicts that arise as "causes, effects, and future of the post-war good life fantasy" (Berlant, 2012: 166). They argue that precarity movements can be understood as being part of a "structure of feeling" (Berlant, 2012: 166) marked by the agony of loss of a political promise, what she has described as cruel optimism.

The concept of cruel optimism refers to a personal or collective relationship where "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant, 2011: 1), and therefore there is an attachment to "compromised conditions of possibility

whose realisation is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic" (Berlant, 2011: 24). With optimism Berlant refers to the fact that attachments, for them, all move a subject to pursue something that cannot be generated by the subject on its own. Berlant specifies, however, that this does not mean that the emotions and affective reactions that are coupled with this optimism are optimistic. The way that cruel optimism feels is different for everyone, with emotions ranging from anxiety to dread or romanticism. Nevertheless, all relationships of cruel optimism involve an affective structure that sustains "an inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (Berlant, 2011: 2). Optimism, then, becomes the investment in an attachment, and the desire to sustain it as a promise, or a cluster of promises, of a better, happier, future (Berlant, 2012: 13). Bodies tend to move towards this object, because it means moving closer to the promises attached to that object (Berlant, 2012: 23).

Simultaneously, what is cruel about this set of promises is the fact that the object of desire on the one hand threatens the wellbeing of the subject, but on the other hand the attachment to it enables the subject (whether individual or collective) to exist (Berlant, 2011: 24). This is because, according to Berlant, it is the continuity of attachment that also provides continuity to the subject's sense that they make of the world. In other words, should the attachment be lost, the subject's reading of its world, the way they make sense of it, would also be lost.

Berlant thinks in terms of class politics, and they situate this promise in the context of post-war fantasies, where the extension of the living conditions of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat contributed to a set of wishful promises of a better life (Berlant, 2012: 166). This prompted a crisis, the rise of precarity as a form of politics that resulted in a focus on the politics of care as the foundation of politics of social change (Berlant, 2012: 166). In this sense, people remain affectively invested in precarity, since it also holds the promise of better life conditions, even if that precarity itself might be detrimental to their current life conditions.

Here, precarity becomes what both threatens and enables a promise of a better future, through a prevalent affective dimension. It thus appears as a circulating affect

between different circumstances, demands, bodies and struggles (Berlant, 2012: 166). One that is at the same time demanding for a new model based on interdependence and public care and bringing attention to the loss of faith in a system that has failed to fulfil generational promises and is reduced to fantasy.

Ahmed develops a similar argument to that of Lauren Berlant in "The Promise of Happiness" (2010), where she argues that throughout history happiness can be understood as a promise that reorients subjects and objects towards and away from others, and in accordance to structures of power. In this sense, she argues that there are certain objects, which are presented as "happy objects" (Ahmed, 2010: 23) and that happiness and positive feelings get attached to them as part of a promise that closeness to the object means closeness to happiness and pleasure. This is not to say that some objects or subjects are a source of happiness, but that we understand them as such. What is interesting about this argument is that, like Berlant, Ahmed argues that the happiness that redirects our orientation toward happy objects, and that makes subjects gather around or reject proximity from them, is a promise. This is a scenario where subjects already desire it before we encounter it, therefore subjects already read certain objects as happy before they have had the chance to experience that promised happiness (Ahmed, 2010: 28).

As mentioned earlier, for Ahmed emotions are performative. In this sense, the happiness that is promised comes to embody previous promises of happiness. And those reflect the power structures that they are embedded in and allow reorienting subjects towards a common good (Ahmed, 2010: 59). This does not mean that there is an intentional manipulation of happiness by political elites to make subjects live a certain kind of way, but that there are certain social norms that contribute to the moral judgment of what is good and what is not and equates that which is good to that which causes pleasure and thus promises happiness in some kind of way (Ahmed, 2010: 33).

However, the main focus of the thesis is not in discussing how a promise of happiness per se can reorient subjects, but instead building on these readings to understand how precarity can be felt as a circulating affective object that carries a specific reading of the world with it, and that reorients subjects towards it and

around it. If we read Berlant's idea of precarity as cruel optimism through Ahmed's lens, we can understand that subjects are part of a performative orientation in relation to an object, which is sticky, in the sense that it circulates creating meaning, and sticking to and through different affective flows, that are intermeshed with structures of power.

The object is circulating and creating signification, a specific reading and understanding of the world and reality. As mentioned earlier, a redirection of repulsion is also an investment in this specific reading that perceives a certain object as the origin of that repulsion, moving our body away from it, perhaps towards other bodies who are also moved away from it. Nevertheless, in moving away from a sticky object, subjects are still being moved, they are still emotionally affected by it, although they attribute a different reading of it, one that rejects it (it is no longer a happy object, but an unhappy one), but still engages with it. It still attributes meaning to it and acknowledges that it plays a role in an affective encounter (whether that is in the present, in the past, or in anticipation of it).

Thus, if we are to apply this to feminist mobilisations, we can think that there is a shared emotional reading of precarity that moves feminist bodies - through different emotions and because of different causes- towards each other. There is an affective economy that simultaneously reorients them away from that which they are trying to change but attaches them to it. In this instance, it is no longer about sharing a specific demand, a specific collective subjectivity, but about sharing an emotional and embodied reading of the world, that reorients them towards and away from certain bodies, objects and norms. This shared reoriented reading is also being read as a common ground for a collective. In other words, when bodies understand each other as being moved in similar ways, they understand that what they share is not just that movement, but the meaning behind that which is moving them. They are moved, and they are moved in a way in which they share a claim: they want to be moved otherwise.

4.3 Circulating bodies, articulating demands

The previous section allows us to understand preccarity as an affective object that moves bodies, and that brings them together as sharing a specific affective reading of the world. As mentioned, this is not to say that they all agree with the cause of such precarity, but that they locate in it the cause of a certain shared affect that they want to change. And in recognising that shared affective redirection, there is a possibility to recognise a common ground for political action and mobilisation.

However, questions arise as to what allows the different claims and demands that constitute that collective political action to stick together. This is, even if there is a number of bodies that are oriented towards precarity in a way that brings them together, they are not necessarily oriented in the same manner towards each other. They might share a common demand, which is a reorientation in regard to precarity, but they do not necessarily share the way in which they see that demand and that reorientation coming about. In other words, not everyone necessarily attaches "unhappiness" to precarity in the same way.

This section will start by firstly engaging deeper with the concept of orientation, as developed by Bonnie Honig (2021) and Sara Ahmed (2006). The section will then engage with Da Costa and Bargetz analysis of affect in collective politics to highlight the fact that the distribution of affect is unequal, and that this generates a second level of affective circulation, one where the bodies that are being moved by precarity when they encounter each other and, in doing so, they also move towards and away from each other.

4.3.1 Bodily orientation

It has previously been mentioned how affect has sometimes been conceived as a reaction of intensity. Rather, this thesis also wants to consider the idea of orientation when looking at the politics of affect and emotion. In this sense, it is not only about the intensity that arises as a reaction to an encounter (whether physical or imaginary) with certain objects or bodies, but about the way in which it moves the body away or

towards them. And how, in doing so, it contributes to the remaking of boundaries and surfaces of the bodies moved and the objects circulating.

The concept of orientation has been used in many different ways. In her last book, Bonnie Honig aims to develop a theory of agonistic refusal using the idea of inclination as disorientation. Honig turns to inclination because, even though it involves a certain degree of refusal and rejection, it does so in a way that it allows engaging with the concept of refusal to rethink it, producing an alternative reading of it, leaning towards collective care (Honig, 2021: 46). Honig reads Adriana Cavarero's concept of inclination (2016) as a form of refusal through mutual care and interdependence, one that requires rethinking that meaning which is usually taken as natural and reproduces heteronormativity. Examining both the Bacchae and Da Vinci's painting of the Madonna, Honig argues that inclination can come to be perceived as a form of female submission in a patriarchal society, where rectitude is usually understood and praised as a sign of power, strength and individuality. Instead, and following Cavarero, she reads inclination as a form of mutual care, as a form of leaning towards something or some other, and re-signifies inclination by reclaiming it as a challenge to the heteropatriarchal idea of rectitude as individualism that disavows mutual dependency and collective forms of care (Honig, 2021: 52).

She also builds on Sara Ahmed's idea of disorientation. In "Queer Phenomneology" (Ahmed, 2006) Ahmed aims to bring phenomenology into queer studies by arguing that "bodies take shape through tending towards objects that are reachable" (Ahmed, 2006: 2), referring not only to reaching towards something, but also to the process of being moved by that something, both physically and affectively. This happens because, as previously discussed, Ahmed argues that when attributing the cause of a feeling to a certain object we are moved by it: towards it, or away from it (Ahmed, 2006: 2). And in being moved by it, we also create a specific reading of it, of the world where the body and the object encounter each other (Ahmed, 2006: 3).

More importantly, even when a subject does not seem to be moved by an object, it does not mean that it is not affected by it. Instead, Ahmed argues that a supposed neutrality, a supposed immobility, is nothing but comfort (Ahmed, 2006: 152). In this sense, when a subject is not perceiving itself to be moved by an object, it is

nothing but the result of conforming to the norms and power that shape the boundaries between the subject and the circulating object. Ahmed elaborates on this by referring to a leather chair whose shape has previously been imprinted by the same body sitting on it over and over again (Ahmed, 2005: 154). When a body that matches the shape of that imprint sits in the chair, it might not acknowledge the shape that has been previously imprinted. Instead, it will just feel comfort. In contrast, a body that does not match the one that has previously occupied it will feel discomfort, as if it does not belong, and it will move to accommodate itself. Through this metaphor we can see how a repeated encounter of bodies shapes an object according to a norm, which then moves bodies (or fails to do so), and either reiterates or subverts this norm.

Ahmed adds that when these feelings of discomfort appear bodies are thus disoriented. They are moved by the circulating object, and they can also move the object by sharing that discomfort (Ahmed, 2006: 155). Thus, bodies that move and gather around their disorientation are reorienting their relationship with the circulating body (Ahmed, 2006: 155). Hence, by building on this idea of disorientation, Honig argues that the potential moments of disorientation allow bodies to gather around each other, around that object that they are aiming to disorient. And it is precisely the fact that it is possible to gather around an object, but to do so in a way that differs from the normativity of power structures, that allows thinking about an agonistic politics around the affective circulation of precarity, one that allows engaging with something while striving to transform it.

Consequently, Honig's idea of inclination as disorientation follows a logic of resignification, whereby it is possible to challenge norms and power structures through alternative readings of the body. This process requires disarticulating an already accepted meaning and rearticulating it by sticking alternative meanings to that circulating object (in this case, an inclined body). This understanding of inclination as disorientation allows acknowledging that reorientation is not just about being physically moved, about posture, but it is also about how in that moving it is possible to produce a different corporealised meaning that deviates from certain structures of power, while at the same time refusing to abandon them (Honig, 2021: 23).

4.3.2 Agonistic reorientation as articulation

At the beginning of this chapter, it was argued that affect contributes to the shaping of surfaces, to the shaping of the boundaries that create collective forms of politics, that delimit who gathers around the table. It was argued that a circulating affective object (precarity) mobilised bodies around it, reorienting themselves and the norms that constitute their boundaries. Nevertheless, I will argue that precarity is not the only object circulating and that there is another level of affective movement, of circulation and reorientation, that is key to understanding how this affective articulation comes about. It can be argued that, even if all bodies that are affected by a circulating precaritys might be calling for its reorientation - in the sense that there is a refusal of the current affective relationship - there is also an agonistic dimension when engaging with that object that they are trying to reorient, to generate a different affective reading of, to reshape, to re-signify and to subvert the political relations that sustain it. But not all bodies that are being moved by precarity are being moved in the same way, sharing the same reading of precarity. How do they stick together offering a polyphonic discourse?

Alexandre E. Da Costa (2016) poses some of these questions when analysing racial democracy in Brazil. He argues that different people are affected differently by a same circulating object, and that this is partly since affect is contingent and political (Da Costa, 2016: 32). Following Ahmed, he argues that affect is the product of histories of previous encounters and is also embedded in specific historical and geopolitical contexts that are marked by structural power relations and inequalities (Da Costa, 2016: 33). Thus, the intensities and affective reorientations are felt differently by different people, which, according to him, complicates envisioning notions of collective belonging built on the idea that emotions are distributed between bodies in an equal and homogeneous way (Da Costa, 2016: 26).

Da Costa argues that, if we take into consideration racial ideology[23] (as well as other ideologies) and coloniality, it is possible to understand how there is an unequal distribution of affective states amongst bodies, which, in many cases, leads to an emotion being felt and lived differently depending on the subject that is embodying it (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2011). This is due, he argues, to the requirements and demands that are posed with the circulation of affective objects, which vary attending to the different reorientations - and which are ultimately determined by the previous history of reorientations and encounters and the ideological performativity that comes with it (Da Costa, 2016: 26-27).

Thus, Da Costa suggests a model of what he calls a political economy of hope, whereby hope is distributed differently and can be empowering for some, but burdensome for others, since it poses different requirements and demands to different bodies (Da Costa, 2016: 27). This concept, however, complicates the idea of affective communities, since different people feel the affective reorientation differently (Da Costa, 2016: 25). This becomes clear when he proceeds to analyse the affective politics surrounding the concept of racial democracy in Brazil. He builds on Ahmed's concept of happy objects, and he states that racial democracy could be understood as such an object by a majority of people and activists in Brazil who call for recognising racial inequality through the democratic system as the way to end such inequality.

However, Da Costa points towards the fact that not everybody attaches the same kind of happiness, and that some people do not attach happiness to the concept at all. Instead, they perceive racial democracy as an unhappy object that does not address racial injustice and inequality. It still requires contestation and a reorientation different from the shared affective reading of this model based on hope, since it produced displeasure and unhappiness (Da Costa, 2016: 33).

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[23] Da Costa here uses the term ideology in its Gramscian sense, to refer to a sedimented form of a contingent articulation of power that represents the ideas and values of a ruling class, and that is accepted by the whole of society as its own (Gramsci, 1975).

Those subjects that refuse to align with the main affective reorientation are then perceived and affectively read as different; a boundary is created. There is an affective surface that delineates and separates the affective community made up of those who are happily attached to racial democracy from those unhappy killjoys (Ahmed, 2017). Consequently, it can be argued that an affective object that circulates and sticks does not always stick in the same way. And that, even if bodies are all gathering around the same sticky object, they are not being moved in the same way or for the same reasons (Da Costa, 2016: 34). To put it in Da Costa's words:

> "Forms of frustration, silence, anger, pain and helplessness illustrate the unequal burden of attachments to a purportedly shared collective affect based on unity and the insistence on maintaining racial difference outside the picture. What emerges for some as a happy, eager promise becomes, for others, an unhappy, suffocating hope." (Da Costa, 2016: 41)

Similarly, Bargetz has also argued that not all bodies relate to affect and are affected the same way by a circulating object, body or sign. She argues that, attending to a politics of affect, it is possible to perceive not only those whose voices are excluded, but also those whose emotions are excluded, whose reorientations are excluded (Bargetz, 2015: 589). In other words, it allows one to think whose discomfort might be considered too uncomfortable, or not discomforting enough. Following this analysis, Bargetz argues, it is possible to acknowledge the normative power of affect (Bargetz, 2015: 589).

Bargetz aims to rethink coalitional politics by taking as a starting point the "affective mechanisms of exclusion" (Bargetz, 2015: 591) that are at play in collective politics, rather than the exclusion of identities itself. Thus, she argues that feminist and queer politics should probe into the way that subjects disrupt emotional regimes when they are affectively excluded, rather than just focus on the exclusion of identities or demands (Bargetz, 2015: 591), since it is through contesting certain emotional orders that we can understand how subjects come into being, rather than assuming the pre-existence of such subjects (Bargetz, 2015: 592).

Moreover, she argues, through processes of subjectivation collective political subjects do not just come into being, but they also become subjected to emotional processes of relationality, which might lead to affective instances (even if brief) or solidarity, dissonance, etc. (Bargetz, 2015: 592). Therefore, the distribution of emotions functions in a way in which it draws the porous boundaries that delimit collective subjects or coalitions, which are always open to change through affective subversion. Hence, by attending to the distribution of emotions, and the effects that such distribution and processes of (re)distribution have, it is possible to better understand forms of collective politics aimed at emancipation (Bargetz, 2015: 590).

What both approaches highlight is the fact that there is not only one affective relationship with the circulating object, but many different ones, which are mediated by power structures and the way in which affect circulates through them, determining those objects and bodies that are *stickier*, drawing the porous boundaries and surfaces that delimit collective subjects and coalitions. More importantly, it reminds us that there is a crucial part of affective politics and reorientations that resides in the way in which bodies react to other bodies that are also circulating around the affective object. The possibility that different bodies might be reoriented differently towards certain objects points to the fact that there is an affective mediation, where affect becomes something contingent to the way we are affected by it, rather than a positive value emotion that just passes from one body to another (Ahmed, 2010: 39). Thus, the possibility of being affected differently by that which is circulating also allows us to think of affect as relational, as requiring actions and reactions.

By building on these insights, this thesis suggests that there is another level of circulation of affect crucial to understanding the process of articulation in feminist mobilisations: the way in which the bodies that are moved by precarity are also moved (or denied the possibility of movement) in encountering each other. Attending to this level of affect is crucial since it allows understanding how the porous boundaries and surfaces that bring these bodies (and their demands) together, or pulls them apart, are drawn, felt and lived. This can be better understood by returning to Sara Ahmed's (2006) concepts of *towardness* and *awayness*. In response to Merleau-Ponty (1962) Ahmed argues that, when our bodies are reoriented, they

are moved by their perception of those other objects. In that reading, there is a move towards something that we read as generating pleasure and away from those things that our bodies do not read as likeable (Ahmed, 2006: 24). These relationships of *towardness* and *awayness* are, again, not random, but the result of our bodies being previously moved in those directions. And what is more important, they delimit the porous borders and establish the surfaces and edges of our bodies, reading the places we want and do not want to go to depending on how we are affected by those circulating objects or bodies (Ahmed, 2006: 24). Ultimately, this works to align some bodies together and against others, to draw the boundaries and the surfaces that divide them into the different parts of the body that is mobilised to contest precarity.

We could picture this model to be like an atom, where there is a nucleus - precarity - around which there are multiple bodies being reoriented and moved. But in moving, these bodies are also encountering each other and reacting to each other, they are also reading each other affectively. And they are not only reading each other as bodies, but as bodies that carry and embody claims and demands. This is not to say that each body carries one single demand. It might be possible for a body to carry multiple demands, or to be read as embodying different demands by different people. It might even be the case that some bodies may be mobilised with no more demand than the claim to reorientation itself. However, what is important here is how these bodies affect each other, and in doing so they read each other affectively (and the perceived embodied demands) and are ultimately reoriented in a way that delimits the feminist bodies and allows for contestation and disagreement without jeopardising the unity of the mobilisation. It allows for openness while not compromising collective political action.

Conclusion: affective politics of precarity

This chapter developed a model of affective politics of precaritys to probe into the way that emotion and affect work to move bodies and to draw the political boundaries that enable feminist collective action. In order to do so, it started engaging with a conceptual discussion about affect and emotions, and clarifying the

terminology used. It explored the social and political dimensions of affect, arguing that both affect, and emotion can be perceived as the result of the reiteration of bodily encounters which are not always occurring in the present time but instead are the product of a repetition of past encounters.

The chapter then followed Sara Ahmed's (2014) notions of circulation and the political economy of affect to argue that emotions are sticky, and that bodies and objects circulate and in doing so, they get attached to some emotions or slide through others, which ultimately reconfigure these objects and bodies, their orientation, surfaces and relationships to each other.

By building on Laurent Berlant's cruel optimism (2011), the chapter argued that precarity can be interpreted as a circulating object that reorients other bodies and objects through affect. This concept the chapter argued, allows thinking of feminist bodies as being reoriented by a precarits, and that affective reorientation being collective action, that outlines the surfaces that delimit the borders of the feminist body. As a result, rather than a shared precarity being the reason why feminists gather in the streets, like Butler argued, this chapter suggested that it is an affective reorientation resulting from the circulation of precarity which moves bodies in a way that allows them to come together to contest that precarity that is circulating. To put it in Sara Ahmed's words: "one moves towards others, others who are attached to feminism, as a movement away from that which we are against. Such movements create the surface of a feminist community" (Ahmed, 2014: 188).

Finally, the chapter moves on to suggest another level of affective circulation that occurs within this affective politics of precarity, one that delimits and draws surfaces within the surfaces. Those bodies that are reoriented by precarity also circulate and encounter each other, thus affectively reading each other and being moved by each other too. Building on the work of Da Costa (2016) and Bargetz (2015), the thesis suggests that when the bodies that are moved by precarity affect each other (and their demands or claims) in a relational way they are drawing the boundaries and surfaces that brings them together or pulls them apart. This is, in reading each other affectively, they are articulating themselves and their demands, as well as allowing space for agonistic contestation to take place.

Ultimately, the chapter argues, this model of the affective politics of precarity allows recognising the possibility of common ground for political action and mobilisation, while also acknowledging plurality and the power structures that are intrinsic and contribute to creating, reifying, challenging and/or blurring political boundaries in between those bodies that are acting collectively. This, as Chapter six will explore, could ultimately contribute to deepening and disrupting democracy through ensuring openness and contestation between different affective readings.

Chapter 5: Feminist mobilisations in Spain and the affective politics of precarity

This chapter will aim to further explore the affective politics of precarity in feminist movements, looking into the feminist mobilisations in Spain. For this, the chapter will draw on a series of interviews with feminist activists conducted in 2022 as part of this research, as well as analysing social media posts and footage from previous mobilisations and a theatre performance by the activist group Territorio Doméstico.

The chapter will be divided into three different sections that explore the role of affect and emotions in relation to the way that they contribute to hold the feminist body together. The first section explores the way that shared emotional readings of the world might contribute to bringing different bodies together. The second section gathers interview extracts that highlight the way in which bodies read each other emotionally, renegotiating the porous boundaries of such feminist body. Finally, the last section, builds on a theatre performance to show the way that the performance of alternative (desired) affective readings of the world, allow thinking that another political (more feminist) reality is possible.

To meet the objectives mentioned, taking affect and emotions as a starting point, this research aims to analyse how this affective politics in the feminist mobilisations in Spain:

> a)   Contributes to holding the feminist bodies together in the absence of women as a defining category hence building a political project that moves away from identity-based articulations.
> b)   Politicises feminist demands and contributes to their articulation attending to processes of embodiment and the economy of affect.
> c)   Allows contestation and conflict between the bodies articulated.

By aiming to answer these questions, the goal of this chapter is to show how the model of affective politics of precarity fleshed out in the previous chapter allows understanding the role of affective circulation in feminist mobilisations and how it

contributes to bringing the feminist bodies[24] together in the absence of a shared monolithic identity that feminism is concerned with (see discussion in Chapter one), and an explicit linguistic demand around which other bodies and demands are articulated (see discussion in Chapter two), exploring the articulation of bodies beyond the performativity of appearing together (see discussion in Chapter three).

This inquiry does not aim to uncover the ontology of affect (asking what affect is), but rather to understand how affect operates, and how it does so in relation to the circulation of power. Here, I understand the circulation of power as the way that power moves in between bodies and signs, shaping them and their interactions, reinforcing or redefining norms over time. Therefore, the aim is not just to uncover the affective atmospheres of a particular place, but the "socio-material relationships, the actions, powers, and discourses thus supported" (Gherardi, 2019: 70).

5.1 Feeling feminist: we missed each other

This section is set to show, through interview material, how affect and emotions are at the core of the process of bringing together a feminist body in the absence of a shared identity or a shared demand. For this, it will engage with the way in which a shared emotional reading of the world between different bodies or signs is translated into an understanding of those bodies and signs as being part of the feminist body. In other words, this section will probe into the way in which the circulation of affect and emotions, and the way they stick to certain bodies and signs, contribute to building a political body in the absence of a shared identity or demand.

I was able to live through this process of circulation of affect during one of my interviews, when the door of the room opened and an old woman walked in asking what the participant, her grandchild, was doing. The participant replied that they were answering some questions about feminism and activism. "Do you want to join?" (Participant, 9, 2022). "Ah, yes, of course, ask me, even if I don't understand a lot" (Participant 10, 2022). She listened throughout the rest of her grandchild's interview and then it was her turn. "I don't know about feminism, I don't understand

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[24] See discussion on the use of the term feminist bodies in the introduction of this thesis

these words that you use, that patriarchy and *intersomething* (intersectionality), but I do understand your pain, and your fear. And when I see you walking together (...) I also understand why you do it, because nobody wants to feel that fear and that pain" (Participant 10, 2022).

I asked if she considered herself a feminist. The dialogue was as follows:

- "I don't know, I don't think so, I don´t know. When I was younger, I would have never dared to say I was a feminist, and now I don't do the things that people like you do… So maybe not, I don't think I could call myself a feminist" (Participant 10, 2022).
- "I think that you should, grandma. You might not be an activist, but you're clearly a feminist: you said that our situation is not fair and we need to change it (...)" (Participant 9, 2022).

Interestingly, she had never mentioned that the situation was not fair or that it needed to be changed. Participant 10 only mentioned understanding pain, understanding fear, and understanding why people, feminists, mobilise against it. Immediately, participant 9 interpreted this shared understanding of affective reactions to the word (the pain, and the fear) as having a shared understanding of the world and being part of the same collective: feminism. Moreover, she also understood that in that sharing of their reading of the world they also shared the aspiration to change it.

Emotions are central to this process of mobilisation, reading and translation that participant 9 evidenced. This is, even if initially participant 10 would not consider herself a feminist, thus rejecting the identification with a collective subjectivity (the feminists), her granddaughter (participant 9) quickly captures their shared emotional reading of the world, one in which certain bodies are moved by fear, and by pain. And, in that reading of a shared affective reaction, this is, the reading of the way that their grandmother's body is also moved by pain and fear (through her understanding of it), participant 9 finds another kind of movement.

Emotions are also moving her grandmother's body closer to her, and to all of those who are also moved by pain and by fear. Thus, emotions here are working simultaneously to move the body away from fear, and pain, on the one hand; and towards those other bodies that are similarly moved away from that fear and the pain, on the other. More specifically, it is not precisely fear or pain that are moving the body, but the way in which these are understood.

Pain and fear are read by the grandmother as something to avoid, something to move away from. At the same time, it is understood as being caused by the world (one could argue the way in which power relations structure it) and inflicted onto those who are suffering it (in this case, feminists). The pain, and the fear of suffering such pain, are hence read by the grandmother as having an origin and an effect, and in that circulating between signs and meanings, it is creating boundaries and moving bodies around it. There is thus a moment of translation whereby the recognition of a shared emotional reading of the world allows erasing the porous divide between bodies and is transmuted into an understanding of each other as being similarly moved by our reading of the world with the aim to change those readings, and thus that movement.

Through this emotional movement an affective political feminist body emerges, one that exists only through that translation and reading of emotions moving bodies. More interestingly, in moving and being moved those bodies are also making a claim: it is possible to be moved otherwise. There is a shared affective reading of the world, and in this case, a shared affective reading of the fact that the world can and should be otherwise. The emotions that arise from her reading of the world, one marked by pain and fear, quickly travel through the grandmother's body, and then to the participant's body, to the feminist body, and to the demands of such feminist body: a need to change.

Even if here I am interested in the way that emotions are circulating, and how in that circulation they are moving bodies, I also want to point out how this interaction between participants 9 and 10 highlights the importance of considering precarity in this model of affective politics.

It could be argued that when participant 10 points towards a shared pain, she is talking about the consequences of a shared patriarchal violence. In addition, patriarchal violence and gender-based violence have been higlighted at feminist mobilisations in Spain, which have been tightly linked to cases of gender and sexual violence like La Manada. The point could be made that it is (gender) violence that is circulating and affectively moving bodies, rather than precarity, as I laid out in the previous chapter. Therefore, it seems important to detangle the relationship between violence and precarity in this model of politics of affective precarity that I am pointing at.

I want to clarify that with this argument I do not want to question any experiences of violence and patriarchal violence of the participants or people attending feminist mobilisations, nor its relevance in such feminist mobilisations and struggles. Rather, the point that I am trying to make is why I chose the lens of a circulating precarity to understand the role of emotions, rather than violence, in these feminist mobilisations.

Although the scope of this thesis does not allow to fully engage with a discussion of violence in relation to feminist mobilisations, it is important to show how it fits within this model of affective politics of precarity. To do this I follow Butler in thinking that violence is directly linked to the condition of ineradicable vulnerability that I explored in the Chapter 3. This is, because of our interdependence with each other we are open to experiencing violence. The ties that bind us, and the dependency we have on those binding ties, make us vulnerable to those ties disappearing, being altered, and leaving us exposed.

However, as explained in Chapter 3, not everyone is equally open to arbitrary violence (Butler, 2004: xii). In other words, some bodies are more porous to violences than others. If we argue that this porosity, this precarity, is not random but rather a result of power structures, attending to violences allows us to also perceive the differential distribution of precarity. Therefore, it is not so much about the experience of violence per se, but about who that violence is directed towards, and the realisation that some bodies experience more precarity insofar as they also experience more violence.

In attending towards those bodies that experience violence we are also attending towards those bodies that are considered to be less valuable. This is because, Butler argues, this differential opennes to violence does not only respond to material conditions but also to how some bodies are rendered less worthy of protection or care, how some lives are deemed more valuable than other. In this sense, precarity is intimately linked to violence, but also to grievaibility, to the value of certain bodies, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Therefore, my argument is not that experiences of violence are not important, but rather that there is a circulating affective precarity through it that allows us to be moved. In other words, it is the unequal distribution of the vulnerability to that violence, that allows an affective precarity to become so sticky when circulating in between bodies, signs, and violences. It is no longer about patriarchal violence, but about a pain, a pain that only certain bodies are experiencing, and that they do not want to experience. And about the fact that the reason that they are experiencing that pain is not random, but rather responds to something as political as the value that such bodies are given. Even if this is not always evident in the way we think about it, it is in the way we feel about it. Going back to the words of Participant 10: "I understand why you do it (mobilising together), because nobody wants to feel that fear and that pain, and they keep expecting us to do so".

Here, it becomes very evident that the pain that originates in the affective reading she has of the world, is a pain that not all bodies experience, and that renders some to be more valuable than others. Therefore, it is that precarity that is circulating and blurring the boundaries of the bodies, and that is sticking to these emotions of fear and pain. It is these precarity that when circulating and sticking to this emotions is being read by Participant 9 as sharing an understanding of the world, a world where such pain and fear linked to patriarchal violence is only linked to some bodies, and a will to make it be otherwise.

This process of affective blurring of boundaries between bodies and claims also becomes clear when looking at the case of the Cadena Feminista that took place in Madrid in February 2020, as part of the events leading up to the mobilisation of the 8th of March. This action was part of the lead up to the protests of the 8th of March of 2020. The idea behind this action was to form a human chain with activists to circle Madrid highlighting different political demands of the feminist assembly of Madrid, and it managed to gather more than 6,000 people (El Diario, 2020). Although this human chain was planned and initiated by the feminist movement of Madrid, it quickly managed to reach a lot of people who were not involved in the feminist movement, but rather protesting for other social issues that would a priori seem unrelated to it and to passersby who are not involved in activist circles but, when encountering the action, they felt called by it. The human chain was organised with different sections that corresponded to specific demands and claims that called to certain collectives: fair pensions for all, ecofeminism, decent housing, regulation of care work, anti-racism and migration, education, sexual and gender dissidence, etc (20Minutos, 2020). This created a live articulation of bodies and demands around Madrid, that all merged into a big feminist chain, a big feminist body.

Amongst those gathered into the feminist chain was participant 8, who said:

"My friend who was in the organising committee brought me. I had always been involved in the movement for decent housing and she said there was going to be a sector gathering for that" (Participant 8, 2021). I was put in contact with this participant through one of the other activists that I interviewed for this thesis, when speaking about those things that move people who are not usually involved in feminist organising to join their protests and their acts. "I had never been involved in the feminist movement, and I haven't really been involved in it after either. But on that day I wouldn't stop singing "here we are, we are feminists", it felt good" (Participant 8, 2021).

Aquí estamos las feministas, (here we are, we are feminists/the feminists are here/have arrived), is an important slogan for feminism in Spain (and other Spanish speaking countries). In Spain it became especially relevant when during the trials of La Manada, a very mediatic case of gang rape in 2017, it was used by the thousands

of feminists who flooded the streets to show support to the victim, and a rejection of the Court's ruling, and rape generally. "I went to Pamplona for one of the protests, and it was as if every time we clapped after shouting (shouting aquí estamos las feministas) we were somehow leaving our imprint there, a way of saying and showing that it was a turning point: we were there, and nobody was going to be able to get away with this madness anymore. Like a patrol of angry feminists that were taking over this watchdog role and making a lot of noise" (Participant 2, 2021).

I asked participant 8 if he felt a feminist while he chanted that day. "I somehow did, I felt like I was part of something bigger, as if our struggles were common and shared, we were all upset at the injustice, at the austerity measures, or patriarchy, or the pension system and we were together in it. And, well, that day feminism kind of allowed us to get together and realise these shared dissatisfactions" (Participant 8, 2021).

Here, anger and upset are circulating through the chant *aquí estamos las feministas*, passing through and mobilising those bodies that were gathered in 2017, and those that gathered in 2020. When participant 8 stresses the diversity of identities, claims and demands, he also stresses the common ground on which they are gathering to circle Madrid, the upset that they feel, their feeling of dissatisfaction. This travels through the pensioners, the ecofeminists and the LGBTIQ community that, together with the movement for decent housing, hold hands in the streets of Madrid to say that the feminist movement is here. And this precarity also circulates affectively through time, through that "aqui estamos las feministas" that allowed performing an affective feminist body in Pamplona two years before participant 8 was joining a feminist mobilisation for the first time.

In this case it is interesting to see how precarity is circulating through this feeling of dissatisfaction. In fact, it is precisely here where I find the notion of a circulating precarity useful to better understand how the political boundaries are blurred allowing bodies to come together. Participant 8 highlights how there was a diversity of claims that was underpinned by a feeling of dissatisfaction and upset. There is no reference to that which the upset was about because it is not as relevant. What is relevant is this shared affective reading. And, interestingly, even if the different

bodies gathering might be allocating different sources from which the dissatisfaction is originating, they are all coming together through the affective reading, one that says that their life is more precarious than others, and more precarious than what it should be. Here, it is easy for precarity to circulate and stick to different bodies and different causes of dissatisfaction, and it allows us to think of struggles like that of the pensioners together with those affected by austerity, who meet under an *aquí estamos las feministas,* understood as more than the words, but the act of showing up, the emotions and the meanings that it brings, the way that it moves bodies, etc. And in that chant, feminists get to mean all of those who are being moved by the unequal distribution of precariousness. By paying attention to the way that affect and emotions are circulating through and sticking to the unequal values assigned to bodies, it is possible to see how different experiences of violence and inequalities come to get articulated.

But how far can emotions travel? Is it possible to have emotional encounters between bodies that are not coming into contact? It would be logical to assume that if the feminist body comes into being when bodies are moved by their affective reading of the world, with the outbreak of the pandemic, when activism went online and protests and mobilisations in the streets were not allowed, the seemingly fleeting emotions that this participant describes, would have been absent with the absence of bodies, thus making the feminist body disappear. This is, if emotions emerge in the encounter of bodies, and those emotions contribute to holding the feminist body together, when such bodies are not allowed to meet it would be logical to argue that the feminist body disappears. The following interviews, however, highlight how despite the absence of the body from the streets, there is still an emotional circulation that brings about the feminist body.

In 2021, feminist mobilisations in Madrid were forbidden by the government less than 48 hours before they were meant to take place (El Diario, 2021). Although some activists tried to organise a protest despite the opposition of the authorities, most feminist activists stayed home. I spoke to an activist just after she had left her first in-person meeting with her feminist collective since 2020, and she said "we had missed each other (...) in the streets, on the 8th of March, but also our hugs, our sharing coffee and our catching up about our lives (...). I was speaking to one of my

compañeras earlier and I told her "it's like that feeling when you get your hair cut and you do not manage to get a ponytail done anymore". (...) Well, finally my hair has grown back, what a relief!" (Participant 4, 2021).

Interestingly, this reference to missing each other suggests that emotions can move bodies beyond their initial encounter, through an imaginary reproduction of such an emotional encounter. Missing something implies the wish for that something to be present somewhere where it is not, with the important nuance that this something must have previously been encountered and become part of our understanding of the world. One cannot miss something that has not been had, seen or felt, whether in reality or imagination. Missing someone implies that this someone has left an emotional imprint on the way in which we affectively understand the world, so that when we no longer encounter that body in our circulation, we feel a certain level of emptiness around that imprint that was left. Just like when we get our hair cut and it is now too short to be tied into a ponytail.

Hence, it can be argued that in the absence of a body that has become part of our emotional reading of the world, it is precisely such absence that circulates, rereading that reality and the affective understanding and relationship we had with it. The 8th of March becomes a day where the impossibility to gather in the streets allows feminists to feel such absence of the gathering. And in feeling it, it is emotionally re-enacted in the present, re-imagining a feminist body that technically would only exist in the past. Therefore, emotions move bodies even if those bodies are not literally being moved.

When asked about this issue of not being able to gather during the pandemic, another participant said: "it was really unfair, clearly a political move to save their (politicians') asses from public opinion. And we will not forget about it when they want to join our march next year and take nice pictures for the press (...). They tried to divide us and make us fight against each other, but they have only made us grow closer" (Participant 6, 2021). Here, the participant refers to the big debates between feminist activists in Madrid when the government announced the prohibition to protest on the 8M. While some called for a consumption strike instead, others called for disregarding the government measures, and others thought the actions should be

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postponed for the security and wellbeing of those that were in more vulnerable situations (Participant 6, 2021). However, what is interesting is this idea that, despite the different opinions and demands, it was the emotional reaction to the feminist gathering (or in this case, its absence), whether that was the feeling of missing each other, or, in this case, the anger towards the politicians, that brought the feminist bodies together.

Similarly, feminists in other parts of Spain marched in solidarity with those feminists in Madrid that could not gather in the streets. Many of them used purple umbrellas to symbolize their absence (@CharoGlez, 2021), or shouted "the (feminists) from Madrid are also here" (@EcuadorEtxea, 2021). Participant 6 added, "It was as if we somehow were there with them, I remember seeing them (pictures on social media) and being shocked: we were really asking for the same things even if we had never met each other and probably never will (pauses). I mean, look (tries to show goosebumps through the laptop camera)" (Participant 6, 2021).

I got goosebumps too. Somehow, this affective flow, also travelled through to other parts of Spain, to other bodies that had never encountered each other but that somehow were open to the circulation of that emotion and moved by it. Moved towards each other. And it travelled back to the moment when the interview was taking place more than eight months later to move the body of the participant, and through the screen mediating our conversation to move me as well. And in doing so, the emptiness of the absence joins the circulation adding more affective ties that bring such bodies together, paradoxically making the imprint of the feminist body felt even stronger through its absence.

It is also possible to see these emotions traveling through encounters of imaginary bodies and their representation in the case of the feminist mural of Concepción, a neighbourhood in Madrid. This mural was painted in 2018, portraying 15 women that had influenced the feminist fight. On the 8th of March 2021, the mural was vandalised by far-right groups who painted black over the faces of the women and wrote next to them words like "communist" or "terrorist" (El Confidencial, 2021). The mural was restored but has been vandalised twice again since then. When I asked one of the participants about something that she felt strongly about in her

feminist activism she mentioned this matter, "I remember when I woke up and saw what they had done. I was so angry and sad at the same time, I felt so powerless" (participant 1, 2021).

I asked her why that mural was so important and the vandalisation had such a strong emotional impact and she suggested, "It was not about the mural per se, it was about the violence of trying to erase feminism from our streets, pointing at us and then crossing our faces out as if they were saying "you cannot be here". Something about it felt extremely personal, even if my face was not the one in the wall" (participant 1, 2021). Once again, we see the absence of the feminist body, which in this case is a violent rejection of a feminist body that was already in the streets, rather than the prohibition of that feminist body to appear, like in the previous case. And this absence circulates affectively merging the porous divide between bodies, objects and demands, as if everyone's faces had been painted over by the far right, and all feminists had been violently pushed out of the streets. Within this, there is a feeling of anger and sadness felt by the participant, and that feeling moves her closer to the other feminists that were painted in the mural.

Participant 1 expanded on this stance, proceeding to say:

"And there's also this thing about erasing the progress, the feminist progress, from the streets. In the end what makes a feminist street is not that much the fact that there are laws regulating them, but what we are building as a community, right? I mean yes, of course making sure that there are more lampposts in the street or having laws against catcalling might help have safer streets for women, but who is going to enforce that? Who is going to speak to the police if they are the ones catcalling us or laughing when we want to report something? What makes a feminist street is feminists, our murals and our purple ribbons and our solidarity to stand up for each other. So then, in the end, it is the whole feminist project that is under a constant threat of being erased from the streets. And that makes me very angry, but it's also very exhausting to have to be angry at all times" (Participant 1, 2021).

Here it becomes evident how the absence, or the threat of absence of the feminist bodies, does not impede emotions to circulate. Instead, the anger and the exhaustion

that the feminist activist felt still circulates and in doing so it brings about the feminist bodies. Participants 1 and 6 are moved towards other feminists through that anger (even if directed or read as being caused by different objects), the same way that participant 4 was moved by the feeling of missing her fellow feminists. There is an emotional movement that also moves bodies, through a shared reading of the absence of those bodies. And, in doing so, it brings about (a feminist) movement.

5.3 Renegotiating feeling feminist

The previous section showed how it is possible to bring about feminist bodies in the absence of a shared identity (as discussed in Chapter one) or demand (as discussed in chapters one and two). It pointed towards the way in which affect circulates through different bodies and signs, and the way in which it was read and translated into a reading of the world shared by those bodies to which the emotions stick, this moving those bodies together. In doing so, the act of being moved towards other bodies with whom there is an apparent shared affective reading of the world (which might involve different affective flows, but ultimately moves the body in a certain direction -rejecting the current affective understanding of the world) gives place to a feminist body.

But is this emotional movement always read as shared? As argued in the previous chapter, there is another level of circulation, which happens when different bodies that are moved in a similar direction encounter each other and read each other affectively. This section will show the way that bodies are also moved simultaneously by other bodies and by the way that these are moving. In doing so, it will highlight the role of emotions in both bringing different bodies and demands together by blurring the porous divide between them, and in moving bodies away from each other and thus renegotiating the porous boundaries of the feminist body. This, the chapter will argue, allows understanding the feminist body as a non-monolithic body, one where there is space for contestation and openness. As the next chapter will show, this dimension of agonism that arises from the contestation of affect, is key to understand the way that feminism might contribute to the radicalisation of democracy.

After the mobilisation of the 8th of March 2022, a video of a feminist festival went viral in social media. In it you see a feminist who is starting to recite a poem about her gender identity and is abruptly interrupted by one of the organisers and told to get off the stage: "I'm really sorry but gender is not an identity", she says in quite an aggressive way (@andrea16__, 2022) while she takes the microphone away from the performer.   The activist who was taken off the stage wrote an article in the newspaper some weeks after, where she stated that she did not understand why she was taken off the stage like that, and why trans people still face discrimination in feminist spaces "the same suffering that moves them, the hate received, the abuse, the rapes, the murders, is what moves us to fight against patriarchy too" (...) The reason why I stood in that stage is that I was hurting" (Martínez, 2022).

Although this can be understood as a disagreement over identity issues and gender expression, a prominent debate in feminism[25], it is also possible to see an underlying affective dynamic that allows engaging with the issue further. Understanding how the circulation of bodies and affect produces encounters that move such bodies away from each other, while still interrelating them, is crucial to fully capture the way in

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[25] I want to acknowledge the prominence of the trans debate within feminist scholarship but also feminist activism. In fact, it could be argued that there is a complex relationship between feminist theory and practice and transgender issues (Hines, 2017). The issue of gender is still today debated by many feminist who, following some strands of radical feminism, believe that sex assigned as birth is the only way to determine someone's gender and, therefore, their belonging to the category women and their legitimacy to be part of the feminist movement, questioning and limiting the role of trans people in feminism (Raymond, 1980). Although at the moment the dispute of the so-called gender ideology is widely used by the far-right and reactionary movements that want to discredit feminism, still today it is used to question the place of trans people in feminism (Hines, 2017). However, the choice of this case of analysis is not overshadowed by this debate. Instead, it responds to the fact that, despite the prominence of such debate and the numerous arguments that can be used, as the case shows, affect has a prominent role when describing the incident. Affect (feeling fear and hate, being moved by them showing pity in their facial expression) becomes one of the main things that the activists refers to in her article. This is, despite the importance of the trans debate, when talking about the issue, it is affect and emotions which is highlighted. Thus, the choice of this case of analysis responds precisely to the fact that it points towards the crucial role of affect and emotions in keeping the feminist body together while also allowing for conflict and dissensus.

which emotions allow for political intervention in the absence of a shared identity or claim. In fact, with the words of the activist who was performing, it becomes evident how they read the sharing of suffering between the different feminists in the event as a shared cause that pushes them to fight in the same direction, to move in such a shared direction to dismantle patriarchy, thus blurring the distinction between them. However, when encountering these other bodies who took their microphone away, the performing activist is suddenly pushed away by the angry and violent reaction that denied her claim, rebuilding the porous boundaries between the bodies.

It is not possible to know how the person who took the microphone off their hands and made them get off stage felt, or what emotions were moving her, however, the performing activist did feel moved by the emotional reading they had of that encounter "if they treated us (trans and non-binary people) like that it is because they are scared, and they are turning their fear into hate. "I also felt fear. I feel it and I will feel it" (Martínez, 2022). They read the response as fear and hate, the fear that they felt and whose origin they located on the other woman. This emotion that was read as fear and hate by the performer circulated creating a contested boundary between the bodies and transformed the way that the performer was mobilised by fear. Before the incident, locating the cause of fear outside the feminist body, moving all feminists against it. After the incident, locating that cause within the feminist body and limiting their ability to move.

"I went back to the stage to speak to those women but the shouting in the background and the pity in their faces, feeling sorry for me, made me cry and get down again" (Martínez, 2022). Interestingly, and despite being pushed by the emotional encounter of anger and fear, the activist did try to continue with their performance. Nevertheless, it is the pity of the rest of the activists that makes them disengage and stop their performance. This shows that the reading of an affective encounter has the potential of redrawing the boundaries of the feminist bodies but also within the feminist bodies. It is not just the different ideas that are pushing the different activists away from each other, but the emotional readings that they have of their encounters. And in that movement, even if in opposite directions, there is still a degree of interconnectedness, because they are moved and still claiming that they would like to be moved otherwise, still attached to each other and giving each other

meaning as either the cause or the object of the affective reading of the world, of each other's encounters, bodies and demands.

Here, once again, it is interesting to see how there is a circulating precarity, linked to the value that is differentially assigned to bodies, and how it gets exposed through violence. The trans activist speaks about the encounter making reference to the "violence that they suffer when (being understood by most people as falling) under the umbrella of women" (Martinez, 2022), and how that violence is shared with the same activists that were violent towards them. At first, it would seem as if there was a certain precarity circulating, and being affectively read as bringing the bodies together. However, they add that as trans people they also have to fight for their right to have their identities and their struggles recognised.

Although this struggle for recognition should be understood as a form of institutional violence (and I do not want to deny the violence that such struggle for recognition implies), I am interested in exploring how this violent struggle for recognition highlights the differential value of different bodies. The fact that certain bodies need to struggle for recognition in the first place, means that their lives are currently not recognised as being as valuable and worthy as the lives of other bodies (in this specific case, the cisgender feminist activists who were violent). This lack of public recognition of the value of these lives is not only violent, but it is painful. The trans activist says "it is painful because us (trans activists), in the protest, on stage, we wanted to be understood, to fight together, to share our point of view, and instead of being listened to and supported, we were silenced and rejected" (Martinez, 2022). It is really evident how precarity (and the differential value assigned to bodies that it entails) is affectively read as painful, and how that pain moves the trans bodies away from those of the cisgender activists, building a porous divide, a political boundary, in between them.

I do not want to claim that violence is nonexistent, nor overlook the extremely violent nature of the situation. Rather, I want to highlight how the differential value of bodies constitutes a form of violence that, in this case, is affectively read as pain by some and fear by others, and that circulates creating boundaries that move certain bodies away from each other. On the one hand, the cisgender activists chose not to

recognise the equal value of the lives of the trans activists, and are moved away from them by hate. On the other hand, the trans activist is moved away through the pain that the lack of recognition of the value of their lives.

This is even more interesting because the trans activist insists that both them and the cisgender activist who were violent are fighting the same thing: patriarchy (Martinez, 2022). Yet, even if they might seem to agree on fighting patriarchy, there is a contestation over the meaning of that patriarchy, and its boundaries, that is also happening at an affective level. The dissonance between both understandings of the patriarchy that they are opposing, and whether it concerns uniquely women or also other subjects such as non binary or trans people, is also happening at an affective level through the precarity that circulates. This is not to say that there is not a political debate over the subjects that patriarchy oppresses. Rather, what it highlights is that the precarity that circulates (here the fact that trans lives are not recognised as worthy as others), encounters the cisgender activists, moving them away from the trans activists through hate and anger. The trans activists then encounter the moving away of the cisgender activist from the precarity as a reaffirmation of such precarity. A painful one. And in doing so, they are also moved further away from the cisgender activists. This builds a political boundary between both of them, and in doing so they are also further building a divide between that which they are fighting for, or against, and how it is understood. In other words, the circulating precarity affectively moves bodies and in doing so, there is a contestation over the subject of patriarchy (which they are opposing) happening at an affective level and redrawing the boundaries between different feminist bodies.

Participant 3 has suggested that this was not a one off, explaining that: "It happens quite often to us, to be honest, they approach us to tell us that this is not a party and that we have nothing to celebrate. We understand that it's not a traditional thing to do, to dress up like this and be singing songs and dancing, but this is what we think represents our way of understanding feminism and it is not less legitimate than others" (Participant 3, 2021). This participant belongs to a collective of racialised women who protest through performative arts, mainly dances and songs. They have recorded several albums with songs that they write about the reality of racialised people in Spain, many of whom are undocumented migrants. On the day of the

feminist human chain, they occupied the space of anti-racism, where they performed traditional dances and sang some of their songs, some of them dressed up as maids, including participant 3, who said, "we wanted to reclaim our space and our right to be women, who clean, but who also have rights, labour rights but also the right to have fun and rest (...) a group of feminists who were really angry at us, they kept telling us that our activism doesn't represent feminism and that we really needed to get angry at those who are oppressing us. They said that with our dances and our songs we were missing the point and we were not going to be taken seriously. But who do we want to take us seriously?" (Participant 3, 2021).

Once again, we see how emotions travel shaping the boundaries of the feminist body and moving the bodies that constitute it closer or farther from each other. Feminists are angry at participant 3 and her feminist collective because they are not conforming with a specific reaction and emotional reading of the world, they are seen not to share an affective reading of feminism. The way they move their body, they use their voice, or they write their banners produces an emotional reaction in them, they are bothered, angry, and they are moved away from them when they locate the cause of their anger in their activist performance.

It seems as if there was an emotional thread that weaves through all the feminist bodies, and that in each encounter between bodies that thread gets shorter or longer, with more or fewer knots, depending on who it is that the thread is connecting. In this case, the anger travels in between the activist bodies', the way in which they perform their activism and their demands, it also sticks to the othered who, perhaps an authority, or the general public, who will not be able to take them seriously, to affectively resonate with their feminism and their bodies, there is an affective (angry) rejection of their bodies that sticks and circulates through bodies that are not even present or defined.

Therefore, this process of affectively reading each other's bodies and demands allows space for contestation and disagreement within the feminist body, ensuring that it does not become a foreclosed or monolithic body, but rather one where there is space for continuous movement and remaking of its boundaries. The next chapter will develop the way in which this contestation within the feminist body is crucial to

understanding the way in which feminist mobilisations might contribute to the radicalisation of democracy. However, for now, it is important to keep in mind that this contestation of the limits of the feminist body, such as, the fact that certain affective readings of bodies within the feminist body move those bodies apart from each other (to the point of making them be perceived as excluded by some, as in the case of the trans activist), also contributes to bringing about the borders of such body. Thereby, when reading other bodies that are circulating, and being moved by their reading of them, activists are rearranging the porous surface of the body, they are being moved in a way that they allow certain bodies and signs to get through with more or less difficulty, like the ball of a pinball machine which is in constant movement and encounters obstacles on its way. Thus, this level of affective circulation contributes to allowing for dissensus and constant movement but also shaping the feminist body through the drawing of its porous divide.

5.4 Feeling differently

The previous section engaged with two different ways in which emotional readings contribute to holding the feminist body together: on the one hand, by bringing together those that share affective readings of the world; on the other hand, by delimiting and contesting its boundaries through emotional encounters between the different bodies and signs circulating. This section will engage with testimonies and a case study that shows a third way in which affect, and emotions are central to feminist mobilisations. This is shown through the performance of alternative (desired) affective readings of the world, that allow thinking that another political (more feminist) reality is possible therefore challenging the current configuration of political structures.

Emotions are also present in artistic performances where activists are also moved by and with their affective readings of the world. Radical democratic theatre, as developed by Fisher (2011) building on Boal's theatre of the oppressed, is an example of a theatre that does not aim to achieve that liberation, but to destabilise the

"relational space in which political identities are first configured" (Fisher, 2011: 15-16) instead, and where emotional and affective readings of the world play a major role. With radical democratic theatre Fisher refers to an emerging trend of participatory theatre where it is possible to engage with the antagonistic dimension of politics as well as with the "forms of reciprocal action and empathetic identification" (Fisher, 2011: 16) that can ultimately lead to new political forms organising the social. This demonstrates that radical democratic theatre is not focused on emancipation but instead on the rearticulation of power relations aimed at uncovering equality.

As mentioned, Fisher's radical theatre departs from a critique of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. He argues that it is not possible to identify an oppressive relation from which it is possible to free a subject from. Instead, Fisher believes that the oppressive relations are part of a complex process of subjectification where there is a certain degree of ideological inscription that produces subjects through that oppressive relation (Fisher, 2011: 19). This he argues shows that it is not possible to think of a moment of total separation from oppression and oppressive relations through theatre (or at all) where it is possible to identify such causes and at the same time dis-identify from them. Instead, he argues, the focus should be on producing a politics of disruption that allows constituting a "demos", an identification, around a collective signifier, thus disarticulating previous signifiers. In this sense, Fisher believes that theatre has the possibility of politicising and revitalising democratic politics if engaging with such dis/rearticulation of subjectivities (Fisher, 2011: 21). Fisher builds this argument on a Foucauldian conception of power, where the presence of power also implies the existence of resistance, even if only as potentiality. Thus, power is always contingent and there is no possibility for totalisation, it is not possible to think of power as a perfect act of coherence but instead an incomplete act of contradiction that can be interrupted, disarticulated and rearticulated in a more equal way. It is here where he builds on Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualisation of radical democracy, arguing that the process of subjectification is never fully fixated and is always open to contestation and re-subjetification (Fisher, 2011: 21). Hence, for Fisher the aim and particularity of Radical Democratic Theatre is "the promotion and activation of democratic politics" (Fisher, 2011: 21) through the deepening and extension of "the range of democratic practices through the

creation of new subject positions within a democratic matrix" (Mouffe, 1993: 57 in Fisher, 2011: 21).

Therefore, Fisher argues that through theatre it is possible to open up a "space of speech" where through interpretation and performance power its sealing effects get questioned through a confrontation between the subject and the process of subjectification (Fisher, 2011: 24), hence bringing the "subject back to a suppressed power of dissent" (Fisher, 2011: 24). Therefore, Fisher argues, that radical democratic theatre is political and produces political effects because it allows space and means for "the effective suspension of the conditions of operation through which a structure of domination produces its effects" (Fisher, 2011: 25).

Although Fisher's take on Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed through a radical democratic lens is very useful for the purpose of the analysis that will follow, it is important to highlight the contradiction of this last conclusion. By affirming that there is a suspension of the operation of power through subjectification, Fisher is, like Boal, arguing for the possibility of separation from oppression and emancipation, even if momentarily. Radical democratic theories do not tend to focus on such possibility and believe that the interruption of the process of subjectification is not possible and that such a process should be used to articulate forms of identification in more egalitarian ways instead.

This theoretical understanding of radical democratic theatre can be applied to Territorio Doméstico's catwalk of precarity. *Territorio Doméstico* (TD) is a feminist association based in Madrid and made up of migrant domestic workers, many of whom come from Latin American countries under tourist visas to work as *internas*, a term used to describe live-in maids who often work in precarious conditions, without a contract, insurance or even legal residency. Territorio Doméstico's activism is characterised by its artistic and aesthetic dimension, since they use performances, podcasts, dances and their original songs to make their demands and grievances heard.

One of their actions is called *pasarela de la precariedad* (catwalk of precarity), which they have performed numerous times in the streets, in squares and in protests.

This time, they performed it in the context of the days of syndicalist feminism, organised by Museo Reina Sofía[26]. These days had the objective of gathering several collectives of feminists that are trying to organise themselves to reclaim their rights as workers, and it included the participation of *Territorio Doméstico,* as well as *colectivo de las putas* (whores' collective), *las temporeras* (seasonal workers in agriculture from North Africa) and *las Kellys* (hotel maids). The closing of these days of reflections and debates included *Territorio Doméstico*'s catwalk of precarity.

The catwalk starts with several women who are wearing colourful wigs (purple, green, red…), pageant sashes across their chest and carrying cleaning tools such as dusters, buckets and gloves in their hands. There is music playing in the background, cheering and applauses from the public who are celebrating that "we are all in this catwalk, a catwalk that represents our life and that we have to walk through every day" (Territorio Doméstico, 2021: 00:18). When interviewing one of the members of the collective, they referred to the catwalk as a way to, "visibilize the work that us women do, specifically migrant women of lower class: We are sustaining the whole country, the world even! Could you imagine the Queen (of Spain) Letizia, having to wash the dishes and vacuum the whole Palace? It would be the end of the Monarchy! (...) And yet, whenever our bosses give us one of those uniforms that we need to wear it's as if we disappeared and became invisible. We are no longer people, just some hands to tidy things up and to mop" (Participant 7, 2021).

Hence, with this opening act, TD is exposing (rather than suspending as Fisher argues) the contradictions of power and its inability to have totalising effects. TD refuses to leave domestic work at the margins of politics, and instead reclaims its centrality to life and society through the means of a catwalk, which tend to be exclusive events attracting a lot of attention and gathering celebrities and people with high social status. Instead of models wearing the latest fashion trends and conforming to very specific standards of beauty, it is domestic workers, walking with their cleaning tools combined with the characteristic crowns of beauty contests, showcasing "the latest trends in exploitation and domestic work in the times of Covid" (Territorio Doméstico, 2021: 01:50).

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[26] Recording available through https://vimeo.com/519001550

In doing so, they are choosing to question the affective reading of their reality, one that relegates them to the margin of society with shame and indifference. Participant 7 reinforces this point, "I was embarrassed to admit that I was a domestic worker and that I spent my days cleaning an old woman's shit, and that's why I didn't ask for help, how could I go to see a lawyer and tell them that they had fired me? I felt so ridiculous. And then in TD I met so many other women who were in my situation, we started joking about this, it really changed the way I saw my situation, as if I was suddenly part of something bigger than me and I didn't have to hide anymore because we were too big to even try" (participant 7, 2021).

Thus, it can be argued that when the members of TD dress themselves up as models of precarity, they are engaging with their affective reading of their world as shame and transforming it into one of revindication, one of celebration and even pride. Here, I am not focusing on the individual emotions and how they might or might not be transformed, as if I was presenting a model of emotional evolution through which certain *bad* emotions need to be overcome to achieve justice, equality or freedom from oppression once there is a *better* emotion. Instead, what I want to highlight once again is the way in which emotions move bodies towards each other, or away from each other, and in doing so they also move the way in which they perceive their worlds, and they interact with it and its injustices.

Shame in this case can be paralysing, it moves the body in a way that makes them stay silent, and conform to the status quo, to the power relations. However, through the display of celebration and even pride in walking along the catwalk making use of sarcasm to embody their circumstances, which are usually invisibilised, they are being moved otherwise, they are relating to their bodies, to their world and to each other in a different way. It is precisely in doing this that they are performing a new affective reading of their world, the one that they would want to have.

And, interestingly, through the performance of new affective readings of their world, the initial shame is displaced towards other bodies, perhaps towards those bodies that are watching and are not joining the fight, towards those bodies that are benefiting from the situation or those that are completely oblivious to it. In addition, by doing

so, shame is also moving them, perhaps to join the bodies that are mobilised, perhaps to stay even further away from them. Once again, this is not to say that shame is inherently paralysing and pride is mobilising or liberating. Instead, what I want to highlight with this is the fact that specific emotional readings of the world can be transformed and, in doing so, the disposition of bodies towards each other can contribute to disrupting affective readings of the world and contributing to the openness that other affective readings of the world are possible.

One after the other, six different models walk down the catwalk, each representing a different archetype of domestic workers, each moved and brought together by their emotional readings of the world, which circulates from one body to the other. The *octopus* domestic worker, the *you're part of the family* domestic worker, the *trapped* domestic worker, the *undocumented* domestic worker, the *I'm neither from here nor there* domestic worker and, finally, the *empowered* domestic worker. All of them are moved around the space, around the structures of power, they walk with grace and stand tall, cleaning but also with empty hands, "to show the invisible weights that we carry" (Participant 7: 2021).

Throughout all of these performances, we see emotions circulating with the way that the *undocumented* domestic worker hides with fear from the actress who is playing the role of the police, the *you're part of the family* domestic worker is unfairly denied holidays or the *trapped* domestic worker does not have access to any kind of insurance or economic support. This affect that circulates through bodies tends to be concealed and generates a specific reading of an object or a body as being the cause of certain affective reactions: shame, fear, threat, even the happiness when the octopus domestic worker dances Latin music while cleaning is part of their reading of the world: "you must be happy and grateful, for you have a job" (Territorio Doméstico, 2021). Nevertheless, the moment in which this is performed outside of its usual context, on a catwalk, the concealing becomes revealed, it becomes obvious to the eyes and the bodies of all those who are watching it and feeling it, as well as all those who are performing it. And so does the possibility of reading it through a different affective lens, of allowing affect to move bodies in a different way, articulating their different demands, and in doing so reorienting themselves against specific norms, structures or even laws and rights (or lack thereof).

The catwalk ends with a call to everyone (domestic workers, spectators, other feminist collectives, etc.) to join the party: "We are here, afraid, happy, angry, spirited, thoughtful, clueless, overwhelmed, with networks and without networks, in the middle of a pandemic but wanting to keep on thinking, creating and supporting each other, organised from a place that allows us to find a common ground, with our differences and conflicts, *juntas y revueltas*[27] (Territorio Doméstico, 2021).

Dancing and walking together they turn the catwalk of precarity into a catwalk that emphasises that there is another affective reading of the world that is possible, And in doing so we open bodies to affect and be affected by others, to challenge and disrupt the way that they affectively relate to the unequal distribution of vulnerability, the unequal value of lives, and the power structures that mediate this. It is here, through the performance of such an alternative reading of the world, they are claiming that they want to change it, and in doing so they are bringing about a feminist body. Radical democratic theatre might not allow escaping oppressive power structures or suspending the operation of power, but it does allow engaging with the affective dimension of feminist politics and using it to build a collective body that reclaims its affective understanding of a political world where an alternative is possible.

 Therefore, I argue that through the enacting of alternative affective readings of the world, different from the ones that are traditionally assigned to those bodies or from the ones resulting from their encounter with their world, it is possible to disrupt the current affective reading of the world, highlighting the possibility of alternatives. This is not to say that there is a full transformation of the power relations, structures, or their lives (in this case as racialised, migrant women and workers) as a direct result of this enacting of an alternative reading of the world. Rather, this points towards the fact that there is, firstly, a disruption and a refusal of such reading that is ascribed to them: they are not conforming to the shame of the migrant worker, but rather disrupting it by bringing to the forefront the contradictions embodied in such reading. Simultaneously, by exposing and visbilising this affective reading of the

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[27] This expression could be translated like "together and in each other's pockets". However, the Spanish word *revueltas* in this context has a dimension that means that they are diverse and mixed, as well as revolutionary.

world and the contradiction in it, they are contributing to move other bodies that might have not shared, or even been aware of, their affective reading of the world.

Ultimately, they are contributing to openness by pointing towards the fact that it is possible to (affectively) read the world differently, which implies that it is possible to also rearrange the unequal distribution of precarity. This is not to say that it does rearrange it, but that in enacting a different affective reading of precarity they are also pointing towards a different encounter being read: to have a different reading also implies the possibility of reading something different. This, I argue, enables openness by challenging the fact that there is only one possible way of affectively encountering the world, and that alternative encounters, and thus worlds, are possible.

This section has therefore pointed out a third way in which affect circulates: bringing about alternative affective readings of the world. The case of Territorio Doméstico shows that there is a political mobilisation in the absence of a shared identity and demand, and around a desired affective reading of the world. In those cases, that alternative affective reading of the world brings about also an alternative arrangement of power relations in the world: it is not just about feeling differently, but also feeling in a different world. The next chapter will further develop the implications that this has for the radicalisation of democracy.

5.5 Conclusion: Affective politics of feminism?

This chapter engaged with the manner in which bodies delved into the feminist mobilisations in Spain through interviews with activists, an analysis of social media and footage of previous protests, as well as an analysis of a feminist theatre play. The chapter first analysed the way that the affect and emotions are at the core of the process of bringing about a feminist body in the absence of a shared identity or a shared demand, through the shared affective readings of the world. Then, the second section engaged with testimonies that show the way in which the porous boundaries of the feminist body are renegotiated through the mutual emotional reading of the encounters between different bodies. Finally, the third section elaborated on a theatre

performance that shows the way that performing and embodying an alternative and desired affective reading of the world allows thinking that another political reality is possible, contributing to disruption and openness.

At this point we might ask: what does affect do to the feminist body? Building on the discussion of the previous chapter and the fieldwork analysed above, I argue that the circulation of affect contributes to bringing the feminist body together in feminist mobilisations through an affective politics of precarity, where precarity becomes an affective circulating object. The chapter has shown three main ways in which the effects of affect are operating: by bringing different bodies, demands, signs and meanings with no a priori relationship together; by allowing space for those bodies to encounter each other and enter into conflict; and by allowing to build alternative understandings of the world, this is, to challenge the establishment.

As the previous chapter argued, affect circulates and sticks to certain bodies, objects and signs attending to a history of previous encounters. In doing so, affect contributes to moving such bodies that it is sticking to (or failing to stick to) closer or further away from each other, it creates certain reactions that redefine their orientation and the surfaces of such objects, the porous boundaries and divides between them. In doing so, the circulation of affect contributes to shaping the surface of the feminist body, by bringing together some bodies, meanings and signs that ultimately give place to a feminist body. Therefore, attending to the analysis of the interviews from the first section, it could be argued that feminist mobilisations bring about, even if for a fleeting moment, the feminist body, when altering the porous surfaces between the bodies through the circulation of affect, in a way in which there is an imprint left. An imprint which, might be bigger or smaller, but allows bodies to miss each other when they do not encounter themselves again, as the interviews showed. In this sense, affect circulates bringing about a feminist body in the absence of a shared identity, through its stickiness to certain bodies and signs, which alters the surfaces of such bodies and signs in a way in which it alters the relationship between them, the way in which they read each other, and therefore the way in which they understand each other. When sticking to the different bodies, affect also brings about an understanding of a shared affective reading of the world, one that

they reject, and moves the different bodies and signs towards each other in this shared rejection of such affective reading of the world.

Moreover, there is a second level of circulation of affect that this research engages with, that is the way in which affect circulates through the bodies and signs that bring about that feminist body. This is, those bodies that are reoriented through the circulation of affect towards each other, in the sense that they reject an affective reading of the world (even if they disagree on what reading that is or how they reject it), are also encountering each other, and therefore being reoriented towards or away from each other within this feminist body. This is important because it means that the feminist body is not a static, monolithic body. Instead, it allows for conflict, it allows for dissensus, it allows movement. And, in doing so, it also allows for a constant redefinition of meaning, and the power relations that this entails. There is no foreclosing of the feminist body, it is in constant movement, constantly being redefined and affectively reading each other, they are articulating themselves and their demands, as well as allowing space for agonistic contestation to take place.

Finally, and following the research of this chapter, there is a third way in which affect can contribute to further understanding feminist mobilisations: its ability to bring about alternative ways of reading the world. As the fourth section shows, through the performance of alternative affective readings of the world, it is possible to contest the current readings of the world, and therefore the power relations behind this. This is, as previously mentioned, an affective reading entails a process of translation whereby we locate in different objects, signs and bodies the causes and effects of such affect, contributing to creating signification. When performing an alternative affective reading of the world, feminists are implying the possibility of different signification, different causes to the emotions; and, on the other hand, the fact that alternatives to the current status quo are possible, that politics are not foreclosed and there is a possibility for change. The implications of this are further developed in the following chapter.

Therefore, we can argue that this model of affective politics allows recognising the possibility of common ground for political mobilisation in the absence of shared identity or demands, while also attending the power structures that are intrinsic to it

and allowing space for contestation. The circulation of affect that sticks to certain signs and bodies contributes to creating, reproducing, contesting and blurring political boundaries, and the power structures behind them, ensuring that there is always an openness and alternatives can be brought to the current arrangement of power relations.

Chapter 6: Radicalising democracy through affective readings?

The previous chapters have dived into different ways in which the feminist bodies can come into being and tied together: identity, demands and performativity of the bodies. Chapter four introduced the idea of an affective politics of precarity, and Chapter five examined the way in which this affective politics of precarity came into being in the feminist mobilisations of the 8th of March in Spain, looking into the role that affect and emotions play in holding the feminist body together while allowing for conflict and to produce alternative readings of the world. However, a question remains: how, if at all, does this bringing together of the feminist body that generates alternative affective and emotional readings of the world contribute to the radicalisation of democracy?

This a complex question that has been guiding the research of this PhD thesis, and is implicitly present in all its chapters, when looking at the disruption and deepening of democracy. Nevertheless, this last chapter directly addresses such a question by looking into three different conceptualisations of radical democracy to understand the way in which the affective politics of precarity that become evident in the feminist mobilisations of Spain can contribute to the debate of the radicalisation of democracy. It will start by engaging with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe´s conception of radical democracy. This is mainly due to the fact that Laclau and Mouffe are considered to be the main exponents of radical democratic theory after they published "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics" (1985). It is true that Laclau and Mouffe then diverged to explore different aspects of radical democracy, with Laclau focusing on issues of populism (2005) while Mouffe moved on to pay more attention to agonism and liberal democracy, returning to her focus on populism with her latest works (2005, 2018). The chapter will thus acknowledge their differences and individual focuses when relevant but will focus a big part of its analysis on the work they published together, given the relevance it had for the field of radical democracy.

The chapter will then move on to engage with Judith Butler´s conceptualisation of radical democracy (2015). Although it is true that Butler does not necessarily inscribe themselves in the school of radical democratic theory, their work has been long enquiring into questions of radical democracy, and engaging with radical democratic scholars (Lloyd, 2009). This has become more prevalent in some of Butler's latest work (2015), where they revisit the concept of radical democracy and dives deeper into radical democratic theory following the protests and public gatherings in different parts of the world. The choice to engage with Butler is twofold: on the one hand, as the chapter will show, Butler emphasises the key role of civil society and social movements in the process of radicalisation of democracy and assembly (Butler, 2015). On the other hand, and more importantly, they put the body at the centre of the process of radicalisation of democracy, which leaves a door open to engaging with affect and emotions.

Finally, the chapter will engage with some feminist accounts of radical democracy, mainly Nijensohn (2022). While it is true that she does not necessarily label herself as a radical democratic theorist, she applied radical democracy as a lens to better understand contemporary mobilisations in Argentina, marked by the heterogeneity of the demands and their intersectional dimension. Moreover, she engages with Butler, bringing a recent reading of her work and applying it to new case studies. In this sense, when putting her in conversation with my thesis, I will be able to also examine how by analysing the way in which feminist mobilisations of the 8th of March we can rethink the radicalisation of democracy and the role of affective readings in it.

6.1 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: radical democracy as a hegemonic struggle

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have become two of the main representatives of radical democracy. With "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" (1985) they laid the foundations of what was later called Post Marxist theory, which deconstructs classical Marxism to theorise beyond its (class) essentialism. Before going into analysing their account of radical democracy and post-Marxism, it is important to

mention that there are some slight differences in Laclau and Mouffe's accounts of radical democracy. However, for this discussion, I will firstly treat their theories as one body of work, given the fact that they remain part of the same theoretical field and are aligned on some of the main points about the construction of radical democracy. Nevertheless, I will move on to engage with two important points of their individual work at the end of the section: the use of emotions in Laclau's work, and Mouffe's agonism and conceptualisation of political conflict. This will allow to better understand the way in which this project's conceptualisation of radical democracy can contribute to posing new questions about radical democratic theory.

As mentioned, in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (1985) Laclau and Mouffe aim to rethink Marxism from a lens that allows moving away from essentialism and class reductionism, and to engage with what they call new social movements. Through the concepts of antagonism and hegemony, they provide a new account for radical politics, radical democracy, where they escape essentialism through an articulation of that hegemony that can lead to progressive social change (Smith, 1998: 6). For them, post-Marxism allowed reappropriating certain parts of the Marxist intellectual tradition to allow expanding this work into one that privileges political articulation over class determinism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: x).

In order to do this, they rethink Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and make it their central category of analysis of the social, perceived as a discursive space (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe thus understand the social space as structures rhetorically, where discourse allows establishing relationships of signification that bring meaning to the world (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011: 48). It is important to note here that, with discourse, they do not just refer to linguistic elements but to the process of signification more generally. This is crucial because it means that, once again, they move away from the orthodox Marxist understanding of the social field as one that is direct and determined by material structures, to one where signification renders social and political relations contingent. Consequently, if social relations, and thus social identities, are not necessarily determined by and determining of historical interests like Gramsci argued (Gramsci, 2005: 42), they become, they argue, unfixed and unstable (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 88). There is thus no one privileged social position, no one unique subject or demand, from which it is possible to transform

society as a whole (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 169). Hence, building on the work of Lacan and Derrida, they argue that social and political identities and their interests cannot be defined a priori, they are mediated by discourse and signification, and thus remade every single time through what they call, practices of articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 108).

As mentioned, for Laclau and Mouffe, the social is a discursive space that is always structured through articulatory practices, rejecting the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011: 48) and arguing for a reality that is always discursive, meaning that it is mediated and therefore always political. In other words, if it is not possible to access reality *as it is;* if, following Derrida, there is no outside discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 108), then it is not possible to have a neutral essential truth, and the social is always going to be a place of plurality of truths. This is, there is a radical contingency where every meaning, social identity and arrangement of the social is possible. This does not mean that they are all happening at the same time, but that there is a relational dimension to identities, where everything is that which the other is not, and that requires a certain level of fixation for meaning to appear. In other words, if the social is a discursive articulation of meaning, a contingent one since there are multiple other possible articulations of meaning and the social, it is always constituted through the exclusion of those other significations. This also means that, the constitution of signification, and the social, requires a certain level of fixation, of consent and agreement on one of those meanings. It requires the articulation of a hegemony.

Before moving on to understand the way that this partial fixation that makes signification possible happens according to Laclau and Mouffe, it is important to mention that the idea of the social as a discursive and contingent articulation brings up two important points for their theory of radical democracy. Firstly, their conceptualisation of power as something inherent to the formation of identities and the social. We argued that for Laclau and Mouffe, social identities are contingent, relational and discursive, rather than essential, built on an also contingent exclusion of that which they are not, which partially fixates and produces meaning, that exclusion involves an act of power (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 142). This means that

power is therefore constitutive of social identities, rather than something external that acts upon it.

This brings up a second point, which is that of the ineradicable antagonism for their conceptualisation of the political. If, as mentioned, power is located within the subjects, so are those other possibilities that are excluded from them, which then become an ever-present potentiality that threatens, while at the same time enabling, the articulation of the social. This is, the existence of other possible configuration of power and the discursive, of other possible meanings and identities, require the partial fixation of one of them, and the exclusion of the others. And these excluded others are not only allowing the fixation to happen, but also require the constant re-enactment of consent for that which has been fixated (and simultaneously the re-enactment of the exclusion of that which is not).

Therefore, the possibility of those excluded articulations that are not to become those that are, threaten the accepted social order and limit it (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 122). Antagonism, the division of the political field into social identities and meanings that are constantly excluding and enabling each other (Laclau, 1994: 282) is thus always present, as it enables signification while also showing the limits to objectivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 22).

At this point it is important to understand how, despite or because of this dimension of radical antagonism it is possible to fixate meaning. For this, Laclau and Mouffe use Lacan's concept of point de caption, or nodal point, which allows fixating meaning through assuming the function of the universal in the discursive. Demonstrating that through the establishing of nodal points it is possible to create relationships of meaning between different signifiers, binding them together and partially fixating them. These nodal points need to simultaneously resonate with particular discourses while being empty enough that they can be rethought, thus making them the perfect meeting point for increasing meanings, making them more universal and pushing them to move beyond their own particularities. Hence, nodal points, by assuming this role as the meeting point between different meanings, allow the creation of a chain of signification that can acquire meaning through the displacement of the signifier itself.

Nodal points thus become the element where there is a convergence of a high number of associate changes, becoming overdetermined elements that condense elements from other chains (partially) anchoring meaning (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011: 49). And this process of instituting nodal points that establish a relationship of signification between different elements, altering their meaning and partially fixating it, is what Laclau and Mouffe call articulation (Laclau, Mouffe: 1985, 113). Once again, it is important to note that meaning is only partially fixated, as there is always the possibility for other meanings to contest that which has been fixated.

In order to be able to understand what elements are articulated, we need to return to the previous notion of antagonism. If, as Laclau and Mouffe argue, every articulation entails an exclusion of that which is not articulated, every articulation also implies the construction of political boundaries and frontiers. These are, like articulations, also unstable and contingent, but contribute to configuring the discursive field and are therefore crucial to be able to articulate social collective identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 135-136). Thus, according to Laclau and Mouffe, every articulation of a social identity is going to require the existence of an antagonistic other that enables and threatens the articulation of that identity. And this is precisely what allows understanding what elements are articulated into a hegemony.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, for an articulation to become hegemonic, to become accepted as universal, a particular element must take up at a certain point the representation of a universal meaning that exceeds itself. In other words, it shall articulate differences through a nodal point that comes to represent the universal. Hegemony thus requires articulating a unified social identity that gives place to a common will, a new common sense, that is then accepted by a majority (Laclau, 1994: 174-175). This, they argue, can only happen if they construct a chain of equivalence that encompasses as many elements as possible. Chains of equivalence are, according to Laclau and Mouffe, processes or articulation where the difference between elements is subverted in favour of a common feature (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985:142). This does not mean that all elements become homogenous and disappear into each other or into a nodal point, but that they refer "through equivalential links, to the totality of their demands" (Laclau, 2008: 37). Their differences become

subverted in so far as they can be substituted by each other. And this is only possible through the existence of an antagonistic other that negates them all (Laclau & Mouffe: 1985: 127-128).

Thus, the shared relationship of opposition against the antagonistic other allows overcoming the relationship of difference amongst each other and establishing a chain of equivalence, which gives place to new forms of identification. Hence, the antagonistic other becomes a product of the articulation of elements through chains of equivalence, while simultaneously enabling this chain of equivalence. This process is crucial for the establishment of a hegemony, and identity becomes "the scene and the object of political struggles" (Mouffe, 1995: 264) insofar as those political struggles are aiming to build chains of equivalences that give place to new forms of identification that become hegemonic. Therefore, "as theorised by Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony is a relational concept that enables us to conceptualise hierarchies, conventions, structures, values, norms, biases and preferences of all kinds, in terms of the interplay of relative gravities of different kinds of power and the formations and transformations of relations and kinds of influence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985)" (Bowman, 2022: 79)

But how does this idea of a hegemonic articulation, one that represents the universal through the articulation of particular elements in relationships of signification through chains of equivalences opposed to an antagonistic other, contribute to radicalising democracy? According to Laclau and Mouffe, the task of the Left is to radicalise democracy by building an articulation of demands and identities that are in relations of oppression to give place to a new hegemony that restructures the division of the social on a new basis, one that expands the chains of equivalence between the struggles against oppression and liberal democracy towards more radical and plural democracies (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 159). This is, they suggest a complex process of articulation where all the demands and identities of the different struggles for equality are renegotiated following the logic of articulation in order to create a new hegemonic bloc that allows challenging current arrangements of the social and political fields. This is not to mean that there should be an alliance or coalition between predefined groups with identities and interests. Instead, they argue that the renegotiation and reshaping of their struggles into an articulated hegemony, where

different nodal points are continuously redefined leaving space for new meanings and significations, allows a constant reconstruction of the identities and demands of those struggles that are being articulated.

Following Smith (1998: 31), I argue that what is interesting about their approach of a radicalisation of democracy is the way they manage the tension between the unity of the hegemonic bloc and the autonomy of the particular demands. The radicalisation of democracy, they argue, should allow for "effective solidarity without asking any individual movement to pay the price of tokenism, co-optation and assimilation" (Smith, 1998: 31). For them, it is only hegemony that allows achieving this through a chain of equivalences: maintaining and deepening plurality while at the same time transforming the meaning of current democracies to deepen their egalitarian dimension. To put it into Laclau and Mouffe's words:

> Pluralism is radical only to the extent that each term of this plurality finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy. And this radical pluralism is democratic to the extent that the auto-constitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary. (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:167).

Hence, Laclau and Mouffe press the importance of recognising that these articulations are never going to be whole, but always going to be partial (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 187). This is because, if we recognise the antagonistic character of the social and its ineradicability, we also need to recognise that the process of building a hegemony is never going to be about installing a new totalising or universal articulation, but instead about the aim to do so. This is, hegemonic articulations are always going to be recreated and renegotiated in an attempt to deal with the conflict and the antagonism of the social (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 188).

Rather than being a negative aspect, this is, for Laclau and Mouffe, what constitutes the core of articulating a project for a radical democracy: challenging and destabilising the idea of a rational and transparent society with universal truths and instead ensure the institutionalisation of its openness in a way that it ensures the managing of the tension between the hegemonic articulation's aim to reach the horizon of totality, and the impossibility to do so (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 192-193). In other words, to ensure that there is a possibility to bring forward new and alternative (counter)hegemonic projects, it is necessary to ensure that there is a constant challenging of the universality or the totality of the hegemonic articulations in a way that it ensures openness, the ever-present possibility of it being challenged, giving up on the possibility of a universal discourse or access point to reality (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 191-192). Otherwise, this project would deny the plurality and impede the recognition of the multiple social logics, the multiple articulations, within the social (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 188).

This is not to say that hegemonic articulations should avoid putting forward their projects to reorganise the social because of the risk of foreclosing plurality (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 189). Instead, they argue that articulations, in their struggle to become hegemonic, will always attempt to reach the horizon of totality, this is, will establish a foreclosed understanding of the arrangement of the social that is adopted as universal, as a new common sense, following Gramsci (2005). However, because of the antagonistic dimension of the social, this is never going to be the case, and instead hegemonic articulations are always going to be contingent. It is the attempt to avoid recognising such contingency by imposing a foreclosing that would lead, according to Laclau and Mouffe, to moments of totalitarism, which are at odds with projects of radicalising democracy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 187). Therefore, the task of processes of radicalisation of democracy is not just to build a hegemonic articulation, or to avoid doing so because of the risks of totalisation, but to ensure that those hegemonic articulations are maintaining the tension between the horizon of totality, this is the attempt to impose and foreclose an absolute centre that reinstitutes unity and denies pluralism (Laclau and Mouffe,1985: 188); and the radical uncertainty and openness that comes with the plural and antagonistic character of democracy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 189). Only through these means,

they argue, is it possible to ensure that the horizon of totality does not impede democratic openness.

As a result, we can argue that radical democracy for Laclau and Mouffe is about expanding the struggles for democracy in a way that encompasses as many struggles, identities and demands as possible and about extending the sites of such hegemonic struggles as much as possible, to incorporate both civil society and the state (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 182). Thus, it is not about building a hegemony where certain collective identities are going to be able to achieve emancipation (since, as argued earlier, power is always going to be constitutive of such identities and therefore emancipation from such power is not possible). Instead, it is about expanding and institutionalising the process of building hegemonies, which allows deepening the principles of democracies by ensuring its plurality and its radicality through the enlargement of chains of equivalence and the articulation of struggles against oppression. Radicalising democracy is thus about ensuring that there is space for a hegemonic struggle that ensures the constant openness of democratic principles by recognising the ever-presence of antagonism and the contingency of hegemonic articulations.

The previous chapter and the literature discussion of this thesis show that, despite sharing with Laclau and Mouffe the rejection of essentialism when reading identity, process of identification does not constitute the key focus for the understanding of radicalisation of democracy through affective politics of precarity that I am trying to develop. In fact, it becomes obvious when remembering the words of participant 8, who does not consider himself a feminist or affected by the issues of feminism, but still partakes in the feminist mobilisations. Interestingly, even after being in the mobilisation where he felt being part of the feminist bodies, he still did not consider himself a feminist.

This highlights how identification with a mobilisation or political body, even if important to constitute subjects and collective politicisations, is not the main driver behind this process of radicalisation of democracy, but rather the affective reading of precarity and the bodies moved by it. Hence, as the next section will develop, the thesis argues that it is a shared affective reading of the world which allows to form

alliances that bring together different particular demands, bodies and signs. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I reject the role of identification in processes of radicalisation of democracy. Rather that it is not the main structuring category for the radicalisation of democracy and the articulation of political change.

Similarly, as argued in this section, in Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of the role of identification in the radicalisation of democracy there is a concept that becomes very relevant, that of articulation. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, when conceiving articulation this thesis does not advocate for the necessary existence of one single antagonistic other to which the articulation is opposed. Instead, it points towards the shared affective understanding that the world should be otherwise by bringing different bodies together. This becomes evident with the case of participants 9 and 10. Participant 10 does not consider herself a feminist but argues that she understands the feelings that move feminists to gather in the streets. Immediately, participant 9 reads her as sharing an affective understanding of the world, which comes together with an understanding of the structuring power relations of the political field and an intention to change it. This establishes that there is an affective dimension that allows mobilising and articulating bodies and signs together.

This idea of articulating an alternative, of bringing about the possibility to think and feel differently, to affectively relate differently, resonates with Laclau and Mouffe's process of articulating a hegemonic process that ensures openness. As discussed later, participant 4 speaks about the possibility of organising a mobilisation around happiness, to counter(en)act the feelings of exhaustion, anger and sadness that they are usually ascribed, making it evident that affect and emotions are not just about allowing to articulate different signs and bodies into feminist bodies, but about bringing alternative readings of the world that imply different political arrangements. In other words, there is a contestation of the dominant reading of the world (feminists are sad or angry because they are unhappy with their circumstances, with the arrangement of power relations), and there is an opening up of the possibility that the world can and should be different.

Here, my argument is that through the practice and performance of those alternative emotional readings of the world and the causes behind it, it is possible to open up a

space for claiming that the world can be otherwise (and thus emotionally read other way). This potential for change, this space for thinking, acting, being and feeling differently allows space for living differently in a way similar to a line in a horizon that is never reached but allows bodies to keep moving, rather than stuck in totalising affective readings of the world. This, I argue, is crucial for the radicalisation of democracy, for the contestation and destabilising of established readings of the world and the power relations that performatively and affectively sustain them, and for the envisioning of doors that might open ways that allow performing them in more democratic and egalitarian ways.

6.1.1 Laclau's affective populism

As noted at the beginning of the section, Laclau and Mouffe share some of the main points on radical democracy, exploring different aspects of it after publishing Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. As mentioned, it is not possible to engage with the entirety of their work in this research project, but I will be briefly engaging with two main aspects of it. On the one hand, I will engage with Ernesto Laclau's dimension of affect in the figure of the people. This is because, given the centrality of affect and emotions for my research project, I would like to understand the way in which Laclau utilised such a concept in his own account of radical democracy and how, if at all, it can be complemented by mine. On the other hand, I will engage with Chantal Mouffe's idea of agonism, and more briefly with her use of passions. This choice has been made given the relevance that Mouffe's theory of agonism has had in further exploring contestation within the process of radicalising democracy, which has proved to be key in the research outlined in the previous chapter.

As mentioned, after Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau started building his theoretical work around the idea of hegemony in a way that he turned to explore the concepts of populism and antagonism. In "On populist reason" (2005) he starts outlining his theory of populism moving away from those theorists that consider populism to be an irrational and emotionally violent movement, therefore setting the foundations to engage with the role of affect and emotions in politics, which leads to

developing a psychoanalytic account of hegemony that considers affect to be a constitutive and central part of all identities (Eklundh, 2020: 110).

For Laclau, populism is also a rhetorical articulation, like hegemony, built through a systems of differences with no outside (Laclau, 2005:13). He argues that in populist discourse the requests of people that are not accounted for by a state or institutions become demands that can be articulated through chains of equivalences with other demands that are not articulated (Laclau, 2005: 74). In this sense, following the logic of hegemony, the demands will be articulated around empty signifiers, creating a political border which, in the case of populism, demarcates a people (whose demands are not met) and the ruling class (to which the demands are addressed). This articulation of unmet demands into a chain of equivalences that takes the form of an identification with the people is what Laclau considers populism. And this process, he argues, is inherently affective (Palestrino, 2022: 229).

When engaging with the process of hegemonic articulation needed to construct a people Laclau argues that the process of producing signification requires an act of radical investment, which is highly affective (Laclau, 2005: 71). Following Lacan, Laclau argues that there is no signification without affect (Laclau, 2005: 43), and in the case of the hegemonic articulation of different particular elements that come to be represented by an empty signifier, it is important to think not only of representation but also in terms of the Lacanian notion of jouissance (Palestrino, 2022: 231). *Jouissance*, which comes to be conceptualised as the enjoyment of something which is lost/impossible, functions as the drive of the subject. According to this, *jouissance* is transferred from the universal, to the particular objects, in a way in which the investment in such particular elements, those demands that are not met, is the source of enjoyment, of *jouissance*. In the case of populism, for Laclau, particular demands start signifying in lieu of an unachievable universality (since those demands cannot be fulfilled), bringing about the people, and locating affect at the core of the process of signification.

However, and despite the centrality that Laclau gives to affect in his theorisation of populist articulations and radical investment, he fails to provide a full theorisation of affect and its functioning in the articulatory processes and the radicalisation of

democracy (Palestrino, 2022: 23). Here, this research project can contribute to asking some questions and adding some nuances to Laclau's approach of affect and its role in the radicalisation of democracy. As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the aim is not to uncover an ontology of affect, analysing what affect is. Instead, the idea is to further understand how affect and emotions contribute to the process of radicalising democracy, the effect it has on bodies, demands. As the previous chapter showed, the role of affect and emotions is not reduced to a simple exercise of radical investment into processes of identification. In fact, the previous chapter built on three main ways in which affect contributes to the radicalisation of democracy: bringing bodies together, allowing space for contestation and conflict, and bringing forward alternatives to established structures of power.

This is clear in the case of participant 8 discussed in the previous chapter, who said how "we were all upset at these injustices(...)" (Participant 8), where we can see that the affective reading of different bodies as being upset by the situation of the world, is moving the bodies towards the same side of a porous divide that separates them from that which they are opposing, rather than just the identification with an identity. Later on during the conversation he added "I remember I was standing with my friend, who is a pro-choice activist, and we were talking to a teacher. The teacher kept telling us about how some of her students were there today, and how she was very happy about it, because they had had a complex conversation about abortion rights in the classroom some weeks ago (...) she was clearly very touched by the (activist) work that my friend did, and she said how she wished she had more time to join in this kind of work, but the precarious conditions of teachers was not allowing her to get involved as she was having to take on extra teaching in the afternoons (...) it was cathartic, we had our own stories and our own little fights but they were all finding each other in some way in that screaming (screaming "we are here, we are the feminists")and exchanging" (participant 8).

Here, it is not about them becoming invested into the demands of the feminist mobilisation (pro-choice, better conditions for teachers or better quality of sex education), nor about identifying as feminists, through the upset. In fact, participant 8 mentioned not having attended to more feminist mobilisations nor to consider himself a feminist. But rather, it is about how there is an affective reading of one

body (the teacher) and its stories, that is then sticking to another body (the pro-abortion activist) and is moving them towards participant 8. It is not because they have felt upset that they have identified with the feminist demands. In fact, we do not even know how the other participants really felt. However, through this circulation of affect, that is read by participant 8 as jumping from one body to another and manifesting through the screaming, there is a redrawing of the boundaries and an articulation of the demands and the bodies. Whereas Laclau would put the emphasis on the way that this emotion is allowing other bodies to be attached to it, this is, how through the upset several bodies get invested into feminism, the feminist mobilisation, and its demands, this model of affective politics of precarity shows how there is a system of circulation of affect that goes beyond the investment into the sign, where the circulation of emotions is already doing something by sticking to other bodies and reorienting them to each other, shaping and being shaped by these interactions.

6.1.2 Mouffe's agonism

As mentioned, Mouffe develops the work of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy in the direction of political identities, antagonism and democratic politics. She starts from a critique to Habermasian and Rawlsian accounts of politics and democracy, which she considers to be overly focused on rationality and consensus (Mouffe, 2005: 10-13). With this critique she opens up the door to her work on agonism and political passions, which will be crucial for the sake of this thesis.

In On the Political (2005), Mouffe departs from this critique of the rational and consensus-oriented character of deliberative democracy to argue that such an approach does not acknowledge the antagonism of pluralism. This is, she argues that theories of deliberative democracy do account for pluralism, but not in a way that is open to the antagonistic relationship between them. If we remember from the thesis developed in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, for Laclau and Mouffe there is an ineradicable dimension of antagonism that is constitutive of all social identities, signification and political fields.

Mouffe furthers this approach by building on Carl Schmitt's conceptualisation of antagonism that establishes the political field as a division between an *us* and a *them* (Schmitt, 1976). Contrary to Schmitt, Mouffe argues that this antagonism requires and responds to pluralism, where the different identities are indeed constructed by and constructing antagonism (Mouffe, 2000: 89). Showing that in her eyes, given the contingent character of the political, there are numerous articulations that are constantly competing to become hegemonic and partially fixate signification, there is always going to be a constant struggle to structure the political field according to a specific understanding of it, and therefore according to a specific *we* vs *them* political border. This is why, according to Mouffe, antagonism requires and creates the conditions for pluralism.

Hence, for Mouffe conflict is constitutive of and ontological to the political dimension, as it is the core of the creation of meaning, identities and hegemonies, always involving acts of power that are trying to redraw the us/them boundary, making the social open, porous and ever-changing (Mouffe, 2013). Thus, since conflict is ineradicable to the political, the goal of democratic politics cannot be to transcend or eliminate conflict, and the power relations that it entails, but rather to constitute them in a way that makes them more in line with democratic values (Mouffe, 2013). This, Mouffe argues, should become the goal of a radical and plural democracy: establishing an *us/them* distinction compatible with pluralism. Mouffe suggests that, to make this opposition between a *we* and an *other* more democratic and compatible with pluralism, it is necessary to reconsider the figure of the antagonistic other and turn it not into an enemy to be eradicated, but an adversary to whose ideas we will contest (Mouffe, 2013). This is what Chantal Mouffe calls agonism: a struggle between different adversaries that recognise themselves as such and that recognise each other as legitimate, but that compete to try to articulate a hegemony that represents their own understanding of democratic ideals.

Therefore, for Mouffe it is the practice of transforming antagonistic others into agonistic relationships that allows the radicalisation of democracy: making sure that the struggle for signification remains present and at the core of democracies and avoiding the foreclosing of democratic politics to a sole hegemonic arrangement of power relations. Mouffe's agonism thus perceives democratic politics as the setting

of institutions that allow transforming antagonistic constructions of the political into an agonistic one.

Interestingly, like Laclau, Mouffe also considers the role of affect in her conceptualisation of radical democracy. She calls it passions, and she argues that they appear at the level of identity formation. For Mouffe, who differentiates passions from emotions, the former refers to those common affects that allow constructing us/them forms of identification in the political field (Mouffe, 2022). Passions for her are also ineradicable, she argues, critiquing the rationalist theories of liberal democracy that tend to consider emotions to be incompatible with democracy. Mouffe developed this account of passions further in her last work "Towards a Green Democratic Revolution" (2022). There, she takes a psychoanalytical approach towards passions, following Freud's concept of libidinal links and Lacan's lack and, following Laclau's take on it, *jouissance*. Thus, like Laclau, she argues that passions have a key role in investment into identifications and, therefore, into the creation of us/them divides.

Following from this, Mouffe also argues that passions are central to agonistic understandings of politics and that, just like with antagonism, the task of radical and plural democracies is to transform violent passions into tamed passions, in ways that contribute to building an agonistic relationship. This is because, for Mouffe, passions are not only intrinsic to politics and ineradicable because of the role they play in identity formation, but they are also extremely mobilising. Therefore, the attempt of certain understandings of democracy to ignore and overlook the role of passions by not providing institutional channels that allow expressing those passions democratically leads to the opposite effect: violent passions that threaten democracy itself. Thus, for her, there should be institutional mechanisms in place that allow embodying such emotions in ways that are not antagonistic, that are not antidemocratic and give place to adversaries, rather than enemies.

Thus, with this, Mouffe (2022) has also considered in more detail the question of affect, and the way in which, for her affective identifications can contribute to reviving the left and agonistic struggles. Mouffe aims to highlight the role of affects in constituting political identities, questioning what makes people identify with

certain identity formations and the implications that this has for the process of radicalising democracy (Mouffe, 2022: 49). Following a psychoanalytic approach that builds on Freud, Spinoza and Lacan, she establishes two different dimensions in the process of identification, one of them being the process of affective identification. This is the process through which bodies invest themselves in identifications, in the representational signifier (Mouffe, 2022: 53). Therefore, for Mouffe it is through the affective investment in identifications and ideas that it is possible to build hegemonic struggles, thus locating the added value of affect in its possibility to allow subjects to invest themselves in process of identification with ideas, subjectivities or demands that constitute hegemonic articulations (Mouffe, 2022: 61). In this sense, it could be argued that affect moves bodies by allowing them to invest themselves in identifications that are then struggling for signification through hegemony and, ultimately, contributing to radicalise democracy.

However, as the next section will show, the concept of affective reading that I develop in this thesis differs from Mouffe's idea of affective identification. This is because, while for Mouffe affective identifications are a process that explains how there is an investment into a certain identification which ultimately contributes to the radicalisation of democracy (for example, it can explain why someone's anger might allow them to identify with feminism, and how this angry feminist identification might contribute to radicalising democracy), for me it is the affective reading that contributes to radicalising democracy by drawing that porous boundary that brings some bodies together, opposed to other objects that they want to change. This is, bodies are moved by the affective reading, rather than by the identification, and by being moved they are already contributing to the process of meaning-making and drawing antagonistic and agonistic boundaries.

This becomes clear in the example of participant 1, who mentions the incident with the mural painting in the streets of Madrid discussed in the previous chapter. She refers to being angry for being erased, and even if she is not the one personally in the mural painting, she adds that the act was like "pointing at us and then crossing our faces as if saying "you cannot be here"". Here, it is not the anger that allows the identification with the feminist body. Instead, the precarity circulating (the being open to being erased from the streets) is sticking to and through anger, anger that is

moving the body of participant 1 towards the body of all those who are painted in the mural, as well as those who painted it, and those who might also be erased in the streets. In this movement, I argue, there is already a redefinition of the boundaries of the feminist body, making her part of it by moving herself towards it through the anger, and the waythat this anger sticks to precarity.

Thus, despite my conceptualisation of affect and affecting readings as more than an element for investment into a certain signification chain like Mouffe argues, it is her affective conceptualisation of conflict and agonism that can be useful for the purpose of this thesis' argument. In fact, as the case of the trans feminist activist proved, there is indeed a big role that emotions and affect play in not only blurring the porous divide between bodies that brings them and their demands together, but also in renegotiating those porous boundaries as a consequence of conflicting affective understandings of the world that move bodies against and towards each other.

Consequently, as argued in the previous chapter, it is important to consider the dimension of conflict through affect, and the way in which conflicting affective readings resulting of bodily encounters contribute to shaping the porous divide of the feminist bodies. To put it another way, as mentioned in the previous section, affective encounters contribute to drawing an us/them political boundary by regrouping certain bodies and signs that are affectively moved by the same perceived causes, and simultaneously, those affective encounters can also move those same signs in different directions, away from each other, even if affect is still sticking to them and accumulating value. Therefore, we can think of it as affect circulating at two levels simultaneously: one that draws the porous boundaries that delimit the feminist body, and one that constitute the agonistic relationships between the signs of that feminist body through affective encounters, where there is a thread of affect that sticks to all of those bodies but in a way in which those bodies are also moved by that thread closer to some and further from others. This allows us to think of agonism and conflict beyond identity, as a moment of reorientation of bodies towards each other, in a way in which they contest the different boundaries that they build and allow for openness and for the possibility of different affective readings of the world, which come with different arrangements of power relations that structure it.

6.2 Affective readings: feeling identifications and demand

At this point, it is important to further elaborate on the idea of affective reading[28] that I started developing in Chapter four and differentiate it from processes of identification or demands developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and is picked up by Butler (2015) and Nijensohn (2019) in the following sections. When I refer to affective reading, I am referring to the process of meaning making that follows an affective encounter between bodies, objects or signs. This is, I aim to capture the way in which bodies are emotionally moved when they encounter other bodies. This, I argue, happens as a result from a process of translation that occurs when a body locates the origin of such emotion in the body that has just been encountered. A process of reading[29]. As I discussed in Chapter four with Sara Ahmed's conceptualisation of affective circulation (Ahmed, 2004), I argue that emotions arise in between bodies, but they are ascribed to one of those bodies. In that, they are read as emanating from one of them. Therefore, when bodies encounter each other, affect and emotions, there is a moment of translation, of reading, of ascribing a meaning to the emotional encounter that has just occurred, and to the way that this encounter relates with the world around it. And through this moment of reading, there is an affective movement of such body. This is, bodies are moved as a response to the

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[28] Here, like throughout the whole thesis, I use the terms affective and emotional (reading) interchangeably (see chapter four for discussion).
[29] Here, I will just note that the term reading is of special importance because in reading a text, a poem, or a piece of academic work, there are always different interpretations, different readings within the process of reading. Similarly, reading encounters (with other bodies, sings, or with the world) involves a certain indeterminancy of the reading, this is, it is never possible to predict how an encounter is going to be read, how it is going to be translated. However, despite the ambiguity, there is always a political dimension, a dimension of repetition of previous encounters, following the concept of stickiness (Ahmed, 2004) that I discussed in Chapter four. This means, affective readings are normally not completely random, but respond to a normalisation of affective encounters and the performativity behind it. In this sense, it is precisely through the process of affective reading, through which bodies abscribe meaning to an affective moment by relating it to the bodies around it, that it is possible to manage a tension between a certain level of emptiness and the accumulated meaning behind it that allows articulating feminist bodies and disrupting certain understandings, certain meanings and, ultimately, the hegemonic performativity of affective readings.

moment of reading that assigns an origin to an affective reaction to the encounter with other bodies. And it is in this movement where they are being articulated together with certain bodies, and away from others.

To put it simply, if we return to the metaphor of the wall that is constraining feminist bodies from entering democracy that I used in Chapter one, we could argue that when a body encounters that wall, and in doing so is hit by it, there is a pain that they consider to be originated in the wall (even if that pain actually originates in the encountering of the wall). This is a first moment of affective reading: walls cause pain. And in affectively reading walls like the origin of pain, the body is moved away from the wall, demonstrating a moment of affective movement. Moreover, when I might encounter another body that is also being moved away from that wall, regardless of whether we do or do not share or not the same pain, I read their movement away from said object as a movement towards me. This, ultimately means, that we are both being moved away from the wall, and that we are both in its presence to create change, even if my strategy might be to climb it and the other body's strategy might be to try to demolish it. The skin that separates my body from yours becomes more blurred the more that the skin that encounters the wall thickens, building a common skin that separates us from it.

This becomes evident, for example, in the case of participant 4, who told me she suggested changing the focus of the 8th of Match to have a " feminist spring, like a festival or a celebration after these years of being at home. I think it's important that we keep defending happiness as a right and (as) an emotion that mobilises all of us, we cannot abandon it after having been so sick these past years" (Participant 4, 2021). When I asked her to clarify why she thinks that happiness is a right and an emotion that mobilises everyone, she added "well, we all want to be happy, right? We might want different things, but in the end, we would rather be happy than have to put our time into fighting the violence that we suffer" (participant 4, 2021). I asked who is the "we" that she was referring to. "Well, all of us, the feminists in the streets, but I think everyone. We are all tired and fed up after these years, we keep seeing how things are getting worse and nobody does anything about it. So yes, feminists, but also young people who cannot afford their rent, and doctors who are

exhausted after this (the pandemic), and migrants, and pensioners… (participant 4, 2021).

Here, bodies are being moved by the affective reading of the world they would want to have. Even if those different bodies might disagree on what the specific reason behind worry and unhappiness are, there is a movement of refusal, a reorientation that looks to involve the body in a different affective reading. This is, bodies are claiming that they want to have a different emotional understanding of the word and in that wanting to be moved differently, they are already being moved. By understanding each other as desiring to be moved towards happiness, they are also rejecting their being moved away from it (whether the reason behind it might by violence, the pandemic or inequalities, etc.). In this way, when trying to be moved by and towards happiness, participant 4 (and the feminist project she is trying to build) is also engaging with their current affective reading of the world and saying: we want it to stop emotions circulating like this.

This is not to say that happiness is always a mobilising emotion capable of bringing everyone together into a harmonious political movement despite their differences and disagreements. Instead, it highlights the multi-directionality of the circulation of affect, how it is able to move bodies that might not share more than an affective movement by and away from the circulation of an emotional reading of the world. Thus, the value of happiness is to be found not in happiness itself, but in the relational process that arises when, firstly, it sticks to certain bodies, reminding them that it is possible (and desirable) to be moved otherwise. And, subsequently, when these bodies recognise each other as being moved in a way that the porous boundaries that delimit them are blurred, blending out with those of others who are also being moved and desire to be moved. Because I want to be happy , I reject the conditions of unhappiness, and I recognise an ally in those who also reject their own conditions of unhappiness.

In this sense, affective readings are different from processes of identification like those that Laclau and Mouffe suggest (1985). As argued earlier, for them, identity is the result of an articulatory practice that aims to reconfigure the social and political field in the form of hegemonic projects. Rather, I argue that it is not just

identifications that allow mobilising bodies into different political bodies but is that first moment of affective reading that moves bodies towards each other. In giving affect and emotional readings priority when understanding processes of radicalisation of democracy, it is also possible to understand how in the absence of such shared identity, feminist bodies can be tied together. Going back to the previous metaphor of feminist bodies that encounter a wall, it is not through the articulation of a common identity between both bodies that represents a plurality of demands opposed to the wall or demonstrates that it is possible to build a divide the radicalises democracy. Instead it is the fact that those bodies are sharing an affective understanding of the wall (being moved away from it). Returning to the example of participant 4 mentioned earlier, it is not just about the articulation of a common identity (a "we" of feminists, young people, doctors, migrants and pensioners), but the reading of the world as a place of unhappiness, and the process of recognising that our bodies are being moved away from that undesired unhappiness, and towards happiness instead.

This is not to say that identity and processes of articulation are not necessary or irrelevant. In fact, I recognise the importance of identification to form the subjects of radical democracy. However, I argue that when confronted with feminist mobilisations like those I engaged with in Chapter 5, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of radicalisation of democracy, and their focus on the linguistic construction of identities, is not enough to fully capture the affective dimension that contributes to tying the feminist bodies together.

Similarly, affective readings are not to be conflated with demands or claims. This is because, even if through an affective reading there is a possibility to constitute such a claim, as the previous chapter argued, the tying of the feminist bodies does not fall on that which is being claimed, articulated around that demand that is being put forward or against that which it opposes, but rather on the affective understanding that bodies are being simultaneously moved in similar ways and that, in that movement, there is a wanting to be moved otherwise.

In other words, because we are both moved towards each other, we are understanding each other as being part of the same body. This does not mean that

there are no claims or demands being put forward, but rather that the affective reading that happens allows competing demands to be brought together. Returning to the metaphor of the feminist body that encounters a wall, I argue that the blurring of porous divides and the thickening of feminist skin does not necessarily happen around the demand to demolish the wall or to go around it, it is not even about the claim that there is a wall that they are encountering, but rather about how they are affectively reading the moving away from the wall as a shared movement, and this is allowing formulating the different, competing, conflicting and even contradictory demands in a way that does not compromise the boundaries built. This, I argue, allows approaching the process of radicalisation of democracy in a way in which feminist bodies can be tied together in the absence of a common shared identity or demands, while also accounting for affect and the body.

6.3 Judith Butler: radical democracy as assembling cultural translations

Although, with her first writings, Butler did not explicitly reference radical democracy or radical democratic thinking too often, they have been labelled as a radical democrat author for the way in which they have conceived and explored political change as subversion of apparently universal although contingent socio-political significations. Moreover, their later writings (namely "Assembly" (2015), and the "Force of non-violence" (2020), have dived deeper into radical democratic thinking. Given the influence that they have had in the present work, and the central role that the body plays in her account of radical democratic change, I have decided to engage with Judith Butler in the following section.

In general terms, Butler's radical democracy privileges the disruptive character of democracies and understands the radicalisation of democracy not as an alternative to current democracies or as an end-goal, but rather as a process of constant contestation of the key principles of liberal democracies (such as equality, freedom or justice, and the power relations that are intrinsic to them and to our societies (Lloyd, 2007: 148). In this sense, Butler highlights the disruptive character of radical democracy and argues that the radical transformation of societies requires the expansion of those key principles and categories of democracies to make them more

inclusive. Thus, the radicalisation of democracy is about committing to disrupting those categories and the norms that define them. But how does this disruption of what Laclau and Mouffe called hegemony happen according to Butler?

It can be argued that Butler's conceptualisation of radical democracy has been highly influenced by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and in fact, it can be considered a critique of their theory of radical democracy (Lloyd, 2009: 33). In "Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left", Butler questions their conceptualisation of identification and "identity projects" (Butler, 2000: 273) privileging lack as the a priori condition for the constitution of new social movements (Butler, 2000: 272). This is, they argue that the process of radicalisation of democracy might need to critically engage with the idea of new social movements as articulated by processes of identification that find their origin in a constitutive lack. This is not to say that Butler disregards the role of new social movements in the radicalisation of democracy, or the importance of psychoanalysis to understand processes of identification, but that they question whether all those so-called new social movements are indeed constituted by such common identificatory processes that start from lack. In other words, does lack constitute the a priori condition through which new social movements are articulated, ultimately allowing to radicalise democracy?

Instead, Butler takes on Laclau's theorisation of the universal to build her conceptualisation of radical democracy and political transformation (Lloyd, 2009: 35). Rethinking Laclau and Mouffe´s hegemony, Butler argues that a radical democratic transformation of society requires an open-ended universal that does not fully translate to any of its particular significances, since this would mean fore-closing the possibility for contestation by new potentialities. To put it in their words, "the point of hegemony on which we might concur is precisely the ideal of a possibility that exceeds every attempt at a final realization, one which gains its vitality precisely from its non-coincidence with any present reality. What makes this not coincidence vital is its capacity to open up new fields of possibility" (Butler, 2000: 162). Thus, we can start to understand that for Butler the radicalisation of democracy is less about the processes of identification and has more to do with the competing realities that open up political thinking and acting through that

contestation of universals (Butler, 2000: 162). It therefore becomes evident that contestation and disagreement between universals are intrinsic to the radicalisation of democracy, making radical democracy an open-ended process sustained by its own unattainability.

It is important to note at this point that, however, Butler differs from Laclau (and Mouffe) in her conceptualisation of universality (Lloyd, 2009: 34). Firstly, because Butler considers the universal to be culturally mediated and shaped by the practices that enact it - one could argue performative (Butler, 2000:35), thus distancing themselves from the conception of emptiness of Laclau (Butler, 2000: 29). Secondly, because they not agree with Laclau's a priori distinction between the universal and the particular. As argued in the previous section, Laclau and Mouffe argue that several particular identifications and claims compete to incarnate the universal, without equating themselves to it, establishing a hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe: 1985). Though this they aim to relate themselves as particular claims to the one that is universal, trying to equate themselves with them.

Butler, however, does not agree that it is possible to distinguish between the universal and several particular claims, since it leads to a division between "modes of resistance that are particular and those that successfully make the claim to universality" (Butler, 2000: 165). Instead, they argue that there are different visions of universality that clash within the particulars. This includes the suggestion that the universal is not separate from and prior to the particular, but indeed there is universality found in the particularity of such movements (Butler, 2000: 165). To argue this, Butler builds on Zerilli's examination of Scott's revisiting of post-revolutionary French Feminism (Butler, 2000: 33; Zerilli, 1998).

Scott shows that feminists in post-revolutionary France had to ask for their rights claiming both the universality of such rights and the particularity of their identity and sexual difference. Thus, following Scott, both Zerilli and Butler argue that Laclau´s concept of universality is to be rethought since it is not possible to remove a universal claim from particularity. In other words, some struggles are not about reincarnating the universal bringing into it the particularities of the movement as a claim, but rather about simultaneously bringing a new universality that is to be found

within those particularities. This blurs the line between power and resistance, between a universal and competing particularities that succeed or fail to incarnate that universality. This is not to say that Butler rejects the distinction between a hegemonic universal and particularities, but rather that they question the incompatibility between the two categories (Lloyd, 2009: 34), conceiving a world of profound pluralisation where the contestation occurs between different particular cultural universals, rather than a sole universal and different particulars.

This conceptualisation of the universal is key to understanding what Butler considers to be crucial to the process of radicalisation of democracy: practices of cultural translation (Butler, 2000: 168). Following Balibar, when the same terms or concepts have different meanings in different places, cultural translation allows resolving such conflict through the rethinking of the assumptions of each side, confronting their own cultural limitations on their concepts, and opening themselves up to other interpretations. Similarly, Butler believes that cultural translation between competing universalities is the best way to articulate "the universal claims intrinsic to these particular movements (...) in the context of a translative project (...)in which the terms in question are not simply redescribed by a dominant discourse" (Butler, 2000: 168).

It is important to remember that, as mentioned at the beginning of the section, for Butler the radicalisation of democracy is aimed at a more equalitarian and encompassing understanding of the principles of democracy. This is, the aim of this contestation is for the competing universals to become more all-encompassing, allowing the expansion of the universal understanding of a liveable life and the norms behind it (Lloyd, 2007: 149). In order to allow for this expansion of the universals, Butler argues, it is crucial to identify the exclusions and contingencies in them. This is, new universals come into being precisely when their limits and contradictions are challenged, revealing an open-ended and expanding alternative universal. Cultural translation occurs when contrasting universal reveal each other's' limits and exclusions.

This differs from Laclau and Mouffe's logic of articulation which, as pointed out in the previous section, relies on the existence of a nodal point and an antagonistic

other that generate radical investment and a chain of equivalences that struggles for hegemony over political signification. Cultural translation is not meant to come up with an alternative universal resulting from the mix of the competing universalities, nor to just expand it by including new particular universalities or by imposing a new view of the universal. Instead, it is about the "encounter between competing conceptions of the universal, articulated in different languages, that produces a transformation in how the universal is thought" (Lloyd, 2009: 37). It shall be noted that here, different languages do not necessarily refer to different dialects, but to different conceptual and linguistic configurations. Therefore, through the cultural translation of competing universalities, which allows evidencing the limits of such universalities, it is possible to destabilise and subvert them, opening up more space for an all-encompassing universal and less exclusionary democratic principles.

Thus, according to Butler, when certain movements pose specific demands of the universal, they are indeed partaking of this cultural translation by claiming something that they are excluded from. In this moment of assertion without legitimacy it is possible to destabilise that same legitimacy, exposing a performative contradiction that further opens up the universal, by blurring the borders of such demand and exposing its exclusions. This process of cultural translation is thus highly tied in with the disruption of norms since, through the act of claiming a universal that we are excluded from and thus exposing such exclusion, it is possible to question and subvert the norms that regulate that universal, that determine who is part of it, whose life counts (Butler, 2004: 13). Consequently, by disrupting those norms that are accepted, it is possible to allow spaces to rethink what other norms are possible in a way that is less exclusionary, in a way that radicalises democracy.

Butler goes on to argue that those competing claims of universal particularities are not just linguistic and spoken claims, but also bodily ones (Butler, 2000). They further develops this point in "Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly" (2015). Chapter three already engaged with this book, however, for the sake of the argument here, it is important to highlight that bodies play an important role in Butler's theory of radical democracy. This is because they argue that bodies that are acting in concert in mobilisations, that are appearing, are also making a claim to appearing (Butler, 2015). In this sense, they are contesting the limits of a particular

universality with their own, one that says that their lives also deserve to be liveable, creating those conditions of liveability. Hence, there is a bodily practice of cultural translation where this performativity that exposes their precarity is also exposing the limits of a certain articulation of the universal, further contributing to the radicalisation of democracy.

Like Butler's approach, this research project points in the direction of processes of radicalisation of democracy that account for dimensions like the body. This is not to say that identities are not present or that they do not play a role in the radicalisation of democracy. Instead, the argument following the idea of affective reading developed in the previous section, is that the processes of identification are not the only dimension to be considered in process of radicalisation of democracy, like Laclau and Mouffe state. This becomes evident with the interviews in the previous chapter, where there is a strong emphasis on affective and emotional encounters, as well as on the possibilities of alternative readings of the world, rather than on identities.

While Butler moves on to suggest alternative practices of cultural translation that engage with norms through performativity and the assembly of precarious bodies as a way to radicalise democracy, she fails to engage with the role of affect and emotions in these processes of cultural translations. This is, even if Butler does not claim that this is a strictly rational process (and she is indeed quite far from this argument), they do not consider how affect or emotions might allow understanding the way in which precarity circulates and engages with certain norms, signs, bodies or demands, bringing them together, and sustaining certain hegemonic readings of the world, as well as the possibility to disrupt them and think of power configurations differently.

In overlooking such emotional and affective dimension, Butler does not account for the level of affective translation involved in the process of affective reading that I develop: the translation of emotional encounters into emotional readings of the world and into the causes behind such emotional readings, that lead to the redrawing of the porous boundaries between bodies, and between collectives. This outlines how emotional encounters spark certain understanding of other bodies, demands or

identities as sharing an understanding of the world, and a will to transform it. This becomes evident if we go back to the case of participant 9, and how her emotional encounter with her grandmother immediately translated into the understanding of a shared bond, a shared position towards the world and towards that which they fight for or against. Here, affect travels, it circulates between signs, bodies, demands and histories of previous and future possible encounters in a way that allows moving some bodies towards each other, while moving them away from others. And, simultaneously, it opens up the possibility to question certain power arrangements: if we are both angry, it means we are struggling against something, and it means we are on the same team to change it. Thus, this affective blurring of the skin between bodies that are reading each other as being on the same side, and the attempt to thicken that skin that separates them from that which they oppose, allows understanding how of feminist bodies come to be tied together, as well as how they are articulated as opposed to that which they aim to change.

Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the interaction between participants 9 and 10 also shows how precarity circulates contributing to this redrawing of the porous boundaries. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is an unequal distribution of vulnerability that is circulating, and that is what is allowing affect to stick. In this sense, when the grandmother makes reference to understanding the pain that they (feminists) suffer, she is also making reference to the fact that such violence is not the same for everyone, but that only some bodies are open to live it. This understanding that some bodies are more open to living this violence, that some lives are more valuable than others is present, even if it is not explicit, and it is affective. There is a pain that is shared, not by everyone, by those who precarity is sticking to. And there is a pain tht is being read as understood by those who also experience such precarity. The real origin of the pain, or whether the pain is felt and experience by all, is irrelevant. What matters here is that there is a reading of bodies sharing a pain that they are oposing, and in that there is a movement towards each other. Here, understanding precarity allows understanding how affect, pain, the understanding of pain, is circulating and sticking: it is not about the emotion per se, but about what the emotion does, moving the bodies, who want to not be moved by precarity anymore. Thus, it is not just the affective reading of the encounter that

moves bodies blurring the boundaries of the feminist bodies, but also the precarity that is circulating and is allowing for those emotions to stick.

In other words, turning attention to affect and its circulation, as I suggest to do in this thesis, offers a tool to understand the way in which different bodies that are performatively gathering in the street contribute to radicalise democracy by building contingent feminist bodies that are articulated around affective readings of the world, and the way in which this articulation of boundaries and skins between bodies allows disrupting the universal through an alternative particular. This can better be understood by returning to Butler's argument for a shared precarity as the foundation for assembling bodies that challenge norms, values and power structures and therefore contributing to radicalising democracy and consider its affective dimension. As argued in Chapter four, following the understanding of affect as circulating, and the role of affective translation in moving bodies together and recreating political boundaries, I would argue that is not the precarity per se that allows for bodies to gather in the street. Instead, it is the shared emotional understanding of such precarity, in that, it is the fact that there is an affective encounter in which different bodies are affectively moved and locate the cause of that movement in precarity, and the way that such affective encounters thus allow mobilising bodies with respect to each other, acting as a common thread. For example, when analysing Territorio Doméstico's catwalk of precarity, the role of affect and emotions in translating such precarity was evident: some of the performers were afraid, others ashamed, others excited. However, in the end, they all encountered each other affectively on that catwalk and translated that affective encounter into a reading of the world, one that came with a position within power structures that they were relegated to, and that they understood and addressed through the lens of precarity: a precarity that is affective and that circulates, acting as a place of encounter of different affective flows, affectively sticking to different bodies, demands and realities and in doing so bringing them together.

This demonstrates that following the stickiness of affect allows better understanding the way in which different particulars are mobilised to disrupt a given universal, and to try to form an alternative one in their being mobilised.

Therefore, it could be argued that Butler's conceptualisation of radical democracy and performatively assembling trough precarity could benefit from incorporating a consideration of affect and emotions. This would allow further enquiring into the affective dimension of precarity, in the way in which the unequal distribution of precarity is understood affectively, and how those emotional readings move bodies around precarity, towards and against it. In doing so, it would be possible to further enquire into the process of articulation, questioning what bodies affect sticks to, which ones it slips through, which are mobilised and how many remain unmoved, to better understand the way in which bodies gather in the street and how the porous boundaries that delimit feminist bodies and separate them from that which they are aiming to change are (re)generated.

6.4 New (affective?) readings of radical democracy: Malena Nijensohn

After engaging with Laclau's, Mouffe's and Butler's conceptualisations of radical democracy, this section moves on to engage with the work of Malena Nijensohn (2019). She builds on the framework of radical democracy to engage with the feminist mobilisations Ni Una Menos. What is interesting about their approach is that, even if she does not consider herself to be a radical democratic theorist, nor does she explicitly develop her own theory of radical democracy, she contributes to the debate on radical democracy when thinking political mobilisation from it. Through this, she revisits theories and theorists of radical democracy by putting them into conversation with current feminist mobilisations.

Malena Nijensohn also builds on radical democracy to analyse contemporary social mobilisations, in her case feminism. Following Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy (1985) she develops the concept of radical and plural feminism (Nijensohn, 2022: 135), as a feminism that "articulates a plurality of demands in equivalential chains to create a counter-hegemony that struggles against neoliberalism" (Nijensohn, 2022: 135). For this, she believes that this project should be articulated around the idea of a shared vulnerability. It is important to note here that articulation, thus, becomes central to comprehending the way in which Nijensohn understands a radical and plural feminism. She argues that it is through

these practices aimed at building consensus and destabilising it, that the practices of struggle for hegemony, for signification and "common sense" are precisely what makes it possible to constitute feminism as a matter of radical and plural democratic politics.

More interestingly, she adds that we shall recognise that this plurality is mediated by the logic of hegemony. Here, she follows Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) logic of hegemony in arguing that the mainstream version of feminism that we take to be right or hegemonic, is nothing but a naturalisation of a contingent articulation of the tension between difference and equivalence, which settle into the construction of a particular political identity (Nijensohn, 2019: 19). Accordingly, Nijensohn argues that the feminist articulation that becomes hegemonic is always contingent and emerges as the consequence of a set of struggles for signification and articulations between different formulations of feminism that might even be opposed in certain contexts.

Hence, Nijensohn argues for a radicalisation of democracy where there is a level of disruption that occurs from the performativity of the right to appear -with the gathering and assembly of bodies in the street that are defying neoliberalism and the precarity ascribed to their bodies-, and also a process of articulation of their plural demands in a chain of equivalence (Nijensohn, 2022: 146). It is this process of articulation of plural demands against neoliberalism where Nijensohn argues that it is possible to build a "counter-hegemonic bloc" (Nijensohn, 2022: 146) that contributes to radicalising democracy.

Nijensohn does not follow autonomist accounts of feminist mobilisations that conceive feminism as alliances that do not require hegemonic processes of mediation to constitute alternatives to current power relations (like Gago, 2019 - Chapter 2). Instead she emphasises the importance of hegemonic articulation and the struggles for resignification as a central part of the street politics of feminism (Nijensohn, 2022:144). Hence, for her there is a gathering of plural struggles in the street, with multiple bodies, demands and identities that are bringing about their rights by appearing and therefore contesting the neoliberal distribution of precarity, fighting the value ascribed to their life through performativity. And this performative

disruption of precarity is therefore followed by a process of hegemonic articulation, of building a counter-hegemony to neoliberalism, where antagonism is constitutive and irreducible and builds a political border against which the plural demands are articulated (Nijensohn, 2022: 145).

Interestingly, and contrary to Laclau and Mouffe's account of hegemony, Nijensohn does not believe that the plural bodies that gather in the street constitute or give place to a shared political subject (Nijensohn, 2022: 137). Echoing Butler, she believes that a common identification cannot serve as a foundation for the formulation of feminisms, since this would mean that feminism is producing the subject that it is trying to get emancipated from. Instead, she believes that the starting point for a radical and plural feminism must be that of a shared vulnerability, a shared precarity (Nijensohn, 2019: 55). Her understanding is that that precarity is a locus of resistance and adds that it is the condition that allows resistance to emerge and be built in the first place.

Therefore, Nijensohn argues that a shared vulnerability is crucial to build a radical and transformative feminism, since it is through it that it is possible to find ways to articulate ourselves with each other in a society that will never find reconciliation. Thus, Nijensohn understands that articulation is central and crucial for political practice, as it allows mediating between the logics of equality and difference, and building shared significations and common sense that are presented as universal but also always contingent, precarious, and threatened by their constitutive antagonism that both enables them and challenges them (Nijensohn, 2019: 29). Consequently, she argues that articulation on the basis of precarity, and opposed to neoliberalism is crucial to building a radical and plural feminism to radicalise democracy.

In this sense, she believes that the dispute over meaning of the political action of those bodies that are congregating is indeed creating the space for a hegemonic struggle (Nijensohn, 2022: 137). Hence, for Nijensohn, Ni Una Menos, and feminist mobilisations more widely, contribute to radicalising democracy through a struggle for signification where the different demands gather around a nodal point that articulates a chain of equivalence, making that nodal point signify beyond its original meaning. Interestingly, this signifier is not referring to an identity but to one demand,

ni una menos, not one woman less: a particular demand to end femicides becomes, according to Nijensohn, a meeting point for a plurality of demands that oppose neoliberalism, a counter-hegemony to neoliberal logic (Nijensohn, 2022: 146).

In other words, for Nijensohn, feminism contributes to the radicalisation of democracy through the articulation of demands opposed to neoliberalism and performative acts of assembling that contribute to "demonstrating (and therefore enacting) the type of society that the people want to create" (Nijensohn, 2022: 138). It could be argued that Nijensohn tries to bring together Butler's precarity and assembly with Laclau's and Mouffe's hegemony. Her approach is very relevant to the research of this project, since it also engages with feminism and emphasises the importance of the body and precarity in the process of radicalising democracy. Moreover, Nijensohn's approach considers hegemonic articulation as a crucial part for radicalising democracy, which this research project also does.

It is true that given the scope of this research project the focus has not been so much on the way that the affective politics of precarity contribute to the negotiation of the hegemonic articulatory process, but rather how they contribute to disrupting and deepening democracy as a whole. However, returning to the performances of Territorio Doméstico, it becomes evident how different elements and demands come together in the representation of each of the models walking down the catwalk: anti-racism, migration laws, labor law, domestic work, feminised tasks, etc. They are all embodied by each of the models, who are simultaneously offering an affective reading of the current hegemonic order (one where these realities are present), and pointing towards an affective reading of an alternative hegemonic order (one where these realities are ridiculous to be considered a possibility).

When, for instance, one of the performer hides scared from the police, that fear is sticking to the bodies in a way that highlights and brings about the precarity of the situation of undocumented workers, and that travels to the feeling of disappointment when another performer is denied holidays. Here, affect works in silent ways, weaving the different realities together, articulating them, but also their implicit demands. And reorienting bodies in a way that the discomfort to fit in the reality that they are in is evident for those who are watching. As mentioned in the previous

chapter, by performing these realities in a catwalk, there is a moment of dissonance that exposes the reality that these bodies are experiencing, the way that they are being moved (or limited in their movement by hiding from the police or not being able to travel on holidays), and they are exposing that they would want to be moved otherwise. In this sense, it could be argued that there is a moment of articulation of different struggles embodied in the performers through the way that affect is sticking to the different struggles and to the way that bodies are moving, but also through the way that they are pointingat alternative ways how they would like to be affectively read. Whether this alternative articulation of the hegemonic order could become hegemonic is a discussion that would require additional research. However, what is evident is that in this process of affectively reading bodies, and the way that they move, there is a process of articulation of demands that disrupts and deepens democracies.

Nijensohn emphasises that it is important to remember that, if we want this feminist articulation to be radically democratic it must consider two aspects. First, that of antagonism. She argues that a radically democratic feminism must define itself in opposition to the neoliberal project that produces the conditions that threaten the liveability of their lives (and which paradoxically enables them to articulate with each other). Secondly, she argues that it is important that this antagonistic articulation is done in relation to equality, having as a central demand the call for a less differential distribution of precarity (Nijensohn, 2019: 106). Thus, for Nijensohn, a radically[30] plural feminism is a feminism built on a constitutive pluralism that contributes to a radicalisation of democracy, understood as the construction of a counter-hegemonic project to neoliberalism that articulates the differences of this pluralism into equivalences to build a political 'we' (Nijensohn, 2019: 18), making the antagonistic other a central part of her understanding of radicalisation of democracy.

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[30] It is important to note here that when she defines this feminism as radical, she does not refer to the radical feminism that emerged in the US in the 70s, nor to the current interpretations of radical feminism and its link to transphobia or anti-sex work movements. Instead, she insists that the dimension of radicality relates to the formulation of this type of feminism as one that is opposed to the neoliberal order and aims to radicalise democracy.

However, if we refer back to my research in the previous chapter, it becomes evident that there is no one single antagonistic other, like neoliberalism in Nijensohn's theory, that allows having a hegemonic articulation à la Laclau and Mouffe. This is clear when remembering the conversation with participant 8, who had never been part of the feminist movement before attending one of the mobilisations of the 8th of March, but still described how he was moved by it. He suggested that "If I'm honest with you, even if I'm a bit embarrassed to admit it, I don't think I consider myself a feminist yet, even after the march. I think I still have a lot to learn and to understand. But still, it was surprising how on that day it felt as if we were fighting for the same thing and we were all angry and upset about our own different things but together" (Participant 8, 2021). From this quote we can deduce that, despite the difference demands, identities, and antagonistic others, there was still a shared emotional reading of the world: the world made them angry and upset.

Participant 8 read the shared anger as a shared understanding of the world, one that is mobilising and that allows different bodies to gather opening up the possibility that the world could and should be otherwise, allowing for the different demands to be articulated, not on the basis of a common antagonistic other, but on the shared emotional reading of a hegemonic order, an established universal, which allows articulating what Nijensohn calls a radical and plural feminism.

Participant 8's opinion of his experience captures Nijensohnn's theory, he added, "I had never been involved in the feminist movement, and I haven't really been involved in it after either. But on that day I wouldn't stop singing "here we are, we are feminists", it felt good" (Participant 8, 2021).

This articulation of bodies and demands around a shared affective reading of the world reorients those same bodies and demands towards each other and away from that which they perceive to be the cause behind such affective reading. And it does so through the questioning of the current emotional understanding of the world. This is, the perception of a shared emotion that brings the bodies and demands together allows, not only the getting together, but also the interrogation of the universality and hegemony behind that emotional reading of the world. Why is this making us angry? And how can it make us feel in a different way? This means that, if we look

back to the research of the previous chapter, it is not necessary to have such an antagonistic other against which the demands are articulated, but it seems enough to have a shared emotional reading of the world, one that highlights that the world could indeed be otherwise, and that thus moves us together.

This is not to say that there is no dimension of antagonism and hegemony, or that there is not one antagonist other in some cases. I side with Nijensohn when she argues that there is a necessary mediation of hegemony in the process of radicalising democracy. And furthermore, my argument is that there are shared emotional readings of the world that, in the absence of or in addition to that antagonism, also allows bringing bodies together and articulating different demands into a same movement. My claim is also not that there is an affective reaction that precedes articulation or the process of identifying a common antagonistic other, as if bodies "felt" against something before defining what that something that we are against is. I understand the process of articulation as one where affect and emotions play a key role in both questioning hegemonic understandings of the world and drawing the boundaries between bodies and demands, bringing some of them together and some others apart. I argue that, it is precisely in this redrawing of the porous affective bodies of the feminist body (and its bodies and demands) that feminism contributes to (affectively) radicalising democracy: opening up the possibility to affectively read differently and bringing forward the demands to do so; questioning the current arrangement of power relations and the affective encounters that arise from it, while bringing forward alternative emotional encounters that redefine such power relations.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the way in which research on feminist mobilisations contributes to a rethinking of the radicalisation of democracy. By engaging with some of the main exponents of the theories of radical democracy, like Laclau, Mouffe and Butler, as well as with recent re-interpretations of those theories that relate them to the current political situation, such as Nijensohn, this chapter argued that the feminist mobilisations of Spain contribute to rethinking radical democracy

through an affective perspective. It argued that such affective reading of mobilisations and radical democracy allowed thinking of political articulation of collective mobilisations beyond the concept of identity, like Laclau and Mouffe, and precarity, like Butler. This did not mean that those concepts are not present, but that the affective circulation works as an articulating tie that allows bringing together signs, bodies and demands, while allowing space for their particularity and giving space for conflict and contestations. Moreover, the chapter argues that, like Laclau and Mouffe, this affective reading of radical democracy allows accounting for political boundaries that bring forward a continuous struggle to redefine what the world could look like.

Conclusion: towards an affective politics of the radicalisation of democracy

This thesis has thus been concerned with two main questions: *how do feminist mobilisations contribute to radicalising democracy? And, what is the role of bodies and affect in it?* By building on the literature that tends towards democratic tradition with feminist curiosity, which I understand following Ahmed's call to "make everything into something that is questionable" (Ahmed, 2017:2) and putting it in conversation with empirical research on the feminist mobilisations of Spain since 2018, the thesis builds a model of affective politics of precarity that, building on the idea of affective readings, argues for a process of radicalisation of democracy that allows tying feminist bodies together in the absence of a shared identity and demand through the blurring of the porous divide between bodies, while simultaneously thickening the skin that separates them from those things that they oppose, and allowing for a certain level of openness through contestation.

In order to do this, the first chapter engaged with feminists of difference, and their approach to democracy through the horizon of women as a subject that requires a widening of democratic politics. In analysing the work of Carole Pateman (1989), Iris Young (1990) and Jean B. Elshtain's (1981), the chapter argues that their unitary understanding of the category women as a foundational subject of feminism, and their lack of consideration of conflict, not only risks the reification of power relations within feminist politics through the homogenisation of women, but also furthers exclusions within democratic practice.

Therefore, in aiming to engage with feminist approaches towards democracy that move away from such horizon and recognise the plurality in feminism and the ineradicability of conflict, needed to ensuring openness, the thesis engages with what I call agonistic feminists (Honig1994; Zerilli, 2005; Brown, 1995; Fraser, 1996b; Weeks, 1998; Gago, 2019; Palop, 2019; di Marco, 2019) in trying to answer *how is it possible to bring about and tie together feminist bodies in the absence of shared identities and demands?*.

Nevertheless, I argue that their lack of consideration of emotions and the body is problematic, and risks reproducing the exclusions that they are trying to uncover with their move away from unitary identities. Thus, in asking '*where are the bodies and their emotions in feminist mobilisations and the radicalisation of democracy?*', the thesis aims to disrupt and deepen democratic tradition in a way that dismantles the body/mind divide. For this, Chapters three and four engage with feminist theorists that tend towards the body (de Beauvoir, 1949; Ortega, 2016; Butler, 2015; Sabsay, 2016), and affect and emotions (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011) to build a model of affective politics of precarity around the idea of emotional reading, and the way in which it allows articulating bodies by the affective movement that redraw the porous boundaries of the feminist bodies. This model of affective politics of precarity that builds on the concept of affective readings, allows further understanding to the way in which feminist mobilisations contribute to disrupting democracy and the unequal distribution of precarity, while at the same time ensuring a certain degree of openness by pointing towards the possibility that the world that they are confronting could also be different.

Chapter five thus approaches the empirical research on feminist mobilisations in Spain since 2018 from this model of affective politics of precarity. In doing so, it builds a conversation that brings together instances from interviews, social media interventions and activist performances to analyse how affective politics can tie feminist bodies together in the absence of a shared identity, while simultaneously allowing processes of affective and embodied articulation that redraw the boundaries of the feminist bodies and contribute to openness through contestation and the envisioning of possible alternative affectives of the world.

Ultimately, Chapter six returns to the main question posed at the beginning of this thesis, and that has been guiding this research: how, if at all, does the model of affective politics of precarity found in feminist mobilisations contribute to radicalising democracy? Engaging with three different accounts of radicalisation of democracy (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Butler, 2015; Nijensohn, 2019), the chapter outlines the process of affective reading and the way in which it differs from all these approaches. In putting forward this model of affective politics of precarity through affective readings, and reading it together with the three aforementioned

approaches, the thesis ultimately argues that, when confronted with feminist mobilisations like the ones analysed, theories of radicalisation of democracy and their accounts of processes of identification or performative claim-making fall short in engaging with the process of radicalisation of democracy. A consideration of the role of emotions, precarity and the body, however, would allow understanding the way in which such feminist mobilisations contribute to disrupting the understanding of the world and, in doing so, open the door to the possibility of the world being different, ensuring openness in a way that deepens and further radicalises democracy.

APPENDIX 1

Guiding questions for unstructured interviews:

- Have you ever taken part of a feminist mobilisation? What moved you to take part of such mobilisation?/What stopped you?
- How would you describe being part of such feminist mobilisation? How did it feel?
- Why do you think feminist mobilisations like the one you attended or the ones of the 8th of March are important?
- How do you think the pandemic affected feminist organising after feminist mobilisations were banned in some parts of Spain?
- Have you been involved in feminist mobilisations or in any way of feminist organising after? Why?
- What do you feel brings you together with other *compañeras*[31]? And apart?
- Can you think of a moment when feminist mobilisations/your feminist organising has brought you together with people you wouldn't usually come together with? How did that feel?
- Do you consider yourself a feminist? What does this mean to you? How does it feel?
- How would you describe your relationship to feminist activism? Has this evolved, why?
- What is something that you feel strongly about your feminist activism (something that has happened to you/ something that pushes you to keep your commitment to your activism…)?
- How do you think feminist mobilisation have changed the way you see your world/activism/feminism?
- What is one thing that you take home with you after feminist mobilisations?
- What is something that you would want those who have never been part of a feminist mobilisation/feminist organising/activism know about it?

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[31] The choice of the term *compañeras* is intentional. It is very commonly used amongst feminist activist in Spain and does not make any direct reference to whether the participants identify, or not, as feminists.

- How would you change feminist mobilisations/activism if you could?

- Do you think feminist mobilisations can contribute to change in any way? How?

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