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**Let's Win Madrid: Radical Democracy**  
**and Prefigurative Constitutionality in the**  
**New Municipalism**

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Law

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## Declaration

The thesis is entirely the author's own work. Its contents have not previously been published, and the thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

## Abstract

The thesis proposes *prefigurative constitutionality* as a novel approach to the production of constitutional and political theory and the study of non-state political actors in the context of strategies for radical democracy. Prefigurative constitutionality requires a bespoke understanding of prefiguration itself, as a transversal complex of types and functions of political action, applicable far beyond the limits of ‘prefigurative politics’ narrowly conceived. It opens constitutional theory to the constitutive, self-valorising practices of movements and parties, discovering in their prefigurative constitutional practices both implicit critiques of mainstream constitutionalism, and emergent constitutional models of future democracies to come. It poses the vital challenge for prefigurative practices to recognise and refine their constitutional practices. It reflects back onto questions of methodology, demanding a novel adaptation of grounded theory methods within a critical theoretical framework. The prefigurative-constitutional lens is here applied to the experience of ‘new municipalism’ in Madrid, from its roots in the 15M movement, to the separate constitution of municipalist platform Ganemos Madrid, left populist party Podemos, and their attempted confluence in Ahora Madrid, the formation that would ultimately contest and win Madrid’s 2015 municipal election. Reading Ganemos’ *asambleario* constitutionality through the work of Antonio Negri, and Podemos’ populist constitutionality through the work of Ernesto Laclau, reveals novel constitutional models as well as offering deeper insight into the logics of their respective political strategies. Simultaneously, the key concepts of prefiguration and hegemony are critically developed. In seeking to explain the weakness of Ahora Madrid’s constitution, the concept of leadership becomes crucial. Beyond its explanatory function, leadership also constructs the theoretical ground on which prefiguration and hegemony, Negri and Laclau, Ganemos and Podemos all most productively intersect. The analysis culminates in the discover of prefiguration and hegemony’s complementarity, and the need for their confluence in a unified theory.



## Introduction

The possibility of victory changes everything. Aspirations for radical democracy have long languished in the margins of world politics, tied to the fate of the Left and its continual defeat; and few nations feel that legacy more viscerally than Spain.

I have defeat tattooed in my DNA. My great-uncle was shot dead. My grandfather was given the death sentence and spent five years in jail. My grandmothers suffered the humiliation of those defeated in the Civil War. My father was put in jail. My mother was politically active in the underground. It bothers me enormously to lose, I can't stand it. And I've spent many years, with some friends, devoting almost all of our political activity to thinking about how we can win.<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by the remarkably successful movement-party dynamics of Latin America's 'pink tide', Pablo Iglesias, alongside fellow academics in the political science department of Complutense University and his collaborators at the political television show *La Tuerka*, saw their opportunity in the aftermath of the Spanish 15M movement.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 2011, the significance of 15M can barely be overstated. Much more than the Occupy movement it inspired, 15M gained astonishingly transversal popularity for its critique of the duopolistic, neoliberal settlement of Spanish politics that had lasted largely unchanged since the transition to democracy in 1978, engaging huge numbers across the country in physical protest, social media activism, and face to face deliberation in open, horizontally organised assemblies.<sup>3</sup> 15M tore an immense rupture in Spain's political status quo, shattering the two party system and opening up a route for new electoral projects at both the national and municipal scale.

In forming the national party Podemos ('We Can'), Iglesias et al emphasised the populist aspects of 15M: the discourse of citizenism, the binary antagonism between the people and the corrupt political elite, the unifying symbol of the Spanish republican flag.<sup>4</sup> However, this was not the only plausible reading. Spain saw another project emerge from those same debates over electoralism held during the comedown from the rebellious high of 15M. This project tended to attract those who saw 15M not as a populist moment but as a prefigurative moment. In 15M's calls

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<sup>1</sup> Pablo Iglesias, cited in Hancox 2015c.

<sup>2</sup> Of those collaborators, Íñigo Errejón is the most important to highlight by name, for the purposes of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> 'The CIS [Centre of Sociological Investigations] recorded in July 2011 that more than 70% of the population supports [15M], and close to a million people acknowledge having actively participated in it' (Rodríguez 2013: 274).

<sup>4</sup> Gerbaudo 2017; Errejón 2011; Iglesias 2015 [2014].

for *¡Democracia Real Ya!*,<sup>5</sup> and in the consensus-based participatory democracy of its meetings – and most especially those meetings taking place in its territorial anchors, the physical encampments in Puerta del Sol, Plaça Catalunya, etc – 15M could also be seen as an experiment in a radical democracy to come, and as part of the tradition of ‘prefigurative politics’.<sup>6</sup> This prefigurative reading led to an alternative electoral gambit, targeting municipal elections, running on a platform of participatory democracy, and promoting a multitudinous logic of ‘confluence’ over the old logics of parties and coalitions. What we find, then, in the earliest stages of this ‘municipalist’ project is a rare transition of traditions of prefigurative politics, long associated with anti-institutional networks, into the form of the movement-party, into the electoral realm and, somewhat unexpectedly, into the state. Despite immense political differences with Podemos’ left populism, Spain’s ‘new municipalist’ platforms share with Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias the refusal to carry on losing, encapsulated in the name common to many of the municipalist platforms across Spain: Let’s Win.<sup>7</sup>

If the mere possibility of victory changes everything (reshaping movement politics through the sheer force of a concerted shift in the collective optimism of the will) then actually achieving victory changes everything yet again. Since formation in 2014 both Podemos and the municipalists have upturned Spain’s political arena, confounding expectations by entering the institutions of government. Podemos exploded out of the gates, rising rapidly in popularity and achieving electoral successes unprecedented for any non-establishment party since the transition to democracy. Paradoxically, however, it was not until their lowest ebb of support that they finally entered national government, joining PSOE (Spain’s established centre left party) as junior coalition partner in December 2019. Pablo Iglesias, leader of what is now Unidas Podemos, became second of four Deputy Prime Ministers, and Unidas Podemos was given four further ministries.<sup>8</sup>

The municipalist victories came much more quickly, and even more surprisingly. Spain’s 2015 local elections saw these ‘citizen platforms’ enter municipal government in five of Spain’s largest cities (and many smaller municipalities besides), inspiring what is now a global ‘new municipalist’ movement.<sup>9</sup> This movement is immensely diverse, each example unique in its own way, not least of all Madrid. Unlike Barcelona en Comú (BComú), for example, the beating heart of the

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<sup>5</sup> *¡Democracia Real Ya!* (real democracy now) was both a popular slogan and the name of one of the most important activist groups behind the call for the initial protest on 15 May 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Breines 1980.

<sup>7</sup> First was Guanyem Barcelona (Catalan for Let’s Win Barcelona; they later changed their name to Barcelona en Comú, for convoluted reasons), inspiring imitation by activists in Spain’s capital, who took the name Ganemos Madrid (Spanish for Let’s Win Madrid), and municipalists in many more municipalities followed suit.

<sup>8</sup> Unidas Podemos is an electoral coalition with old left party Izquierda Unida (IU, United Left). Iglesias was, until recently, Deputy Prime Minister for Social Affairs; Irene Montero became, and is still Minister of Equality; Yolanda Díaz is Minister of Labour and Social Economy; Alberto Garzón is Minister of Consumer Affairs; and none other than Manuel Castells, the giant of academic sociology, is Minister of Universities.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson 2021; Russell 2019.

international movement and one of few municipalist platforms to retain power in Spain's 2019 local elections, Madrid had no Ada Colau figure to lead and cohere the constituent process of confluence from beginning to end.<sup>10</sup> Madrid's process of confluence instead became, in at least one crucial (constitutional) sense, an unusually binary affair, the multitudinous logic of 'confluence' morphing into a logic of coalition and 'popular unity', setting up an antagonistic political foundation. There were of course multiform competing visions of municipal democracy that went into the ultimate constitution of Ahora Madrid as the capital city's municipalist citizen platform, but history created the circumstances in which the infinite variegation of individual visions of democracy congealed around two hegemonic poles, the two groups that formally entered into negotiations with each other to create Ahora Madrid. After parting ways to focus on the local and national scale respectively, the municipalist project Ganemos Madrid sought the participation of left populists Podemos, and so the two parallel paths out of 15M, *asamblearismo* and populism, met once again.<sup>11</sup> Podemos were at this point at the very peak of their popularity, polling the highest they have ever polled, so their participation was seen as crucial to the project;<sup>12</sup> and yet the popularity that necessitated their involvement also gave them the power to refuse to incorporate into Ganemos as it was already constituted, and to instead negotiate the formation of a new 'instrumental party'.<sup>13</sup> Thus in Ahora Madrid we find a uniquely binary marriage between the new horizontal, *asambleario* electoralism of Ganemos and the new left populism of Podemos, pushed by circumstance into conflict over the form in which Ahora Madrid would be constituted.

The constitution of Ahora Madrid thus presented the potential for a uniquely balanced synthesis of the traditions of prefigurative *asamblearismo* and counter-hegemonic left populism.

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<sup>10</sup> Mayor Ada Colau was a long-time social movement activist who had been at the heart of the municipalist project from the beginning, and of the local housing movement before that.

<sup>11</sup> *Asamblearismo* will be defined and contextualised in more detail in Chapter 2. Translating literally as 'assemblyism', the term has been chosen to capture the heart of Ganemos Madrid's radical, prefigurative approach to the municipalist wager: assembly democracy. Other key terms often used to describe the early municipalist project include 'horizontality' (*horizontalidad*) and 'grassroots democracy' (*democracia de base*). Analysis of research data, however, suggests that terms like horizontality are better conceived as constitutional principles that can be subsumed under the higher level category of *asamblearismo*. Meanwhile, grassroots democracy is too vague to be as useful as *asamblearismo*, which achieves an elegant balance of precision (naming the assembly as the physical, pseudo-sovereign heart of the organisation) and expansiveness (allowing for heterogeneous relationships with and understandings of that core plenary assembly and its horizontally arranged working group tributaries). The Spanish noun *asamblearismo* is used over the English translation to emphasise the local idiosyncrasies of the development of prefigurative assembly democracy in Spain, along with the adjective *asambleario* (assembly-based). The latter is much more common than the alternative adjective, *asambleísta* (assemblyist), and also in fact more common than *asamblearismo*, reflecting an orientation towards process over identity and ideology, which I will endeavour to replicate in the thesis. Where *asamblearismo* is used over *asambleario*, the reader is invited to reflect on the costs and benefits of this subtle act of reification.

<sup>12</sup> Podemos reached a peak of 31.1% in two different polls in November and December 2014, and a great number of polls during this time showed them in first place.

<sup>13</sup> 'Instrumental party' being the official legal structure that Ahora Madrid took on. Note that a key, failed priority for Ganemos in negotiations with Podemos was that Ganemos itself would be the space of confluence, which Podemos would, in some form or another, enter. The very creation of Ahora Madrid was, therefore, something of a defeat for Ganemos in the negotiations, and for the original Ganemos vision.

Ultimately, however, the possibility of a productive, complementary, agonistic synthesis tended to break down into antagonism. The possibility of a novel form of prefigurative populism dissolved into a sharp divide between those who backed Mayor Carmena, in whom most of the legal-institutional municipal power was vested, and those who did not, and who were thus largely excluded from decision-making. Carmena's municipal government achieved phenomenal policy successes, implementing, for example, forms of participatory budgeting and expanded citizen consultation largely unprecedented in Europe (outside other municipalist governments in Spain).<sup>14</sup> Carmena also implemented more controversial policies, such as (the continuation of) the massive urban redevelopment project, *Operación Chamartín*.<sup>15</sup> Despite seeking to remedy some of the perceived problems of the plan inherited from the former right wing Partido Popular (PP) municipal government (such as increasing the proportion of affordable housing and the amount of green space), radical municipalists remained highly critical of how the project would exaggerate inequalities between the north and south of the city, and generally continue the neoliberal model of uneven urban development.<sup>16</sup> *Operación Chamartín* is emblematic of the difficulties Ahora Madrid faced, torn between the intense radicalism that birthed the municipalist project and the pragmatic managerialism of their mayoral candidate, Manuela Carmena, who was convinced to participate in the project mere weeks before the party's primary elections.<sup>17</sup> The ultimate fate of Ahora Madrid was complete disintegration, with Madrid's 2019 municipal elections contested instead by Más Madrid, a new platform led by Carmena and a hand-picked selection of her municipal allies; and separately by Madrid en Pie, a coalition of more radical municipalists. Más Madrid fell just short of being able to form a municipal government, and Carmena resigned from the council (as she always promised she would if she were no longer Mayor).<sup>18</sup>

The thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to analysing the experience of Ahora Madrid, with particular focus on political and constitutional theory. My past work on the Occupy movement hinted towards the promise offered by a reading of social movement organisation as generating constitutional principles that could be interpreted as emergent models of constitutional theory that

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<sup>14</sup> For further detail on Ahora Madrid's policy achievements, see for example Sánchez Mato and Garzón Espinosa 2020; Janoschka and Mota 2020; Nez and Ganuza 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Also known as Madrid Nuevo Norte, or Distrito Castellana Norte.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Instituto para la Democracia y el Municipalismo 2018.

<sup>17</sup> As an example of the critique Carmena's managerialist approach has attracted from the *asambleario* left, Brais Fernández describes it metaphorically as the core principle 'that the next day the bins are collected'; a principle that, he argues, 'masks a model of the city oriented ever more towards tourism, financial investment and the middle classes' (Fernández 2018).

<sup>18</sup> This pattern was largely repeated across Spain in 2019. Of all the 'cities of change', only in Cádiz did the municipalist citizen platform both win most seats and form a municipal government (some include the victory of Compromís in Valencia as a second example, though it is not quite the same kind of citizen platform). Más Madrid won the most seats but could not win an investiture vote to form a government. Barcelona en Comú did form a second municipal government, despite placing second in votes and tying first for seats (Alabao 2019).

prefigure possible future constitutionalisms.<sup>19</sup> The motivation for this doctoral project was to refine that approach and apply it to Ahora Madrid's novel prefigurative populist project, and this process has produced the concept of *prefigurative constitutionality*, defining this constitutional approach to non-state organisations as a novel form of socio-legal grounded theory methodology (to be explained in more detail in Chapter 1). The theoretico-methodological lens of prefigurative constitutionality (functioning at the theoretical level as what I call an *open method of tendencies*) allows for an analysis of the competing visions of radical democracy found first in Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality (Chapter 2), then in Podemos' left populist constitutionality (Chapter 3), before analysing their tense attempted confluence in the constitutionality of Ahora Madrid (Chapter 4).

Those three core chapters (2-4) each also focus on a particular key concept: *prefiguration* (Chapter 2), *hegemony* (Chapter 3) and *leadership* (Chapter 4). The role of *hegemony* in Chapter 3 is relatively straightforward: Podemos is a fundamentally counter-hegemonic project, in this period directly inspired by Laclau's theory of populism,<sup>20</sup> which was itself built directly on top of his and Chantal Mouffe's post-marxist theory of hegemony.<sup>21</sup> Therefore an understanding of both hegemony and Laclau is crucial to understanding Podemos. The role of *prefiguration* in Chapter 2 is more complex. As the methodological framework of prefigurative constitutionality already implies (in its being applicable to Podemos as well as Ganemos, and potentially to any organisation), I seek to separate the concept of prefiguration from its narrow association with the tradition of 'prefigurative politics' (as important as that tradition is to our analysis in Chapter 2), viewing prefiguration rather as referring to a complex of functions that could potentially be operative in political projects of any ideological persuasion. The three key functions identified here are the *temporal-ontological*, *counter-hegemonic* and *constituent* prefigurative functions. Analysis of Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality is then built on the theoretical foundations provided by Antonio Negri's theory of constituent power and the autonomous constituent process.

Prefigurative and counter-hegemonic politics are often considered to be diametrically opposite modes of understanding the political (and this conception was certainly shared by some participants). However, the analysis of Ahora Madrid, and especially the fundamental failure of its prefigurative-populist constitutionality, will pull the concepts of prefiguration and hegemony towards a central point of overlapping concern, the concept that best explains the degeneration of Ahora Madrid into a 'personalist project':<sup>22</sup> that of *leadership*. The most immediate aspirations of

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<sup>19</sup> Thorpe 2013; Halvorsen and Thorpe 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Laclau 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985].

<sup>22</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

the thesis focus on the attempt to theorise the experience of Ahora Madrid in terms of prefiguration, hegemony and leadership, explaining how and why Carmena's 'hyperleadership' came to trump all other factors, evolving even further into what the thesis labels 'monstrous leadership', while simultaneously producing a critical analysis of key theorists Negri and Laclau. The critique of Negri highlights in particular the shortcomings of his binary conception of power, which exists in awkward tension with his even more reductive Spinozan monism, and which prevents a fully coherent account of the constitution of the radical constituent process, which requires a more complex and nuanced understanding of radically democratic forms of leadership and constituted power than are possible within Negri's framework. The critique of Laclau highlights in particular his failure to take seriously (his own claims of) the materiality of discourse and popular subjectivation, ignoring the crucial role of the constituent prefigurative function (the immediate creation of alternatives such as strategies of dual power) and underestimating how the instrumentalist tendencies of populism work against his goal of radical democracy in light of the temporal-ontological prefigurative function (ideas such as path dependency). It might immediately be clear to readers already familiar with Negri and Laclau that these critiques seem to imply that our two theorists might learn something from one another, each making up for some of the other's limitations (e.g. Negri would benefit from Laclau's more properly multitudinous conception of social antagonism, while Laclau would benefit from Negri's insistence on the material distribution and collective management of the commons as essential part of any vision of radical democracy). This appearance of complementarity leads to the most ambitious, if only tentatively propositional, claim of the thesis: that from Negri and Laclau's mutual limitations, from our rereading of prefiguration as complex of functions, and supported first by a return to Gramsci and second by tools from Alex Williams' theory of 'complex hegemony', emerges between the concepts of prefiguration and hegemony themselves a relationship of complementarity, in certain crucial regards even tautology, pointing the way towards future research on the possibility of an anti-essentialist unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony.<sup>23</sup>

The thesis thus centres on five key concepts in total: prefiguration, hegemony, leadership, radical democracy and constitutionality. The former three will be more fully developed in their respective chapters. Radical democracy does not require especially detailed elaboration here, other than to say that both constitutive parts of Ahora Madrid's founding negotiations, Ganemos and Podemos, are united in their goal of radicalising democracy. Ganemos, quite explicitly; they have always made clear their identity as a continuation of the radical prefigurative democracy of 15M, of

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<sup>23</sup> The *anti-essentialist* qualifier is necessary to differentiate such a theory from the work already done by Gramsci, which might otherwise count as such a unified theory.

the calls for *¡democracia real ya!*, constitutionalised as an internal commitment to horizontal assembly democracy (captured in the Spanish term *asamblearismo*), and an external commitment to a ‘new institutional architecture’ of participation and direct democracy in the municipal arena, with the express aim of using municipal resources to build spaces of dual power. The willingness of Podemos to explicitly identify as ‘radical’ has oscillated over time, but the call for ‘radical democracy’ is there in black and white in Podemos’ initial statement of intent;<sup>24</sup> Pablo Iglesias, in his 2014 book, clearly identifies with the ‘radical left’ and centres his political project around a deepening of democracy;<sup>25</sup> and even Íñigo Errejón, key Podemos strategist in its early years, who is generally less radical than Iglesias, can be inferred to ultimately seek radical democracy through his theoretical framework, which centres around the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and their post-marxist project for radical democracy. The precise details of the forms of radical democracy imagined by Ahora Madrid participants obviously vary greatly, and these varied conceptions of radical democracy are precisely the focus of the coming investigation. The relevant constitutional issues will be elaborated throughout the thesis, but the constitutional frame itself deserves some brief explanation here.

The central anchor for analysing how the concepts of prefiguration, hegemony and leadership figure in the experience of Ahora Madrid, both theoretically and methodologically, is the lens of *prefigurative constitutionality*. Prefigurative in the sense that movement and party organisation can be seen as prefiguratively developing its own constitutional theory and concretely prefiguring modes of constitutionality; and constitutionality not in the sense of compliance with a particular constitution, but in the sense of having a constitutional quality (short of warranting the stronger, more oversaturated signifier, constitutionalism). Thinking movements and parties constitutionally is not an obvious or a common thing to do, and so it deserves some justification. Indeed, the lens of prefigurative constitutionality flies directly in the face of some conceptions of what it is to do constitutional theory. Barber, for example, claims:

political theory is about ends, and constitutional theory is about means. ... A political philosopher can produce a utopian vision of the ideal world; uncluttered by the limitations inherent in all human endeavour. A utopian constitutional theory, on the other hand, would be a waste of time.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ‘A candidacy that defends a radical democracy in which binding referendums and ILP [popular legislative initiatives] form a prominent part of a new legal order after a constituent process’ (Podemos 2014a).

<sup>25</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014].

<sup>26</sup> Barber 2001: 62-63.

Barber does go on to complicate this schematic, using it to emphasise how political philosophy and constitutional theory are ‘closely intertwined’.<sup>27</sup> But this thesis seeks to turn Barber’s schematic completely on its head. What happens if we do begin to speak of political means and constitutional ends? Or even of utopian constitutional theory? Here we are interested precisely in these interactions – between constitutional and political theory, and between means and ends – and this complex of ideas is encapsulated in the concept of *prefiguration*.

While rarely discussed in these terms, some sense of prefiguration is not entirely alien to liberal constitutionalism. Any formal mechanism of constitutional change implies an openness to future ends that differ from the precise mechanisms of the original constitution, while (the constitutionalist hopes) remaining true to its core values. In a sense the amendable democratic constitution can therefore be said to prefigure further democracy to come – not means-ends unity in a simple, static sense, but prefiguration as political-constitutional process of becoming. Can we not also think constitutionally about the prefigurative political processes of non-state actors, of how movements and parties prefigure in their internal organisation not just vague forms of emancipated social relations, but constitutional mechanisms, principles and even constitutional theories of a future radically democratic polity? I believe that we can, although doing so requires an open-minded approach to non-state constitutional practices, as well as a rigorously constitutional rethinking of the idea of prefiguration, as a serious, transformative political strategy, and as an important constitutive function of the political.

A significant field of literature has emerged that justifies attention to forms of non-state constitutionalism. Early examples are predominantly concerned with the transnational arena and the ways in which transnational organisations, international political economy, etc, have come to serve constitutional functions beyond the traditional constitutional sphere of the nation-state.<sup>28</sup> Despite their claims of a revolutionary shift in constitutional theory, Anderson is correct to identify in this literature ‘significant continuities with their state-focused precursors, relocating respectively the separation between economics and politics, the state-civil society divide, and presumptions about the hegemonic quality of constitutionalism, to the transnational context’.<sup>29</sup> As the concern of this thesis is not to explain the changing nature of sovereignty in a globalising world, but rather to investigate how sovereignty is being deliberately challenged and reimagined from below by the prefigurative functions of grassroots politics, this literature is of only limited use; but it does support the general viability of the project. In 2012 Anderson offered some hints towards a more ‘bottom-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid 63; and so perhaps my differences with Barber could still be explained semantically.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Walker 2002. For slightly different forms of non-state constitutionalism, see also Teubner 2004 and Gill 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson 2012: 362.



up' constitutional research project that might address global south perspectives on 'globalization from below'.<sup>30</sup> His model is already implicitly prefigurative, as when he speaks of 'the possibility of a more democratic global order to come through a differently composed constitutionalism'.<sup>31</sup> Anderson's methodology also resonates somewhat with my own. Channelling Laclau, Anderson critiques 'the more positivistic outlook of traditional constitutional theory' that he sees shared by 'current accounts of constitutionalism beyond the state' insofar as they 'come closer to regarding constitutionalism as a real object, something to be discovered', rather than as something truly political, as a productive process of power-knowledge and a temporal-strategic organisational relationship, that might be actively reimagined and transformed from below.<sup>32</sup> Anderson continued this work with one further article, but it still does not provide the tools for theorising the concrete prefigurative practices of social movement constitutionalities.<sup>33</sup> This is why Negri must be so central to our analysis in Chapter 2, as Negri provides by far the most developed existing form of radically prefigurative constitutional theory that lends itself to our analysis of Ahora Madrid's prefigurative-constitutional practices (and to one of its constituent parts in particular: Ganemos Madrid). Negri also provides the most constitutional theory of prefiguration, which raises Negri above others as a thinker of serious prefigurative *strategy*, in terms of what Chapter 2 will describe as *constituent prefiguration*.

The constitutional perspective is particularly important to understanding Ahora Madrid for three primary reasons. First, how a political strategy is constituted is one of the most difficult and important political questions. Posing the challenge of constitutional implementation can help to reveal the core values and priorities, and the deepest contradictions and oversights in a political strategy; in this case, the strategies of *asamblearismo* and left populism embodied in Ganemos and Podemos respectively. The constitutional perspective is the most important for understanding the actual feasibility of any transformational politics: whether it can actually expect to achieve its own goals. Second, the constitutional perspective is sorely lacking in contemporary debates around radical democracy. Populism is, of course, usually concerned with changing the constitution of the state more than having a radically democratic internal constitution that prefigures a wider democracy to come; but little attention has been given to the fact that what left populist parties are therefore prefiguring is an instrumentalist constitutionalism, in significant ways at odds with radical democracy. Meanwhile horizontal, assembly-based democracy has long been altogether anti-constitutional, rejecting constituted power only to be limited if not crippled by informal hierarchies

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid 375.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 378.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 377.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson 2013.

and the 'tyranny of structurelessness'.<sup>34</sup> Third, thinking about prefigurative constitutionalities is an important question for constitutional theory and the future of law. Not only do emergent grassroots constitutional theories pose an implicit and valuable critique of liberal constitutionalism, movements and parties of all stripes have of course long been key sites of prefiguration of grand changes in law, politics and society. Understanding the prefigurative constitutionalities of today opens windows onto the possible constitutional futures of radical democracies of tomorrow.

The thesis proceeds through four core chapters. Chapter 1 will elaborate further upon the methodological meaning of prefigurative constitutionality, both in terms of concrete methods used and a wider theoretical framework for understanding the research data, informed reflexively by the key concepts and thinkers of the thesis itself. Chapter 2 begins with three parallel genealogies of 'prefigurative politics' – anarchist, communist and the New Left – transitioning into an analysis of the 'anti-power' tendencies of the New Left and alterglobal political practices that today are most associated with the term 'prefigurative politics', centred around a critique of exemplary theorist of anti-power, John Holloway. The latter serves to emphasise the significance of the municipalist wager in terms of the contradictions between the leaderless, anti-institutional, anti-representative nature of many municipalists' political backgrounds (in the alterglobal movement and 15M) and a necessarily representative electoral project that requires both formal constitution and clear leadership roles. The parallel genealogies as a whole establish the messiness inherent to the concept's various applications, which the final section of Chapter 2.1.1 then attempts to resolve into a three-way categorisation of prefigurative functions: the *temporal-ontological*, *counter-hegemonic* and *constituent* prefigurative functions. This is the conceptual groundwork necessary for abstracting the idea of political prefiguration out of and beyond the narrow tradition of 'prefigurative politics', providing terminological categories for the analysis of how the different prefigurative functions apply not only to Ganemos' explicitly prefigurative *asambleario* democracy, but also to Podemos' left populism. Chapter 2.1.2 provides a detailed analysis of Negri's prefigurative theory of constituent power and the autonomous constituent process as disutopian becoming; the best available starting point for a constitutional approach to radical prefiguration. Negri offers us a rich conceptualisation of prefiguration as a purposive temporal relationship between present and future, i.e. as *strategy* (a crucial element missing from the more presentist approaches to prefigurative politics discussed in Chapter 2.1.1). Crucial for Negri's theory of disutopia is how it seeks to overcome three fundamental philosophical problems facing radical prefiguration: the problem of tautology, the problem of utopia, and the problem of the constitution of absolute becoming. The limitations of Negri's theory, especially with respect to the constitution of absolute becoming, lay

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<sup>34</sup> Freeman 1972-73.

the ground for the critique of Negri and for Alex Williams to offer a more compelling theoretical solution in Chapter 4. Chapter 2.1.2 concludes with a long overdue task: the categorisation of key principles of Negri's autonomous constituent process, which will facilitate theoretical analysis of the constitutional principles of Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality. Chapter 2.2 then delves into *La Apuesta Municipalista* (the municipalist wager),<sup>35</sup> charting first its genealogy through local traditions of *asamblearismo*, the seismic event that was the Spanish 15M movement, and the period of movement crisis that followed in its wake during which many activists began to see the limits of autonomous social movement activism in the context of an unresponsive state. Chapter 2.2.3 then retreats briefly into the longer history of the idea of municipalism, in order to clarify why, for some activists in Spain, this was the concept that best defined their vision of the coming *asalto institucional* (storming of the institutions) that would seek to replace the deaf ears of Spain's political old guard in the halls of government with movement activists who would *mandar obedeciendo (y desobedeciendo)*.<sup>36</sup> Chapter 2.2.4 then has the tools it needs for its prefigurative-constitutional analysis of the earliest (and most radical) municipalist organisation in Madrid: Ganemos. Here we explain how Ganemos constituted the methods of assembly-based consensus decision-making it inherited and adapted from 15M, the alterglobal movement, as well as the older local tradition of *asamblearismo*. Our particular focus is the plenary assembly of 26 July 2014, a key moment of crystallisation in which the organisation's various working groups each presented a document of principles for the plenary's consideration, capturing the constitutional vision of Ganemos participants at this early stage precisely through its own constituent process. These principles are analysed through a combinations of lenses – the interpretations found in interview data, Negri's principles of the autonomous constituent process, and the three prefigurative functions identified in the final section of Chapter 2.1.1 – in order to develop our understanding of this *asambleario* prefigurative constitutionality.

Where Ganemos chose a logic of 'confluence' over the logic of the party, Podemos' movement-party model was always more party than movement, and ever increasingly so. Therefore Chapter 3 moves quickly from Errejón's populist reading of 15M to a genealogy of the party form, leading in turn to the introduction of hegemony, a concept that has fundamentally shaped the Podemos project. Our particular focus is the post-marxist theory of Ernesto Laclau and its direct application in the early phase of Podemos by the party's foremost strategist, Íñigo Errejón (alongside the more Gramscian thinking of leader Pablo Iglesias). Chapter 3 concludes by critically introducing

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<sup>35</sup> *La Apuesta Municipalista* being the name of a key text in the development of the new municipalism in Spain, and Madrid especially (Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Lead by obeying (and disobeying): a version of the Zapatista slogan (lead by obeying) adapted according to the prediction that movement representatives may have to disobey the institutions in order to obey the municipalist movement.

the concepts of the movement-party and the 'digital party' that ground our understanding of Podemos in existing literature, before embarking on our analysis of the prefigurative constitutionality found in Podemos' first formal, democratic constituent event, its National Citizen Assembly held in November 2014 in Madrid's Palacio Vistalegre, known informally as Vistalegre I.<sup>37</sup> Here we find three primary, and seemingly contradictory elements: the instrumentalisation and subordination of internal democracy to the Laclauian populist strategy (and its direction by a strong leadership), but also a seemingly radical implementation of what Chapter 2.1.2 defines as the constitution of absolute becoming (here in the form of a constitutionalised right to revolution), as well as an instance of what Chapter 2.1.1 defines as *intermediary prefiguration*, a type (rather than a function) of prefiguration that works to prefigure not ultimate utopian ends but intermediary ends (or further means, which are the same thing). In the case of prefigurative communist thinkers such as Gorz and Boggs, that intermediary end was the transitional socialist workers' state (as prefigured by the workers' party); in the case of Podemos, it is the constitution of a progressive popular subject, the pre-constitution of the people.

Chapter 4 pulls together our various threads. It charts the formation of Ahora Madrid via negotiations between Ganemos Madrid and Podemos Madrid, the sudden appearance of (soon to be) Mayor Manuela Carmena, and how the project transformed beyond the recognition of many of the participants of the early stages of Ganemos. The key constitutional moment is the agreement between Ganemos and Podemos of the *Marco Común de Entendimiento*,<sup>38</sup> which attempted to formalise a compromise position between Podemos' priority of building a powerful electoral war machine united under a strong leadership, and Ganemos' *asambleario* vision of a 'new institutional architecture' in which Ahora Madrid representatives would be subject to forms of 'public control' by citizens as well as strict bottom-up mandatory processes emerging from Ahora Madrid's own movement-party structures. The *Marco Común* promised a novel form of horizontal, radically democratic prefigurative populism; but that promise was fragile, only vaguely and ambiguously constituted, and so utterly vulnerable to the emergent problem of hyperleadership. Radical visions of Ahora Madrid were ultimately nullified, in part, by precisely what they had sought, but what few had actually expected: victory. Carmena had expected to lead Ahora Madrid into the city council with a few seats, at best perhaps surpassing the centre left PSOE to become the main opposition to yet another right wing PP municipal government.<sup>39</sup> Upon unexpectedly becoming Mayor of Madrid, Carmena decided she could not both govern effectively and be subject to the mandates of Ahora

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<sup>37</sup> As can be inferred from that name, Podemos' second National Citizen Assembly was held at the same location in February 2017, and so is known as Vistalegre II.

<sup>38</sup> Common Framework of Understanding; *Marco Común* for short.

<sup>39</sup> At which point Carmena would probably have immediately resigned, as she promised and followed through with in 2019 (Huffington Post 2018).

Madrid's structures, and so she chose to govern. She visited Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación* once,<sup>40</sup> the day after the election, rejected their authority, and never returned. Thus the primary issue for Chapter 4 is not how Ahora Madrid's constitutional processes worked, but why they did not work. The key concept for Chapter 4 is therefore *leadership*: how populist logics of hyperleadership and personalism came to dominate the project, nullifying the horizontal logics of assembly democracy and citizen control; how Carmena's trajectory goes beyond even the extremes of hyperleadership to a logic I define as *monstrous leadership*; and how the sheer ease of that transition emphasises the central importance for any project of radical democracy to constitutionally account for the problems of leadership. Laclau and Errejón offer us an understanding of the populist benefits of hyperleadership and thus why it is such a tempting solution to the great challenge of winning popular hegemony; Hardt and Negri's latest book, *Assembly*, offers us some hints towards a horizontalised reimagining of leadership; and so our theoretical threads of prefiguration and hegemony, Negri and Laclau, Ganemos and Podemos, all converge upon the concept of leadership. Finding both Laclau's and Hardt and Negri's accounts of leadership unsatisfactory, however, alongside wider critique of their theories, leads the analysis to their potential complementarity, and to the apparent interdependence of the concepts of prefiguration and hegemony as parts of a viable strategy of radical democracy: prefiguration cannot be a transformative strategy without aspirations to hegemony; counter-hegemonic populism cannot reasonably expect to realise radical democracy without a prefigurative constituent process of building democratic alternatives and constitutionally distributing leadership functions so as to avoid the traps of hyper- and monstrous leadership. This leads us first to a return to Gramsci, and then to Williams' theory of 'complex hegemony' and his idea of 'strategy without a strategist' (strategy as emergent property of a complex network of political actors) as a model for thinking the evolution from Ganemos' horizontal model of 'collective intelligence' and *emergent leadership* to a more rigorously constituted hybrid model of both emergent and *distributed* forms of leadership, which seems to define the proper constitution of a viable form of radically democratic prefigurative populism: strategy without a strategist, leadership without a leader, hegemony without a hegemon. The thesis' main contributions are thus: the proposal of prefigurative constitutionality as novel theoretical lens, which itself co-produces novel constitutional theory as it emerges from movements and parties, treated as epistemic sources; through that lens, the identification and analysis of Ganemos' horizontal-*asambleario* constitutionality and Podemos' instrumental-populist constitutionality; the critique of Negri, Laclau, and standard accounts of prefiguration and hegemony; the argument for prefiguration and hegemony's complementarity; and the tentative identification of key routes for future research, in

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<sup>40</sup> Coordination Committee; *Mesa* for short.

the form of a more fully developed anti-essentialist unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony, and of hybrid emergent-distributed leadership as key principle of a prefigurative-populist strategy for radical democracy.

# 1 Prefigurative Constitutionality as Socio-Legal Methodology

Prefigurative constitutionality, the central concept of the thesis, requires a mixed methods approach to the grounded, constitutional theorisation of movement-party practice and strategy. Primary data are constitutional documents, broadly defined to include any text or agreement produced by a group's formal organisational processes, from Ahora Madrid's *Marco Común* to the consensus agreements documented in Ganemos' assembly minutes. Everything else is essentially supplementary to understanding that core constitutional data (though interview data is particularly important, especially in elucidating constitutional *practices* beyond the more narrowly codified formal *principles* and *mechanisms* of the documents). Key supplementary data includes: 19 semi-structured interviews with 18 participants from across the range of *familias* within the Ahora Madrid project,<sup>41</sup> conducted in Madrid as part of extensive fieldwork; ethnographic observations during said fieldwork, while attending public political events, municipalist convergences, book launches, closed organisational meetings, protests, socialising with local activists, etc; publications written by or journalistic interviews conducted with participants of Ahora Madrid, Podemos, Ganemos, etc; wider commentary on relevant Spanish politics, relevant journalism, etc; social media use by relevant figures; and suchlike. Interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Spanish.<sup>42</sup> All translations from Spanish are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Prefigurative constitutionality is necessarily a form of grounded theorisation, given that it asserts the emergence of constitutional theory from the case study; but both the constitutional approach and the wider critical theoretical framework mean that existing models of 'grounded theory method' (GTM) are only partially applicable. The methodological framework also takes inspiration from the tradition of militant research, as well as from the key theorists of the thesis, especially Negri's theoretical 'method of the tendency'. This interdisciplinary fusion of critical theoretical and methodological influences, which can broadly be situated around the heterogeneous tradition of 'new critical legal thinking', results in a conception of prefigurative constitutionality as a novel form of grounded socio-legal methodology, within a wider interpretive framework I describe as an *open method of tendencies*.

As originally proposed in 1967, GTM sought to close 'the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research' that Glaser and Strauss identified in qualitative sociology at the time, referring in particular to the split between quantitative approaches that reject the relevance of

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<sup>41</sup> *Familia* (family) is the euphemistic term preferred in Madrid over 'faction'.

<sup>42</sup> This accounts for the particularly wide variety of styles encountered below when interview data is quoted – some is translated from Spanish, some is directly transcribed from English (which was not the first language of any participant). Participants sometimes switched between the two languages, which may result in abrupt changes of style in long quotations.

'grand theory' and end up saying little of relevance beyond the case study, and qualitative research that attempts 'middle-range theory' but in either a 'less than rigorous' or an 'unintegrated' manner.<sup>43</sup> Their suggested solution was to borrow concepts from rigorous quantitative sociology, such as 'sampling, coding, reliability, validity, indicators, frequency distributions, conceptual formulation, construction of hypotheses, and presentation of evidence.'<sup>44</sup> Today GTM is probably the single most popular qualitative social research method, except that there is no 'single' agreed version, its founders Glaser and Strauss having diverged over both its intricacies and its priorities, and many others having intervened to offer alternative models. Nevertheless, most versions of GTM share a commitment to an *iterative* research process, involving *theoretical sampling* and multi-stage *coding* of data, generating new *concepts, categories* and *hypotheses* that feed back into the ongoing iterative research process as well as leading forward towards the generation of both *substantive theory* (narrowly applicable) and *formal theory* (more widely applicable).<sup>45</sup> These core principles of GTM have been applied in this project, if sometimes in atypical ways, and within the wider heterodox framework of militant research and critical theory. Certainly the thesis is far from what Charmaz describes as the 'objectivist' approach of classical GTM proponents such as Glaser and Strauss, but neither is it precisely Charmaz's proposed 'constructivist' alternative.<sup>46</sup>

One key issue is the nature of the groundedness of theory in the thesis. Both key theorists, Negri and Laclau, emerge directly from the case study, if to different degrees. In this regard, the least problematic of the two is Laclau, and his post-marxist conception of populism and hegemony. The early phases of Podemos were very explicitly shaped by strategist Íñigo Errejón's deep understanding of the Argentinian theorist.<sup>47</sup> Errejón went out of his way to popularise Laclau after the emergence of Podemos, discussing him regularly in articles and interviews; as did leader Pablo Iglesias, who also makes the party's Laclauian framework absolutely clear from his description of Podemos' populist wager in his book, *Politics in a Time of Crisis*.<sup>48</sup> Early Podemos was an utterly, explicitly Laclauian project, and therefore offers the opportunity to study the unusually direct and literal implementation of a specific political philosopher's ideas in a successful new political project,

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<sup>43</sup> Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]: vii.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: viii.

<sup>45</sup> Bryman 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Although the thesis is certainly closer to Charmaz than to classical 'objectivist' GTM, sharing Charmaz's recognition 'that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interaction within the field and questions about the data' (Charmaz 2000: 522).

<sup>47</sup> Errejón's doctoral thesis was a Laclauian hegemonic discourse analysis of Bolivian movement-party Movimiento al Socialismo (Errejón 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014]. As a further example of just how explicit Podemos' Laclauianism was at that time, journalist Dan Hancox felt justified in writing a Guardian article titled 'Why Ernesto Laclau is the Intellectual Figurehead for Syriza and Podemos' (Hancox 2015a).



as well as the opportunity for a uniquely prefigurative-constitutional engagement with Laclau's ideas. Clearly, however, this is not the typical form of groundedness implied by GTM.

The theorist most heavily relied upon in conceptualising Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality is Antonio Negri, who also emerges from important sections of the case study. His strong influence on the alterglobal movement has been widely acknowledged,<sup>49</sup> which was itself a key part of the genealogy of the new municipalism, and I found that many research participants were at least aware of his ideas.<sup>50</sup> One important *familia* of Ganemos was the group of activists and theorists anchored around radical publisher and bookshop Traficantes de Sueños,<sup>51</sup> and this milieu is widely known as being particularly autonomist and somewhat Negrian, if by no means only that.<sup>52</sup> Negri's role in the thesis is therefore more tendentiously grounded than that of Laclau, but his theory of constituent power is an essential starting point for thinking constitutionally about radically prefigurative politics, and for thinking prefiguratively about radically democratic constitutionalities. As we will see in Chapter 2, the constitutional principles that emerge from Negri's theory of constituent power bear a striking resemblance to the principles established by Ganemos' early assemblies, indicating a close alignment between the two projects, regardless of how many Ganemos participants explicitly identified with Negri. It is certainly not unproblematic to rely so heavily on one key theorist to understand a group like Ganemos, defined as much as anything by its diversity, but the benefits to the project outweigh the drawbacks. The concept of prefiguration similarly is not quite as firmly grounded in the case study as the Laclauian concepts of populism and hegemony. Participants understood the concept and its applicability when explained, but the direct translation *prefiguración* is not nearly as widely used in Spanish as prefiguration is in English. However, both the theoretical relevance of the idea of prefiguration and the direct genealogical connection between Ganemos and older traditions of 'prefigurative politics' were clear from the outset, and confirmed by the research.

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Cuninghame 2010.

<sup>50</sup> An Ahora Madrid participant once said in passing, 'we are all Negrians'. A facetious remark, certainly not *true per se*, but it speaks, at least anecdotally, to the extent to which Negri's ideas had become commonplace within and around the municipalist movement and its antecedents, and resonates with my finding that even those who did not identify as card-carrying Negrians mostly at least acknowledged his relevance.

<sup>51</sup> Dream Traffickers. Traficantes or Trafis for short.

<sup>52</sup> One key figure in the Traficantes constellation is Emmanuel Rodríguez, whose books present thoroughly autonomist analyses, particularly replete with references to Negri (see especially Rodríguez 2003 and 2013). Rodríguez was also heavily involved in early municipalist debates in Madrid and co-authored the key municipalist text, *La Apuesta Municipalista* (Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014). Traficantes was associated with the Madrid en Movimiento list in Ahora Madrid's primaries, and the three candidates from that list who ultimately became councillors (Pablo Carmona, Montserrat Galcerán and Rommy Arce) all have a clear autonomist bent to their writings. Galcerán and Carmona are also authors and theorists in their own right. Galcerán's work regularly refers to Negri (e.g. Galcerán 2009 and 2016a), and Carmona's doctoral thesis has a chapter dedicated to Negri (Carmona 2012).

Laclau's groundedness in Podemos, then, is not an emergent discovery as per GTM as much as it is a central part of the initial research formation. The deep embeddedness of political theory within the case study was a prime motivation for choosing the research topic to begin with; and so the grounded theory approach works within Podemos rather to generate categories and concepts that help us to further explain and theorise the relationships between Podemos' constitution, the theory of Laclau, and more properly emergent concepts (such as personalism and hyperleadership, which were not at all part of the initial research hypothesis, rather emerging organically from the iterative research process). Negri and prefiguration represent what GTM literature calls 'top-down coding', where important codes, concepts or categories are taken from the literature rather than or as much as they emerge purely from the data. The core 'bottom-up' concepts (emerging purely from the data) are the constitutional principles found in key constitutional artefacts (though these principles emerge somewhat differently to your typical sociological, interpersonal GTM research, essentially being directly given, the main coding work being to prioritise and categorise those constitutional concepts); but also the aforementioned ideas around leadership, as well as Ganemos concepts like 'collective intelligence'. Those bottom-up concepts revealed the relevance of the concepts of emergent and distributed leadership from social science literature on leadership, reflecting how the cyclical, iterative process can oscillate productively between bottom-up and top-down coding procedures to produce coherent theoretical connections.

The framework of Negri, Laclau and prefigurative constitutionality also means that, unlike classical GTM's preference for 'mid-range theory', the thesis cuts across different scales of theory. The prefigurative constitutionalities identified (Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality and Podemos' populist constitutionality) might be described as micro-theories, to the extent their uniqueness is emphasised; but also serve mid-range purposes to the extent they can be applied, compared or contrasted to other case studies. Negri and Laclau also demand attention to what Glaser and Strauss called 'grand theory', in that Negri and Laclau both work at the undeniably 'grand' level of political ontology. In this sense the thesis is combining a grounded theory approach with the 'testing' of existing theory (existing theory which is itself grounded in the case study). A more precise understanding of the relationship between prefigurative-constitutional micro-theory and political-ontological grand theory will be developed later in this chapter, within the framework of militant research and the Negri-inspired open method of tendencies.

Despite important differences with established models of GTM, this project did work through the recognisable stages of GTM research, proceeding from general initial research questions to theoretical sampling, data collection, data coding and analysis, theoretical saturation, the generation of hypotheses, before returning to the stage of theoretical sampling to continue the

iterative process by collecting new data to help test and develop new emerging hypotheses, and at some crucial stages even revising the central research priorities in light of new discoveries of the research. A key example of the latter was learning of how Carmena nullified Ahora Madrid's internal participatory process the day after the election, discovered early during fieldwork, but still after a having spent a considerable amount of time in preparatory study, in blissful ignorance of how thoroughly leadership had shaped the case study. From that point on, the thesis had to shift from analysing how Ahora Madrid's prefigurative constitutionality worked to why it did not work. I had to both re-evaluate my existing data and seek out new data, seeking new concepts that could help explain and theorise the project's transformation from the vibrant prefigurative populism of the election campaign into what one participant described as the 'personalist project' of Manuela Carmena.<sup>53</sup> This doctoral project began with the core research questions, 'how is Ahora Madrid reimagining constitutionality from below?' and 'how are a plurality of strategies for radical democracy interacting internally within Ahora Madrid's movement-party constitutionality?' Theoretically, a key early interest was the prefigurative problematic of the 'constitution of absolute becoming'. All of this had to be adjusted. Ganemos and Podemos became more important as separate, relatively coherent sites of prefigurative constitutionality; and the issue of leadership emerged as both the core explanatory category for Ahora Madrid, and the core theoretical issue through which the other key concepts of prefiguration and hegemony could be brought into dialogue. The 'constitution of absolute becoming' did not have the chance to become as important an issue for Ahora Madrid as my earliest hypotheses had imagined, but still plays some role in the thesis.

The fieldwork continued in this iterative manner, finding new data in the form of key constitutional documents, new opportunities for ethnographic observations, and new participants with whom to conduct semi-structured interviews, guided by the principle of theoretical sampling:

the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal. ... Theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory.<sup>54</sup>

Thus new data and new participants suggested further data and further participants (sometimes participants literally suggested and put me in contact with further participants, a complementary

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<sup>53</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]: 45, 62; emphasis Glaser and Strauss's.

procedure known as ‘snowball sampling’). While theoretical sampling does not necessarily prioritise a ‘representative sample’ over a coherent thread of theoretical development, I did ensure to interview participants from all major *familias*: four from Podemos Madrid; two from IU; one Manuelista; three from Madrid129; one from Equo; two from Ganemos associated with the Madrid en Movimiento primary list; one from Ganemos who stood on the Toma Madrid primary list; one broadly associated with Madrid129 but who ceased engagement after the 2015 municipal election; two unaligned Ganemos members; and one independent, the Director of Ahora Madrid’s Participation Project. In this way the thesis draws on a wide range of exemplary experiences of Ahora Madrid’s constitutional narrative that complement, inform and at times challenge direct understanding the core constitutional data, offering a grounded means for understanding the relationships between prefigurative constitutionality and participants’ personal and collective political strategies and theories.

Coding was similarly an ongoing process, a mixture of ‘bottom-up’ (codes suggested by the data) and ‘top-down’ (codes suggested by the literature, or emergent bottom-up codes being used later in a more top-down manner),<sup>55</sup> and a cyclical process that moved between stages of ‘open coding’, ‘selective coding’ and ‘theoretical coding’. Open coding refers to the assigning of codes to data at the granular level. The primary open coding process was the mostly bottom-up coding of constitutional documents. In some cases this was straightforward, where obviously constitutional documents (such as Ahora Madrid’s *Marco Común* or Podemos’ Political and Organisational Documents) would very clearly convey constitutional principles (treated as GTM ‘concepts’). In other cases (such as working with Ganemos’ assembly minutes) more interpretation was necessary to distinguish properly constitutional concepts (agreements with a certain constitutional weight) from other content, which might be the documentation of a debate rather than a formal consensus agreement, an indicative ‘temperature check’ vote, or whatever. In some cases, not only concepts but categories were given or suggested, in terms of how concepts were grouped or framed in the primary constitutional data. Interviews and other data were subjected to open coding in a more ‘middle-range’ manner, a combination of bottom-up and top-down, with the primary constitutional data in particular suggesting certain codes and concepts for the supplementary data to complement, inform, test and potentially disrupt. Selective coding then grouped, selected and omitted codes until coherent concepts and categories emerged; and the theoretical coding stage then worked on the connections between codes, concepts and categories to develop theory.<sup>56</sup> As concepts, categories,

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<sup>55</sup> Dey (1993) describes this combined approach as ‘middle-range coding’.

<sup>56</sup> See Urquhart 2013 for more detail on this three-stage coding process, this version reflecting Glaser’s (1978) rather than Strauss’ (1987) model.

hypotheses and theories became 'saturated', the process could move on to further issues, try new approaches, or test existing ideas in new ways.

Despite adopting many of the tools of GTM, and sharing its 'microsociological' (or *micro-constitutional*) concern for groundedness,<sup>57</sup> the thesis diverges from mainstream GTM in its critical theoretical framework. The research emerges from past training and research under the broad umbrella of critical legal studies,<sup>58</sup> and claims some affinity with what has more recently been called 'new critical legal thinking'.<sup>59</sup> Critical theory and GTM, however, have a tense relationship. As Gibson puts it, critical theory tends to be wary of GTM's tendency towards positivism and the reification of social relations that might 'replicate patterns of domination', while GTM tends to be wary of critical theory's tendency to 'force' one's own theoretical persuasions onto the sacrosanct data, overriding the priority of emergence.<sup>60</sup> Gibson's proposed solution to this tension is to first accept a basic premise of critical theory, that 'the process of generating theory is not value neutral,'<sup>61</sup> and that thus the classical GTM priority of choosing whatever emergent theory 'fits and works' is not as straightforward a process as Glaser and Strauss suggest.<sup>62</sup> Gibson's preferred framework for how to proceed from that point comes from a combination of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology,<sup>63</sup> and Bohman's pragmatic-Habermasian principles of democratic inquiry.<sup>64</sup> Practically this implies a co-operative, participatory form of inquiry that engages 'with subjects as equal participants in the research process.'<sup>65</sup> Such a 'democratic' mode of social inquiry would reflect openly and collaboratively with participants on the formation of grounded concepts, categories and theories, recognising it as a 'political' exercise with a 'strategic nature' that ultimately seeks to realise 'emancipation in the process of social inquiry'.<sup>66</sup> This doctoral project shares Gibson's practical concern for collaborative research. Not a full-blown model of participatory action research, which would not have been feasible given most key research participants were busy working themselves to the bone within the city council at the time, but something very much like Gibson's co-operative mode of collective, democratic theorisation. I was, as Gibson proposes, very open with participants about my working models and hypotheses, sometimes directly inviting participants to comment upon and critique them. I would not, however, go as far as Gibson in claiming that my research

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<sup>57</sup> Peters 2014: 6.

<sup>58</sup> In particular, the Birkbeck school of critical legal thinking typified in classics such as Douzinas and Warrington with McVeigh 1991, and Douzinas and Gearey 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Stone, Wall and Douzinas 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Gibson 2007: 438. Note that Glaser and Strauss (2006 [1967]: 34) do indeed explicitly exhort the reader to be 'more objective and less theoretically biased.'

<sup>61</sup> Gibson 2007: 442.

<sup>62</sup> Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]: 82.

<sup>63</sup> Bourdieu et al 1991.

<sup>64</sup> Bohman 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Gibson 2007: 444.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid: 442.

‘emancipated’ its participants. If anything it was the reverse: my concern was to learn from their experiences of collective, radically democratic self-emancipation through political organisation, to collaboratively generate a novel, grounded theorisation of that process, and to disseminate the knowledge produced in such a way as to be not only of interest to academics but also of practical political use to activists. I also do not share Gibson’s pragmatic-Bourdieuian framework for understanding that collaborative research process. A much more productive framework, in my view, comes from the tradition of militant research.<sup>67</sup>

Shukaitis and Graeber describe militant research as seeking to draw knowledge from the ‘histories, experiences, and moments’ of struggle and self-organisation, helping to create ‘new possibilities for political action,’ and exploring ‘the ways in which militant praxis and organizing are themselves modes of understanding, of interpreting the world, and expressing modes of social being.’<sup>68</sup> This approach is a much better fit, than either classical GTM or Gibson’s critical-pragmatic GTM, for conceptualising my relationship, as both researcher and activist, with the constitutional objects and activist subjects of my research; for not only is my identity defined by both research and activism, my activism and political identity are themselves defined by the various politics of this project’s case study, or at least by their close UK analogues. My earliest political activity was, as for a number of my research participants, protesting against the Iraq War in 2003. I protested against austerity early the next decade, just as many of my research participants became politically active in Spanish anti-austerity movements like Juventud sin Futuro.<sup>69</sup> In 2015 I became involved in Take Back the City, which at least some of us considered a municipalist project. We contested a seat for the London Assembly in 2016, standing a candidate on a participatory, crowd-sourced ‘People’s Manifesto’, taking direct inspiration from groups like Barcelona en Comú, Ganemos Madrid and Ahora Madrid.<sup>70</sup> Since then I have been a member of the UK Labour Party (somewhat tentatively), with a practical interest in electoral left populism. Thus my researcher-activist subjectivity places me firmly in the position of political ally, rather than objective observer of my research objects and subjects, and in a manner that cuts transversally across them. I approached informants both as researcher (making that part of my motivation clear) and as political ally seeking to learn, disseminate and collaborate on thinking politically and constitutionally about the experience of Ahora Madrid in a way that would be useful to both fellow activists and fellow academics.

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<sup>67</sup> E.g. Bookchin et al 2013; Colectivo Situaciones 2003, 2005; Malo de Molina 2004; Russell 2015; Shukaitis and Graeber 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Shukaitis and Graeber 2007: 31.

<sup>69</sup> Youth without Future.

<sup>70</sup> For media coverage of Take Back the City that explains the project in more detail, see Harris et al 2016; Perry 2016; and Dolan 2016.

Militant research provides a powerful framework for understanding that researcher-ally relationship, as a purposive, strategic process that seeks to make a virtue of necessity by embracing the inescapably political nature of research and the impossibility of the objective researcher, using research opportunities to (co-)create politically useful knowledge premised on the existence of systemic injustice and oppression, the attendant need for social change, and the vital role of organised activists as themselves agents of epistemic production in that necessary process of social change. Searching among existing prefigurative practices for ‘the emerging traces of a new sociability’,<sup>71</sup> or in this case new constitutionalities, produces ‘new possibilities for political action,’<sup>72</sup> dragging critical theory out of what often collapses into a deconstructive critical spiral, pushing towards a collaborative, strategic, and itself inherently prefigurative model of knowledge production that seeks to contribute to the process of remaking the future. The research will thus make most sense to those academics and activists with a shared interest in radical democracy. However, the implicit argument that democracy should indeed be radical, and the debates reflected in the research over the nature and preferable forms of democratic constitutionality, are of virtually universal relevance in an inescapably political world in which democracy is still (just about) the dominant hegemonic empty signifier.

Militant research is of course, like any methodology, not without its complications; and my own relationship with militant research, as with mainstream GTM, is not entirely straightforward. One such complication stems from Russell’s claim that ‘The extent to which militant research can be deemed successful is ... measured solely by the extent to which it had some effect on the movement milieu.’<sup>73</sup> In Russell’s case, he was not merely a participant observer of that milieu (the climate justice movement), but a ‘constitutive participant’; thus we might deduce that the ‘collective autoethnography’ produced by his research could hardly help but have at least ‘some effect’ on a milieu that he himself partially constituted.<sup>74</sup> In my case, we would have to transpose Russell’s criterion to the ‘milieu’ of the wider global municipalist movement, where my past involvement with Take Back the City does firmly place me as ‘constitutive participant’. At that level, I certainly hope that my research will have ‘some effect’ upon the milieu. Yet the thesis is not about the *global* municipalist movement, it is about Madrid’s municipalist movement, of which I consider myself an ally, but nevertheless an outsider. This outsider status calls for particular humility, knowing that my research participants will always understand their case study more deeply than I can, but hoping that my very position as outsider has allowed for a degree of originality in its interpretation of events

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<sup>71</sup> Colectivo Situaciones 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Shukaitis and Graeber 2007: 31.

<sup>73</sup> Russell 2015: 226.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

that participants will find insightful. Primarily, though, I hope the research will be helpful to other outsiders who wish to learn from the municipalist experience in Madrid, and that research participants will be glad to have their story told and theorised.

Militant research, while rejecting objectivity, still raises important issues around partiality and fairness in its treatment of the various political subjectivities encountered in the case study. A particular issue I had to account for was that, by sheer contingency, my first direct encounters with Ahora Madrid participants (in early 2016) happened to be with people associated with the *familia* that would shortly separate from Ganemos to form Madrid129 (in July 2016). This meant my understanding of Ahora Madrid was unavoidably shaped early on by the Madrid129 perspective, something I had to self-consciously reflect upon and actively counterbalance during fieldwork. If anything, the specific spread of my own political subjectivity has helped me to be dispassionate in analysing the various *familias* of Ahora Madrid. It was precisely the breadth of my political interests (spanning from autonomist horizontalism to populist electoralism, and especially what might lie in-between) that motivated the choice of this topic, where their interplay could be studied. My (fully transparent and self-conscious) bias towards radical democracy only reinforces my desire to analyse the data thoroughly and fairly, in order that it should be as useful as possible, to myself, and to other activists and militant researchers in their work for social change. Presenting a partial or dogmatic view would only limit the value and utility of the research, defeating its purpose. Ultimately the militant research approach, while no methodology is perfect, is far preferable to replicating society's 'patterns of domination' through a reifying pretence to full objectivity.<sup>75</sup>

The influence of militant research also helps to explain why the theoretical framework of the thesis is broadly post-marxist; and the post-marxist framework helps in understanding the thesis' relationship to the common GTM concern for 'generalisability', which can be better conceived in the prefigurative terms of militant research and through Negri's 'method of the tendency'. Here I use the term 'post-marxist' loosely, to define the critical intermingling of Marxist categories and poststructuralist theory found in Laclau, Negri, as well as thinkers like Enrique Dussel, and many others. What post-marxism allows, and what it shares with militant research, is the capacity to anchor one's thought around what Dussel defines most clearly: a perspectival 'ethical choice'. Within Dussel's wider project of 'transmodernism', which seeks to refound a universal 'ethics of liberation' that moves beyond the Eurocentrism of both modernity and postmodernity, the 'point of departure is an ethical choice and a concrete historical praxis'.<sup>76</sup> For such thinkers as Laclau, Negri or Dussel, their engagement with Marx is concentric with the 'ethical choice' that guides their path out

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<sup>75</sup> Gibson 2007: 438.

<sup>76</sup> Dussel 2003: 160.



of the deconstructive critical spiral: the choice to adopt the perspective of the subject of radical democracy. Marx sought an improved objectivity by privileging the perspective of the worker;<sup>77</sup> these post-marxists prioritise subjectivity over objectivity, but still choose a privileged subject and philosophise strategically on that subject's behalf; be that subject the 'people', the 'multitude' or the 'oppressed'. This perspectival ethical choice provides the necessary anchor in the present, and a set of leading lights for understanding the past and guiding the asymptotic path through the future.

Hardt and Negri present a relationship to modernity and postmodernity reminiscent of Dussel's in its transversality, or as they phrase it, diagonality. Their project of 'altermodernity' is defined as a strategic-philosophical sensibility that they contrast to the antimodernity of the slave rebellion, the peasant revolt, or Nazism, all forms of resistance against modernity that, whether progressive or reactionary, remain 'internal to modernity'.<sup>78</sup> Altermodernity is not the dialectical negation of modernity, but rather 'a diagonal stance, not simply opposing all that is modern and rational but inventing new rationalities and new forms of liberation.'<sup>79</sup> The diagonality of the altermodern perspective facilitates the prefigurative move from resistance towards autonomy and alternative; it is defined 'not by opposition but by rupture and transformation.'<sup>80</sup> This altermodern strategic modality reflects Negri's wider theorisations of autonomy and constituent power, but also his theoretical methodology. Negri's 'method of the tendency' is explicitly not an objective method; it is a reading of possibilities based on the ethical choice to take the subjective perspective of the multitude (or, earlier, the worker). It seeks out trends that can guide the tactical manoeuvres of political class composition, always on the lookout for tendencies of the state to be subverted, and prefigurative tendencies of resistance to be seized upon, exaggerated and supported through appropriate forms of organisation:

The tendency is in no sense a necessary and inevitable law governing reality. The tendency is a general schema that takes as its starting point an analysis of the elements that make up a given historical situation. On the basis of that analysis, it defines a method, an orientation, a direction for mass political action. ... The tendency is the practical/theoretical process whereby the workers' point of view becomes explicit in a determinate historical epoch. ... it represents an adventure of reason as it comes to encounter the complexities of reality ...

There is no such thing as objective truth given at the outset: truth has to be constructed in

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<sup>77</sup> Or, at least, *some* of Marx's texts could be described this way, primarily *Capital*. Negri argues that we should understand the *Grundrisse* differently (Negri 1991 [1979]).

<sup>78</sup> Hardt and Negri 2009: 101.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid 97.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 104. This move from resistance to alternative can be seen in Negri's work as early as the *operaista* concept of *self-valorisation*, which was a crucial early inspiration in my own academic interests that ultimately led to the concept of prefigurative constitutionality. To be discussed further in Chapter 2.

the struggle, through the struggle, through the transformation of practice. Marxist analysis determines the reality with which it is concerned by imposing a class point of view from the start; this is its operative schema, which takes the side of the worker, and its intentions are revolutionary.<sup>81</sup>

Where Dussel's point of departure is the 'ethical choice' to take the perspective of 'the oppressed', Negri's ethical choice is to take the perspective of the worker, and later the multitude. From this founding subjective impulse one can reread political economy, state theory or constitutional theory from the perspective of the multitude and produce a reading of the tendential development of capital, the state or constituted power that is strategically useful to the multitude, and ultimately shapes and is reshaped by the multitude's own tendential strategic development. The purpose, then, of Negri's method of the tendency is not the production of objective truth, but what Deleuze and Guattari define as the true purpose of all philosophy: the production of concepts.<sup>82</sup> As Negri says: 'truth has to be constructed in the struggle, through the struggle, through the transformation of practice.'<sup>83</sup> So when Negri makes claims like, 'The concept of constituent power is the core of political ontology,'<sup>84</sup> he is not so much claiming that this *is* true; rather that it is, potentially, *becoming* true; that based on critical analysis of past and present, as well as the ongoing praxis of the multitude, the expression of the multitude's constituent power through the autonomous constituent process is a real tendency that can be pursued, if we make the ethical choice to adopt its perspective. In so doing, the movement might more fully become the multitude, might more fully express constituent power and more fully constitute the radical Negrian constituent process.

The thesis does not seek to directly apply Negri's method of the tendency, and it does not choose between the multitude, the people or the oppressed as the proper subject of radical democracy. Indeed, the research is precisely interested in the implications of the contrasting subjectivisations of struggle in the form of either the multitude or the people (although it approaches this question of the subject of radical democracy indirectly and largely implicitly). However it does, like the above theories, make the ethical choice to be guided by the perspective of that radically democratic subject whose more precise definition is at stake in Ahora Madrid's tension between populism and *asamblearismo*; and to produce knowledge that might be strategically useful to that subject of radical democracy. This, then, is not Negri's relatively closed and polemical method of *the* tendency, but an open, plural method of tendencies. The method of the tendency is something the movements are doing themselves, as they propose, produce, consolidate and

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<sup>81</sup> Negri 2005 [1971]: 27-28.

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1994.

<sup>83</sup> Negri 2005 [1971]: 28.

<sup>84</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 35.

compete over an array of democratic subjectivities, temporalities, epistemologies, ontologies and constitutionalities. An open method of tendencies takes greater account of the instability, incompleteness and contestation of these concepts, as well as (taking inspiration from Laclau) the hegemonic relations between them, of the floating nature of key signifiers, and the gravitational pull of powerful empty signifiers. Negri claims a propositive approach but tends to arrive at the prescriptive. Prefigurative constitutionality as open method of tendencies takes the movements even more seriously as sources of theoretical and strategic knowledge and experimentation, producing a more complete understanding of the array of politico-constitutional trajectories in play, that is better able to consider the radical novelty of Ahora Madrid's attempt to constitute a form of prefigurative populism. The great benefit of Negri's influence, however, is to more clearly elucidate a prefigurative-strategic relationship between militant methodology and tendential theorisation that is not tied to the overly objectivist concept of generalisability. From what happened in Madrid we move by open method of tendencies not to what, therefore, is happening elsewhere, but to what is possible elsewhere, and what radical democrats elsewhere should be wary of.

## 2 Ganemos' *Asambleario* Constitutionality

We the unemployed, the poorly paid, the subcontracted, the precarious, the young... we want change, and a decent future. ... We charge the political and economic powers with our precarious situation, and demand a change of course. ... We call everyone, as citizens, onto the streets on 15 May, at 6pm, under the slogan 'Real Democracy NOW. We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers.' We encourage you to join peacefully and without exclusive political symbols, to make one voice heard. ... Standing for peace and social justice. Together, we can.<sup>85</sup>

So reads Democracia Real YA's call to the streets, beginning the chain of events that would cohere into the 15M movement, also known as the *indignados*. 15M is the essential starting point for telling the story of Ganemos Madrid and the 'municipalist wager', as it is the core common denominator of all the actors that converged under the banner of municipalism. Every subsequent political project had to define itself in relation to 15M, had to articulate its own particular reading of that profound event. The PP narrative was one of a naïve movement that should grow up and engage with the representative system, one PP spokesperson infamously arguing that they should form a political party: 'if they say that they represent the people, the best way to prove it is to win votes.'<sup>86</sup> For the left and the movements, 15M became a 'foundational myth' that demanded fidelity.<sup>87</sup> I am (re)writing this section on 14 May 2021, the day before the movement's tenth anniversary, the Spanish media already overflowing with elegiac reflections on that formative experience of 'real utopia' in the '*asambleario* horizontality' of the occupied squares.<sup>88</sup> One certainly feels old upon encountering an article with a title such as 'I Remember it Perfectly: I Was 10 years Old when 15M Happened'.<sup>89</sup> But it is by no means mere clickbait-exaggeration that 15M is today being discussed in the same breath as May 1968.<sup>90</sup> My research participants, interviewed in 2018, also stressed its importance emphatically. José Haro, for example:

15M exceeded everything. ... The movements had reached a limit, but a generalised discontent was slowly permeating diverse layers of society. 15M was a lesson in citizenship, in which the citizenship itself – diverse, horizontal, peaceful – somehow surpassed all that

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<sup>85</sup> Democracia Real YA 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Sanz 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Ernesto Castro, interviewed in Miró 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Duval 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Miró 2021.

we thought we knew about citizen mobilisation, and it changed everything. There is, very clearly, a before and an after 15M.<sup>91</sup>

Academics have emphasised 15M's impressive *transversality*, both in terms of active participation and wider support.<sup>92</sup> Activists consistently emphasised their *autonomy* from established institutions, leading Flesher Fominaya (inter alia) to define 15M as therefore an essentially 'autonomous movement.'<sup>93</sup> Assertions of autonomy were linked to a critique of the representative functions of those established institutions, summarised in the famous slogan *no nos representan* (they don't represent us). That elegant slogan served as a powerful floating signifier that could resonate across a broad spectrum, from those who thought representative democracy should work better to those critical of representative democracy per se, and the latter leads to characterisations of 15M's *anti-representative* ethos.<sup>94</sup> Despite some early struggles for recognition of *feminist* concerns, not all of which disappeared,<sup>95</sup> 15M was a site of confluence for the diverse Spanish feminist movements, reshaping them, and which in turn reshaped 15M, until the two became largely inseparable. This was symbolically illustrated by the emergent, eventually dominant trend among 15M assemblies of the generalised use of the feminine plural.<sup>96</sup> Some have emphasised the role of the encampments as sites of a 'politics of encounter', channelling the ideas of Merrifield and Holloway; or as sites of constituent power.<sup>97</sup> Some, especially those involved in formulating Podemos' populist wager, saw 15M as a *populist* moment, the emergent site of a new 'counterhegemonic discourse' and of the *indignados* as popular subject, as we will discuss further in Chapter 3.<sup>98</sup> In 2020, Iglesias would once again invoke a re-reading of 15M, now to defend his turn away from Podemos' early Laclauian-Errejónista strategy and towards a more explicitly left wing identity (expressed most concretely by the formation of Unidas Podemos, Podemos' coalition with IU).<sup>99</sup> Clearly, 'there is no single story of 15M.'<sup>100</sup> No single history or theory can fully do justice to its ebullient multiplicity. Each story is an act of reification, but also a strategic act of prioritisation. The priority for this thesis is 15M's complex combination of the *prefigurative* function of the assembly as constituent process and the imprint of

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<sup>91</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>92</sup> E.g. Díez García 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Tormey 2018: 267.

<sup>95</sup> As documented by Gámez Fuentes (2015).

<sup>96</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015: 156. Whereas the Spanish grammatical norm is to use the masculine plural for all but purely feminine collectives.

<sup>97</sup> Perugorria and Tejerina 2013; Merrifield 2011; Holloway 2010 [2002]; Hardt and Negri 2012; Halvorsen and Thorpe 2015 (which presents analogous arguments about Occupy London).

<sup>98</sup> Errejón 2011, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> 'Was Podemos ever a transversal political force? No, that is a lie. Podemos was a political force that — as time has shown — fundamentally drew on the traditional voters of forces operating within the left-wing political space. ... Similarly, it makes no sense to say 15-M did not belong to a progressive ideological-cultural space' (Iglesias, interviewed in Gilmartin 2020). Note that the final words of the opening quote from Democracia Real YA are, in the original Spanish, 'Unid@s, Podemos.'

<sup>100</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

that prefigurative legacy on Madrid's municipalist wager, alongside 15M's novel 're-engagement with the state and the direct appeal to state institutions and laws as the basis of claims and demands,' as compared to past autonomous movements, which tended towards the outright 'rejection of the state as fundamentally illegitimate'.<sup>101</sup>



Figure 1, panorama of Acampadasol, Puerta del Sol, Madrid.<sup>102</sup>

15M's existence as prefigurative constituent process was anchored in its assemblies, most visibly the general assemblies of the encampments that formed in the public squares of towns and cities such as Barcelona's Plaça de Catalunya and Madrid's Puerta del Sol. Here a host of influences converged. To name just some important examples: the occupation of Cairo's Tahrir Square the previous year; the ethos of non-violent direct action; the 'prefigurative politics' of the New Left and the alterglobal movement; anarchist traditions old and new; the principle of *horizontalidad* (horizontality) that emerged from the Argentine assembly movement of 2001; and the local tradition of *asamblearismo* (assemblyism), nurtured in transversal, mainstream form in the network of neighbourhood associations active in Madrid and other cities since the 1960s,<sup>103</sup> and in more radical form in Spain's small but vibrant network of anarchic social centres.<sup>104</sup> This complex confluence of influences produced a 'commitment to a prefigurative politics based on horizontality, direct democracy, and self-organization,'<sup>105</sup> expressed by one philosopher and 15M activist in the oft-quoted line, 'the democracy we want is the very organisation of the square.'<sup>106</sup> 15Mayista (15M-ist) assembly democracy was characterised primarily by the practice of consensus decision-making and, according to one communiqué from Acampadasol, the core principles of inclusivity, horizontality and

<sup>101</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015: 154, emphasis Flesher Fominaya's.

<sup>102</sup> Date unknown, some time between the camp's formation in the early hours of 16 May 2011 and its voluntary dispersal on 12 June 2011. Image retrieved from <<https://www.xpresidentx.es/panoramica-acampada-sol>> accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Oikonomakis and Roos 2016: 234; Castells 1983.

<sup>104</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015: 149.

<sup>105</sup> Oikonomakis and Roos 2016: 227.

<sup>106</sup> Fernández-Savater 2011.

collective intelligence.<sup>107</sup> By critiquing representative democracy *while enacting its alternative*, 15M was an inherently prefigurative constituent process of radical democracy.

As Flesher Fominaya highlights, however, 15M was also characterised by a seemingly contradictory ‘emphasis on democratic reform and renewal and a *reclaiming* of the constitution.’<sup>108</sup> As several research participants made clear, we cannot speak of a straightforward contradiction between an anti-representative 15M legacy and the municipalist electoral project, because there was always a more institutional vein present within the multiplicity that was 15M.<sup>109</sup> For P3, ‘It was clear to me that 15M, although it didn’t have an electoral component, was going to have an electoral expression, at some point. It had to, or at least it had to try.’<sup>110</sup> For Alejandra de Diego Baciero, 15M’s emphasis on locality led logically to the municipalist wager:

15M produced a very strong connection with the reality of the space in which you live, of territory, but also of the city as something for everyone. I think that’s where it comes from, for me the municipal perspective is that there is no one who knows the reality of their context better than the very people who inhabit it. Therefore, the solutions, the designs, the work of managing that reality, have to include the people that inhabit them.<sup>111</sup>

The municipalist task, therefore, was to create an organisational interface between the movements and the institutions, such that they could collaboratively revitalise ‘the democratic revolution initiated on 15 May 2011’.<sup>112</sup> They would tackle the local scale, as ‘the institutional space of greatest proximity to the citizens,’ as the space ‘that we know best’, not to mention as ‘the lacuna left by the rise of Podemos’; Ganemos would ‘fill that gap in the municipal sphere, taking advantage of the knowledge already generated by the movements, and of course enriched by 15M.’<sup>113</sup> In order to ‘translate what we learned from 15M,’<sup>114</sup> such a project would have to manifest ‘means over ends’ by creating a ‘tool that can be used by the entire society, a tool for transforming the institution, or rather, for generating a new democratic institutionality, to change the rules of the game.’<sup>115</sup> Some elements of the concrete form for such a municipalist dispositif were clear from the start; as Zapata remembers it:

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<sup>107</sup> Acampadasol 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015: 154, emphasis Flesher Fominaya’s.

<sup>109</sup> 15M was ‘an initiative of diverse natures. One of them, I insist, is the institutional. Not all of 15M backs the institutional approach, but a large part of it does’ (José Haro interview 20 June 2018).

<sup>110</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Alejandra de Diego Baciero interview 3 July 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Ganemos Madrid 29 March 2016.

<sup>113</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>115</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

The way to approach this challenge of building a candidacy in the key of 15M is that there should be a participatory program, ... there should be confluence, it should prioritise diversity and inclusivity, ... there should be a code of ethics.<sup>116</sup>

Meanwhile, Ganemos' Tools and Methodologies Working Group was similarly clear in the *15Mayista* nature of their task: 'The work has been above all to systematise the practices ... for encouraging participation ... that come from 15M.'<sup>117</sup> By developing its plans for a 'new institutional architecture' in a collective, horizontal, *asambleario* manner,<sup>118</sup> it would be Ganemos' own organisation that 'prefigures new forms of democratic city government,'<sup>119</sup> and that 'prefigures systems of democratic, inclusive and transparent relations between citizens, organised movements and public institutions.'<sup>120</sup> Ganemos was thus an inherently prefigurative constituent process, the latter aspect made explicit in the ovaric text, *La Apuesta Municipalista* (The Municipalist Wager):

The wave that was 15M has washed onto the beaches of 'municipalism', which presents a possible egress capable of giving institutional expression to 15M's democratising mission. ... Can a municipal project translate the contents of 15M into a movement for the conquest of the city councils? Can the municipalities be the lever of institutional transformation that points towards the democratic revolution? The will of a part of the population to practise a radical political upset has opened the horizon to a *constituent process*; something so difficult, and at once so simple, as to 'change the rules of the game', in order to restore political protagonism to the people,<sup>121</sup> establish mechanisms of control over political representation and impose a more just social and economic order. ... Municipalism is presented as an important contribution to this project. Without fear of exaggeration, it can be understood as a *constituent process 'from below'* that begins with the institutions most open to democracy.<sup>122</sup>

Although some (but certainly not all) authors of *La Apuesta* were not only aware of but very interested in Negri's particular brand of 'constituent process' (especially Emmanuel Rodríguez), it must be emphasised that talk of a 'constituent process' is quite common in Spain, far beyond Negrian circles, due to widespread and perfectly mainstream discourse around the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and its need, according to some, for radical reform or complete replacement. However, this idea of municipalism as 'a constituent process "from below"' clearly brings radical

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<sup>116</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Ganemos Madrid 8 February 2015a [20 December 2014a].

<sup>118</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

<sup>119</sup> Ganemos Madrid 15 July 2014 [15 June 2014].

<sup>120</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

<sup>121</sup> Translation note: not the People of populism, but '*personas*': people, *gente*.

<sup>122</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 13-14, emphasis added.



municipalism and Negri onto the same terrain and into dialogue, as we will explore in more detail later in this chapter. First, the chapter will chart a historical and theoretical genealogy of prefigurative politics, emphasising the significance of the municipalist *asalto institucional* (storming of the institutions) in contrast to the dominant anti-institutional (and anti-constitutional, and anti-power) trends in ‘prefigurative politics’, but also emphasising the diversity of usage of the concept of prefiguration. The latter effort results first in the articulation of *types* of prefiguration (anarchist real utopias, communist intermediary prefiguration, and an anti- or non-utopian form of realist prefiguration), and then in the categorisation of transversal prefigurative *functions* that will allow us to speak not only of Ganemos’ *asambleario* prefigurative constitutionality, but also of Podemos’ populist prefigurative constitutionality, and potentially of prefigurative functions operative in all sorts of political spheres. Chapter 2.1.2 explores the potential of Negri’s theories of autonomy, self-valorisation and constituent power to ground a more rigorous and strategic understanding of prefiguration and its (problematic) need to be constituted. Chapter 2.2 then follows the more inherently constituent genealogy of Spanish movement politics, from local traditions of *asamblearismo* to social syndicalism and eventually the *asalto institucional*, of which municipalism was one branch. The chapter concludes with a close analysis of the constitutional principles of Ganemos’ *asambleario* prefigurative constitutionality, and an initial theoretical reflection on what the experience of Ganemos means for a purely Negrian conception of the prefigurative constituent process.

## 2.1 Prefiguration

### 2.1.1 From Prefigurative Politics to Prefigurative Functions

Ganemos has been identified as an inherently prefigurative project, but what exactly is prefiguration? It is easiest to define negatively, as a broad and diverse trend away from an ‘instrumentalist’ or ‘consequentialist’ politics in which laudable ends justify incongruent means, and full democratic emancipation is deferred until ‘after the revolution’.<sup>123</sup> Inverting the rejection of instrumentalism produces one possible positive definition of prefiguration: the unity of ends and means. However, *means-ends unity* is hardly self-explanatory – what exactly is the nature of this supposed ‘unity’ that defines the relationship between means and ends? On face value it might suggest a simple deontological ethics, of a type entirely commonplace in modern liberal culture – from the philosophy of human rights, to the Gandhian injunction to ‘be the change’, or even the archetype of the moral hero, Superman, who (with only rare and controversial exceptions) never

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<sup>123</sup> Franks 2003.

kills.<sup>124</sup> Another definition of prefiguration, also common in the literature, is the creation of *alternatives*, the implementation here and now of both the emancipated social relations and the radically democratic procedures that one ultimately seeks to generalise. As per Boggs' classic definition of prefigurative communism:

the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.<sup>125</sup>

This introduces both a more necessarily radical and a more inherently *strategic* understanding of prefigurative politics, as a transformative project of social change, as well as making clear the inherently *constituent* nature of such a prefigurative strategy for radical democracy. Still, however, this web of loose definitions begs a multitude of questions, from the ethical to the strategic to the temporal-ontological to the constitutional; and only more so given that the 'prefigurative politics' label has been applied to such a vastly diverse range of political phenomena, from decision-making methods, to social centres, communes or factory councils, protest and direct action, individual and collective subjectivation, amorphous social movements, political parties, municipal governance, etc. For present purposes, the priority is both a theoretical analysis of prefiguration as a concept of political philosophy (and constitutional theory), and how Ganemos can be seen as part of a broad tradition of prefigurative politics. Therefore, we now embark upon a rough genealogy, deliberately illustrating something of the messiness of the history of the idea, but tempering that messiness by organising it into four parts that identify distinct *types* of prefiguration: first the roots of radical means-ends unity in classical anarchism's focus on prefigurative *real utopia*, then the heterodox communist tendencies that Boggs labelled 'prefigurative communism', and that articulate a type of *intermediary prefiguration* (as well as hinting towards a possible non-utopian *realist prefiguration*), and finally the 'prefigurative politics' that Breines identified as emerging from the New Left and which, along with dominant trends in the alterglobal movement, reveal a more *presentist* type of prefiguration. We will then attempt to abstract from these distinct traditions and types a set of three prefigurative *functions* that transcend ideological distinctions: the *temporal-ontological*, *counter-hegemonic* and *constituent* functions of prefiguration. To clarify, by *type* I refer to a particular conception of the *ends* to be prefigured. Types are thus distinct models of politics, describing the conception of ends within a particular prefigurative ideology. By *function* I refer to a particular mode

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<sup>124</sup> Or, as Gandhi actually said, 'As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do' (Gandhi 1999: 239).

<sup>125</sup> Boggs 1977a.

of understanding the *relationship between means and ends*. Functions are thus transversal, potentially applicable to any political model or ideology.

### *Anarchism: Real Utopia*

At the core of the disagreements between the socialists of the First International, centred around Marx, and the anarchists, centred around Bakunin, was the question of organisation. In 1871, ten months before Bakunin's expulsion from the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA) at the infamous 1872 Hague Congress and the subsequent split and formation of the St Imier International, the anarchist Jura Federation set out their grievances with the behaviour of the IWMA's executive, the General Council. The Jura Federation claimed the Council had sidestepped the norm of assembly democracy, which invested decision-making supremacy in the General Congress of the IWMA, by organising a 'secret Conference' that did not 'grant a full representation of the International' and 'whose majority was manipulated from the start'. The conference was accused of resolving, against 'the General Statutes', to 'transform the International, from a free Federation of autonomous Sections, to a hierarchical and authoritarian organization composed of disciplined Sections placed under the power of a General Council which can, at its own mercy, deny their admission or even suspend their activity.'<sup>126</sup> In contrast to this hierarchical approach, and the resolution of the General Council that workers should form political parties,<sup>127</sup> the Sonvilier Circular advocated 'the Social Revolution, ... and its program: "Emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves," free of all directing authority, even should that authority be elected and endorsed by the workers.'<sup>128</sup> Their reasoning:

The society of the future should be nothing other than the universalisation of the organization with which the International will have endowed itself. We must, therefore, be careful to ensure that this organization comes as close as possible to our ideal. How can we expect an egalitarian and free society to emerge from an authoritarian organization? Impossible. The International, as the embryo of the human society of the future, is required in the here and now to faithfully mirror our principles of freedom and federation and shun any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship.<sup>129</sup>

Means-ends unity continued to define the anarchist tradition into the twentieth century. In the US, for example, the Wobblies of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) made prefiguration a core part of their praxis, enshrining in the preamble to the IWW's constitution the famous

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<sup>126</sup> Jura Federation 1905 [1871].

<sup>127</sup> Gordon 2017: 528.

<sup>128</sup> Jura Federation 1905 [1871].

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

argument that 'By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.'<sup>130</sup>

Other anarchists, meanwhile, expanded their prefigurative vision beyond the purely organisational. Emma Goldman, for example, reiterated the heart of the argument of the Sonvilier Circular in her memoir, *My Disillusionment in Russia*, concluding that 'No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the means used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the purposes to be achieved', but also extending the argument:

All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical.<sup>131</sup>

Goldman and the Sonvilier Circular share a *constituent* vision of prefiguration, that 'our ideal' must be constituted in our democratic organisational procedures, as well as a more implicit *ontological* argument, that how we organise today influences or determines future political outcomes. Goldman also extends the organisational argument of the Sonvilier Circular, generalising it to include 'individual habit and social practice', a more cultural and ethical understanding of means-ends unity that accounts for the importance of *subjectivation*.

The history of anarchism includes the whole range of prefigurative *functions* that will be defined more precisely at the end of Chapter 2.1.1, the ontological, the constituent, and even hinting at the counter-hegemonic (as process of radical subjectivation). What unites anarchism as a distinct *type* of prefiguration is its demand that what we prefigure in our current organisation, and in our everyday social relations, should not be some pragmatic *intermediary* goal, but rather the *ultimate* goal. We should be concerned with building *utopia* here and now. Anarchist prefiguration can thus best be described using Wright's concept of 'real utopia'.<sup>132</sup>

The precise term 'prefigurative politics' does not emerge until 1979, when Breines applies it to her analysis of the New Left, citing Boggs' slightly earlier use of the 'prefigurative' label (in 1977, regarding 'prefigurative communism') as inspiration. We turn next, therefore, to Boggs, trying to maintain some semblance of coherence by following a roughly chronological path. Specifically, we

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<sup>130</sup> This sentence has remained intact in the preamble to this day, ever since its inscription in a 1908 amendment to the original version of 1905. The current official text of the IWW's constitutional preamble can be found here: <https://iww.org.uk/preamble>. The 1905 original and 1908 amended version are available here: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA05/cline/preamble.htm> accessed 31 May 2021.

<sup>131</sup> Goldman cited in Gordon 2017: 530.

<sup>132</sup> Wright 2010. Wright was no anarchist himself, but his concept of real utopia was very much a case of introducing this traditionally anarchist understanding of prefiguration into his Marxist framework.

focus on Boggs' analysis in two articles published the same year, of 'Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control', and of 'Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy and the Dilemma of Power', as well as the prefigurative aspects of two further communist thinkers, Gorz and Gramsci.<sup>133</sup> The primary utility of the following section is to establish *intermediary prefiguration* as a distinct type, which we will see expressed in the next chapter in Podemos' populist constitutionality.

### *Communism: Prefiguring the Workers' State*

In 'Revolutionary Process', Boggs presents the useful dichotomy of instrumentalism versus prefiguration, or as he puts it:

two distinct sets of tasks – the *instrumental*, which includes above all the struggle to conquer and maintain political power, and the *prefigurative*, which expresses the ultimate ends of the revolutionary process itself: popular self-emancipation, collective social and authority relations, socialist democracy.<sup>134</sup>

This defines prefiguration in terms of political content, which Boggs associates especially with what he calls 'the councillist tendency'.<sup>135</sup> A broader, more formal definition of prefiguration is provided in 'Prefigurative Communism':

the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.<sup>136</sup>

Note how this presents a *utopian* understanding of prefiguration, showing that prefiguration as real utopia is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the *intermediary* understanding he will expound elsewhere – not only prefigurative functions but also prefigurative types can overlap in practice. While Boggs acknowledges both the New Left's place in this 'prefigurative tradition' and its roots in classical anarchism, he is largely dismissive of both.<sup>137</sup> The reason being that these traditions were themselves so fervently dismissive of Marxist-Leninist instrumentalism, whereas Boggs was specifically interested in how the instrumental-prefigurative antagonism could be sublated within

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<sup>133</sup> Boggs 1977a and 1977b.

<sup>134</sup> Boggs 1977b: 359.

<sup>135</sup> Boggs sees this councillist tendency represented 'From the early Russian and Italian council movements, to the anarcho-communism of the Spanish Civil War, to the new left of the 1960s' (ibid: 363).

<sup>136</sup> Boggs 1977a.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. The anarchist aspect of 'anarcho-communism' is dismissed as 'trapped in its own spontaneism,' either 'flailing away helplessly from the outside,' or collapsing into full 'integration into Marxism itself' (Boggs 1977b: 382). Boggs also takes aim at 'the degeneration of the new left into fragmented modes of primitive rebellion (mysticism, terrorism, therapy)'. Note however that Boggs is equally critical of 'the simultaneous emergence of dogmatic, super-vanguardist "Marxist-Leninist" sects', which he sees as part of a 'reciprocal process' of polarisation among the (especially US) left of the time (ibid: 387).

the Marxist tradition, with prefiguration geared not to the complete and immediate abolition of state and hierarchy, but to building ‘prefigurative structures ... as a nucleus of a future socialist state.’<sup>138</sup> ‘Such a synthesis’, Boggs argues, must incorporate ‘into a single strategy both spontaneism and the “external element,” consciousness and structural transformation, prefigurative and state power struggles’.<sup>139</sup> Boggs thus presents an understanding of means-ends unity that attempts to combine the prefiguration of utopian ultimate ends (a stateless, classless society) with the more pragmatic prefiguration of further means (the transitional socialist state).<sup>140</sup>

We see this pattern repeated elsewhere in the genealogy of prefigurative communism. Although Boggs is often identified as the progenitor of modern usage of the idea of political ‘prefiguration’,<sup>141</sup> and he himself does remember arriving ‘at the term on his own, inspired at the time by Gramsci and Bookchin,’ the term ‘prefiguration’ was in political usage well before 1977.<sup>142</sup> A key example is André Gorz, who wrote in 1968 of socialist revolutionary practice as ‘the prefiguration of social self-management by the sovereign producers’.<sup>143</sup> For Gorz, the vanguard party should serve a prefigurative-pedagogical function:

[The party] *prefigures* the proletarian State, and reflects for the working class its capacity to be a ruling class. It incarnates the presence of socialism within capitalism, since it is a positive negation of the latter. ... the party must aspire to being at once the memory and the *prefiguration* of struggles more advanced than those which are possible at a given moment. ... Its guiding function consists ... in making explicit the way in which the immediate and local demands of the workers in reality transcend their specific situation, and the way in which these local demands mesh into and define the *intermediary* objectives of a transitional strategy.<sup>144</sup>

Gorz argues explicitly against a conception of prefiguration as real utopia, claiming that the role of a ‘revolutionary movement cannot be the immediate construction of socialism and of communism, i.e. a post-revolutionary society.’<sup>145</sup> Rather socialism should be prefigured only ‘in certain concrete

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<sup>138</sup> Boggs 1977a: 104.

<sup>139</sup> Boggs 1977b: 387.

<sup>140</sup> As insightfully identified by Gordon (2017).

<sup>141</sup> E.g. Yates 2015. Not the exact phrase ‘prefigurative politics’, which belongs to Breines, but Boggs’ discussion of ‘prefigurative communism’ is acknowledged by Breines as the inspiration for her term.

<sup>142</sup> Gordon 2017: 527, citing ‘personal communication’ with Boggs, on 2 July 2016.

<sup>143</sup> Gorz 1968: 60.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*: 58, emphasis added.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*: 52.

aspects,<sup>146</sup> the party specifically serving to prefigure, through its ‘central organs, by their cohesion and capacity for political analysis, ... the central power of the transitional period’.<sup>147</sup>

This staunch emphasis on *intermediary prefiguration*, to the express exclusion of real utopias, the prefiguration not of ultimate ends but of further means, continues to resonate as we press back further in history to Antonio Gramsci, who was (as mentioned above, alongside Bookchin) a key inspiration for Boggs’ thinking on prefiguration. In his early writings, Gramsci saw much value in how the Turin factory occupations and workers’ councils ‘prefigure the imminent transformation of social and historical values’, while in his later writings the emphasis shifted towards the party and the state.<sup>148</sup> As Sassoon puts it, in the *Prison Notebooks*, ‘A new concept of politics begins within the party itself. It is in this sense that the party prefigures a new type of State’.<sup>149</sup> This is primarily a transition from a utopian to an intermediary conception of prefiguration, but it also hints towards a different conception of prefiguration entirely, a third type. Even Gramsci’s early writings include powerful caveats regarding the prefigurative functions of the factory councils, an intense concern for *realism*. Gramsci did not believe that ‘the occupation of an undefended factory’ (nor, we might infer, the occupation of an ‘undefended’ public square) could helpfully be considered a *real* experience of future communism: ‘The occupation of the factories in and of itself – without the proletariat possessing its own armed force, having the means to ration basic necessities according to its own class interests, or having the means to punish physically sabotage by specialists and bureaucrats – cannot be seen as an experience of communist society’.<sup>150</sup> Gramsci continues,

If the workers were convinced that the occupation of the factories represented an attempt at communist management, the rapid disillusionment would have a terrible effect. ... It is essential that the workers should not be able to believe for one instant that the communist Revolution is as easy to accomplish as the occupation of an undefended factory. ... what good would the occupation of the factories ... be, if there is not ... a political-economic centre (the workers’ State) which unites one factory to another; which transforms the banks, to assist working-class management; which breaks ... the sabotage of the counter-revolutionaries?’<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid: 52.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid: 61.

<sup>148</sup> Gramsci 1988: 327.

<sup>149</sup> Sassoon 1987: 172.

<sup>150</sup> Gramsci 1988: 327.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid: 328. Interestingly, Bookchin had similar ideas about how frivolous, presentist activism can prefiguratively instill a dangerous immaturity: ‘A “politics” of disorder or “creative chaos,” or a naïve practice of “taking over the streets” (usually little more than a street festival), regresses participants to the behavior of a juvenile herd’ (Bookchin 2015: 191).

Gramsci did believe in the ultimate withering away of the state and its replacement with what he called a 'regulated society', or 'a State without a State,'<sup>152</sup> and so his concern for prefiguration is, as for Gorz, of an intermediary type: the primary goal of prefigurative struggle being the practical foreshadowing of the transitional workers' state, that intermediary end (or further means) that can be defined concretely, unlike the vague spectre of full communism. However, in his overriding concern that prefiguration of those intermediary ends be *realistic*, that the profound dangers of *unrealistic prefiguration* should be avoided at all costs, Gramsci points towards a third type that we could call *realist prefiguration*. The fullest expression of this type would go beyond Gramsci's realism towards an entirely statist, anti- or non-utopian vision that diverts from intermediary prefiguration by seeking to prefigure ultimate ends, but whose ultimate ends are so unambitious as to be as close to the present as are Gorz and Gramsci's intermediary ends. This type of non-utopian *realist prefiguration* will be seen in Chapters 3 and 4, in the political visions of Jesús Montero, former General Secretary of Podemos Madrid, and P5, a close ally of Manuela Carmena; both see an evolving role for direct democracy in society, but neither believes in any utopian future of wholly non-representative, absolute democracy.

Although Gramsci worried about the concrete constitutional form of the occupied factory prefiguring an unrealistic vision of the socialist state, his political theory also relies heavily on another understanding of prefiguration. This time not a *type* of prefiguration, but a *function*: the prefiguration of 'social and historical values,'<sup>153</sup> and how that helps to answer the question, 'How can the present be welded to the future, so that while satisfying the urgent necessities of the one we may work effectively to create and "anticipate" the other?'.<sup>154</sup> This is Gramsci's well-known concept, the 'war of position'. Central to Gramsci's political theory is not just the direct assault on the state (the war of manoeuvre), but also the war of position that constructs a new hegemony – new subjectivities and a new socio-political common-sense. This idea would intuitively seem to include at least *some* prefigurative element, but Stephanie Ross goes so far as to identify the war of position as synonymous with 'prefigurative struggle':

prefigurative struggle, or what Gramsci called the 'war of position': struggles which create new ways of living, thinking, feeling, and relating that challenge the 'common sense' of the age.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gramsci 1971: 263.

<sup>153</sup> Gramsci 1988: 327.

<sup>154</sup> Gramsci 1977: 65.

<sup>155</sup> Ross 2008: 18.



This suggests that we can think of the social and cultural aspects of prefiguration, at least to the extent that they are part of a broader transformative strategy, as expressing a *counter-hegemonic* prefigurative function, an idea that will be defined in more detail below.

### *The New Left: (Anti-)Strategy and Transversality*

The precise term 'prefigurative politics' finally arrives in a 1979 conference paper by Wini Breines, published the next year as the journal article, 'Community and Organization: The New Left and Michels' "Iron Law"<sup>156</sup>. The article focuses on the US context, but the issues raised are so tantalisingly familiar to students of the later alterglobal and 15M movements that it is worth covering in some detail, in order to see how consistently the same internal tensions have recurred, in particular the tensions between organisation and anti-organisation, institutionalisation and anti-institutionalism, strategy and anti-strategy, counterpower and anti-power. Breines aimed to counter what she described as the near-blanket criticism of the New Left at the time, among commentators of all political stripes, for being 'a utopian, antiorganizational, even antipolitical movement which, for these very reasons, was bound to fail.'<sup>157</sup> Breines attributes this attitude to an 'instrumental bias' that assumes 'not only the efficacy but the necessity of certain kinds of instrumental politics or certain kinds of organization,' leading to the foregone conclusion that a political project that rejects instrumentalism will fail. In contrast, Breines argues that 'the utopian "antiorganizational" and "antipolitical" aspects of the new left were among its most vital aspects',<sup>158</sup> that rather than failures these aspects were themselves deliberate political acts intended 'to forge a new notion of politics ... committed to participatory democracy, a politics that embodied antihierarchical values and community while simultaneously attempting to bring about radical structural change in the United States'.<sup>159</sup> This tense simultaneity is investigated through what Breines calls 'a conflict between strategic and prefigurative politics'; defined respectively as a strategic politics 'committed to building organization in order to achieve power so that structural changes in the political, economic and social orders might be achieved', and 'an essentially antiorganizational [prefigurative] politics characteristic of the movement, as well as of parts of new left leadership; it may be recognized in counter-institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and antihierarchical values in politics.'<sup>160</sup> This tendency that Breines labels 'prefigurative politics' is defined by its attempts 'to develop the seeds of liberation and the new society (prior to and in the process of

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<sup>156</sup> Breines 1980.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid 420.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid: 427.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid: 422.

revolution) through notions of participatory democracy grounded in counter-institutions', and especially for Breines, the building of community.<sup>161</sup>

One of the key expressions of this strategic-prefigurative tension in the US New Left of the 1960s was the organisation Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The existence of the student movement, as a relatively spontaneous upswell of local struggles, preceded and 'did not depend on strategy or formal organization'; it was very much, to borrow the language of alterglobalisation, a 'movement of movements'. Any attempt to organise or coordinate the movements, or to build an organisation on top, would have to contend with the movements' hostility towards 'bureaucracy, hierarchy and leadership'.<sup>162</sup> This remained a largely 'unresolved tension, between the spontaneous grassroots social movement committed to participatory democracy, and the intention (necessitating organization) of achieving power or radical structural change'.<sup>163</sup> The role of SDS was therefore 'to discover organizational forms and instrumental mechanisms that could be both effective within the given political arena and consistent with the "antipolitical" motifs of the movement',<sup>164</sup> and they attempted this primarily through the deployment of the rhetoric and practice of 'participatory democracy'.

The *Port Huron Statement* of 1962 is the SDS manifesto for an organised, strategic prefigurative politics, clearly striving to overcome Breines' vaunted prefigurative-strategic conflict.<sup>165</sup> We find here a concerted interest in the construction of 'alternatives';<sup>166</sup> a proposal that such alternatives should be characterised by 'participatory democracy';<sup>167</sup> a call for economic democracy;<sup>168</sup> and a prefigurative approach to achieving such democratic alternatives.<sup>169</sup> However, none of this necessarily sets SDS entirely apart from older radical traditions. Breines argues that 'the new left ... attempted to forge a new notion of politics,' which is correct, but not primarily for the reasons Breines gives. The main novelty of the *Port Huron Statement*, and of the traditions of

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid: 421.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid: 422.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid: 421.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid: 420.

<sup>165</sup> If not deny it altogether, as later theorists of prefiguration have focused on.

<sup>166</sup> 'a yearning to believe that there is an alternative to the present'; 'The search for truly democratic alternatives to the present'; 'Making values explicit--an initial task in establishing alternatives'; 'The case for change, for alternatives' (Students for a Democratic Society 1962).

<sup>167</sup> 'we see little reason why men cannot meet with increasing the skill the complexities and responsibilities of their situation, if society is organized not for minority, but for majority, participation in decision-making. ... We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation' (ibid).

<sup>168</sup> 'the economic experience is so personally decisive that the individual must share in its full determination; ... the economy itself is of such social importance that its major resources and means of production should be open to democratic participation and subject to democratic social regulation' (ibid).

<sup>169</sup> 'if anything, the brutalities of the twentieth century teach that means and ends are intimately related' (ibid).

prefigurative politics that followed in its wake, is not solely its means-ends unity, nor its interest in participatory democracy and other alternatives; the real novelty lies in adapting those aspects of older traditions and applying them to a *transversal* politics beyond narrow ideological divides. We are not yet in the borderline-populist terrain of ‘beyond left and right’ (it is still the New *Left* after all), but the *Statement* contains a clearly transversal approach to building a broad radical left beyond the liberal-socialist divide:

not even the liberal and socialist preachments of the past seem adequate to the forms of the present. ... It has been said that our liberal and socialist predecessors were plagued by vision without program, while our own generation is plagued by program without vision. ... A new left must include liberals and socialists, the former for their relevance, the latter for their sense of thoroughgoing reforms in the system.<sup>170</sup>

In this schema, participatory democracy is not the novelty; it is the anchor, the common denominator, a partially empty signifier that binds together the diverse, transversal movement of movements. Not that diverse ideologies did not form alliances or coalitions before 1962; but this is far from the broad left electoral coalition or the united front of the revolutionary vanguard party. Transversality does not mean cooperation *despite* diversity, it makes a positive, foundational value of *cooperation in diversity*.<sup>171</sup>

In SDS we see a number of patterns that 15M, Ganemos and Ahora Madrid will later reflect. Ganemos will try to channel the transversality of 15M, anchoring it around assembly democracy; but not all of 15M will be convinced. Many will reject the attempt to institutionalise the spirit of 15M, to move from anti-power to counterpower and state power. A central part of Ganemos’ radical municipalist wager was to maintain and nurture a vibrant municipalist movement outside the state institutions, resolving the tensions encountered by SDS by constituting Ganemos as movement-institution interface within a thriving municipalist ecology. A profound goal, but not one they were successfully able to sustain.

### *From Structurelessness to Anti-Power*

The US left of the 1970s and 1980s saw something of a polarisation between institutional politics and prefigurative politics, described in detail in Epstein’s influential study of the emergence of the nonviolent direct action movement. The American socialist left disintegrated in this period, leaving two primary poles of attraction: electoral social democracy, centred around the merger of the New American Movement and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee to form Democratic

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> This resonates strongly with Hardt and Negri’s calls for a positive conception of tolerance, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.1.2.

Socialists of America; and the diverse movements centred around identity politics, issue-based protest and direct action. Prefigurative politics evolved rapidly among radical sections of the latter movements, especially among feminists, and in the peace, anti-nuclear and ecology movements. Also crucial were the many utopian rural communes that formed in this period, providing stable hubs for organising and intense crucibles for developing new cultural and organisational norms (the same functions served by urban social centres for the alterglobal and 15M movements). Some elements of transversality persisted, uniting a diverse range of anarchists, socialists, feminists, hippies, Christians, pagans and Quakers around a core set of foundational concepts, identified by Epstein as ‘small-scale community, consensus-process grass roots democracy, the rejection of all hierarchies, nonviolent revolution.’<sup>172</sup> From these shared political values emerged a methodological orthodoxy that would be perfectly familiar to any alterglobal activist of the twenty-first century: assembly-based consensus decision-making complete with working groups, spokescouncils, affinity groups, and the immense power of the dissensual ‘block’.

Consensus decision-making quickly became the most recognisable feature of prefigurative politics, all the way through to the movements of the squares. It requires unanimity to proceed, or at least that no individual blocks the decision (individuals may ‘stand aside’ to indicate dissatisfaction without fully blocking the process). Various forms of consensus decision-making can be found in history, from the Haudenosaunee confederacy to the Hanseatic League or the indigenous Aymara of the Andes, but the direct influence on US social movements of the 1960s is most commonly identified as the Quakers.<sup>173</sup>

For decades this has been a matter of hearsay among social movements. Thankfully, at least for this author’s long-burning curiosity, Andy Blunden finally conducted the necessary primary research to offer some concrete answers, published in 2016. The full story is resplendent in its complexity and its unexpected quirks. Sadly we cannot retell it here in its entirety, but some key points are worth covering. Quakers played a role, but only indirectly. Anarchists (with Murray Bookchin playing an especially important role), who often claim consensus as their own, seem to have been early adopters and proponents but not progenitors, at least not in the US. Consensus was rather a matter of parallel evolution, entering the US movements separately from multiple directions. One key source was the curious figure of Myles Horton, who developed techniques of consensus decision-making in the Highlander Folk School he founded in Tennessee in 1932, based on the Scandinavian tradition of the folkehøjskoler, where he raised a generation of Tennessee student activists on principles of racial integration, egalitarianism, and the non-majoritarian ‘process of

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<sup>172</sup> Epstein 1991: 51.

<sup>173</sup> E.g. Cornell 2009.

shared decision making'.<sup>174</sup> First to develop 'consensus in its modern form', Blunden believes, was the Nashville branch of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), nurtured by civil rights activist James Lawson, who was himself inspired by Gandhian principles of non-violence (and Gandhi's wider, implicitly prefigurative philosophy) and the collective decision-making tradition of his childhood Methodist church.<sup>175</sup> Both the Tennessee and Nashville traditions converged in the SNCC, making consensus a natural possibility for organising the national network, but not the only possibility. The deciding factor in its wider adoption by the national SNCC was its eminent applicability to the task at hand: civil disobedience. As SNCC staff member Mary King explained to Blunden:

When building a nonviolent movement, one cannot order another to take a public stand or break the law. Individuals must decide for themselves whether they are ready to make the sacrifices entailed and pay the penalties that civil disobedience requires. The experience of making such profound decisions, both individually and as a group, cultivates democratic skills and an expectation of participatory processes in future governance. This phenomenon isn't found in movements that rely on violent tactics.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore:

the most important reason for the making of decisions by consensus in the SNCC context is that it simply would not work to use majority numerical voting to take a decision that could endanger the participants. How could someone who had doubts, or was not fully committed, be ordered into taking, say, direct action, if it might result in his or her being beaten, or worse? Only that individual could decide. In top-down armed struggle you could order someone to take an action, but not in nonviolent struggle.<sup>177</sup>

This emphasises that the repertoire of prefigurative politics can be employed for a host of simultaneous reasons. Prefigurative dispositifs like consensus might seem like the ethically correct way to proceed, in accordance with one's anti-hierarchical values; while simultaneously prefiguring the inclusive democratic social relations one wishes to see generalised; while furthermore being a sound strategic decision – the best, most effective way to organise a cohesive group of committed activists facing dangerous consequences for their collective actions. 15M, and especially the encampments, faced violent police repression, and so consensus decision-making had similar

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<sup>174</sup> Horton, cited in Blunden 2016: 185.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid: 244.

<sup>176</sup> Mary King, cited *ibid*: 188.

<sup>177</sup> Mary King, private email to Blunden, *ibid*: 188-89.

benefits in that context. Ganemos, on the other hand, was not organising civil disobedience. They would have to justify their continued commitment to prefiguration and consensus in other ways.

Another parallel introduction of consensus decision-making came to the US movements by way of Eleanor Garst and Women Strike for Peace (WSP). This parallel history reveals the long roots of structurelessness in US prefigurative movements, which would be echoed in the alterglobal movement and (aspects of) 15M, and would be a key point of necessary departure for Ganemos in constructing a formally, rigorously constituted prefigurative institutionality. Garst was not a Quaker, but did learn the technique of consensus decision-making from them (making this the primary early Quaker influence), and introduced it to WSP from its earliest meetings in September 1961. WSP was not an explicitly feminist organisation; in fact they deliberately played on the patriarchal image of harmless housewives. WSP rejected 'any tactic which they thought too radical to be understood by the "average woman"', and succeeded in the remarkable mobilisation of around 50,000 women across the US in their first national protest against the prospect of nuclear war on 1 November 1961.<sup>178</sup> Consensus decision-making was used at WSP's first national conference. It came along with a general, deliberate structurelessness, partly due to 'antipathy' among members towards the idea of 'building yet another top-down bureaucratic peace organization' characterised by 'boring meetings'.<sup>179</sup> But partly also due to McCarthyism, as the precursor to WSP, National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), had disintegrated due to the pressure to expel suspected communists. WSP therefore decided 'that they would have no formal requirements for membership or even keep membership lists'.<sup>180</sup> Only much later in the 1960s would the empowerment experienced by the women in WSP blossom into conscious feminism, but the influence of WSP on both the wider peace and later women's liberation movements was immense, handing down to the daughters of WSP (both figuratively and literally) an intimate connection between consensus decision-making at the level of the meeting and structurelessness at the level of the movement.

The US New Left's motley crew of countercultural anarchists, hippies, Quakers, etc, were utterly receptive to the organisational tools that became the repertoire of prefigurative politics. These tools perfectly complemented the emerging anti-authoritarian philosophy of the movement; but just as important in their spread were the structural factors that made them the best tools for the job. Civil disobedience demanded commitment and unanimity. McCarthyism encouraged structurelessness. The New Left's dissatisfaction with the old left encouraged experimentation. Women in particular were sick of the perceived masculinity of bureaucracy and hierarchy. As time

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid: 202.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid: 203.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

went by anarchists were a key group to take up and champion the methods of prefigurative politics, but prefigurative politics was always defined precisely by its transcendence of narrow ideological labels: by its transversality.

Nevertheless, the 1970s and 80s saw the transversality of prefigurative politics turn inward, losing much of the majoritarian, counter-hegemonic and explicitly strategic aspirations of SDS and increasingly becoming more individualist, astrategic and subcultural.<sup>181</sup> At least, that is a common narrative. For example, the extremes of this tendency in the anarchist movement specifically would eventually lead an exasperated Murray Bookchin to denounce the growth of individualism and ‘lifestyle anarchism’, and eventually to break with anarchism altogether.<sup>182</sup> Jason Hickel took a vaguely similar line of attack against Occupy Wall Street, arguing that its methods and implicit ideology were all fundamentally liberal, and therefore toothless, perhaps even counterproductive.<sup>183</sup> More recently still, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams summarised this line of critique in 2015 under the label ‘folk politics’: a vein of movement politics that ‘typically remains reactive ... ignores long-term strategic goals in favour of tactics ... expresses itself as a predilection for the voluntarist and spontaneous over the institutional, ... a preference for the everyday over the structural, valorising personal experience over systematic thinking, for feeling over thinking ... and for the ethical over the political’.<sup>184</sup> Addressing prefigurative politics by name, they argue that it can, ‘at its worst’, become ‘a dogmatic assertion that the means must match the ends, accompanied by ignorance of the structural forces set against it’.<sup>185</sup>

While these critiques are often reductive, they do describe at least a certain tendency towards models of prefigurative thinking that ‘absorb revolutionary accomplishment entirely into current ethical practices’, thereby collapsing into a tendentially astrategic, presentist politics divorced from the future.<sup>186</sup> Gordon cites as examples the CrimethInc collective, where they implore the reader to act ‘not in the name of some doctrine or grand cause, but on behalf of ourselves, so that we will be able to live more meaningful lives ... rather than direct our struggle towards world-

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<sup>181</sup> ‘There is a broad consensus within the direct action movement about what kind of society people want, but there is also a widespread reluctance even to consider the question of strategy. ... The anarchist, antiauthoritarian impulse that runs through the direct action movement, and through the larger tendency toward cultural revolution, is offended by the idea of bringing spontaneity under the discipline of strategy’ (Epstein 1991: 17).

<sup>182</sup> ‘In growing numbers, they have followed the largely middle-class trend of the time into a decadent personalism in the name of their sovereign “autonomy,” a queasy mysticism in the name of “intuitionism,” and a prelapsarian vision of history in the name of “primitivism”’ (Bookchin 1995a: 2).

<sup>183</sup> Hickel 2012.

<sup>184</sup> Srnicek and Williams 2015: 11.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*: 28.

<sup>186</sup> Gordon 2017: 531.

historical changes which we will not live to witness’;<sup>187</sup> and an anarchist blog by Torrance Hodgson, who argues,

The revolution is now, and we must let the desires we have about the future manifest themselves in the here and now as best as we can. When we start doing that, we stop fighting for some abstract condition for the future and instead start fighting to see those desires realized in the present ... as a flowering of one’s self-determined existence.<sup>188</sup>

To be fair to CrimethInc and Hodgson, both do acknowledge the importance of future goals. CrimethInc argue that a focus on the present is a strategic technique that facilitates social change, by preventing ‘the feelings of worthlessness and alienation that result from believing that it is necessary to “sacrifice oneself for the cause.”’<sup>189</sup> Hodgson explicitly pre-empts the critique of ‘lifestylism’, making the perfectly sensible argument that there is no ‘after the revolution’ – the revolution is not a ‘grand singular’ event but the ongoing ‘process of transforming our lives ... of making change in a radical manner.’<sup>190</sup> However, such a focus on the present still becomes reduced to an impotent de facto presentism if it is not accompanied by a strategic vision of the nature of future goals (however changeable they may be), and a nuanced understanding of their strategic relationship with present means; and those are indeed lacking in the CrimethInc and Hodgson texts.

One possible defence of such positions, as having an implicitly strategic quality, is to argue that they are *exemplary*, serving ‘to demonstrate to a broader public that other ways of living are possible’.<sup>191</sup> For example, Graeber describes the prefigurative power of direct action as where ‘the structure of one’s own act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one’s vision of a free society,’ as ‘a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change’.<sup>192</sup> A different defence comes from Maeckelbergh, who argues that the alterglobal movement’s refusal of a singular conception of goal or strategy should be reconsidered as rather an open strategic practice of multiple goals.<sup>193</sup> These arguments are compelling in that we ought to do away with Breines’ supposed opposition between prefiguration and strategy and begin to think in terms of different conceptions of prefigurative strategy. However, there is a parallel aspect of prefigurative politics

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<sup>187</sup> CrimethInc 2000.

<sup>188</sup> Hodgson 2003.

<sup>189</sup> CrimethInc 2000.

<sup>190</sup> Hodgson 2003.

<sup>191</sup> Swain 2019: 50.

<sup>192</sup> Graeber 2009: 210. See also: ‘the strategic deployment of lifestyle tactics pursued by radical activists is not the same as the astrategic preoccupation with the self encouraged by neoliberal ideology’ (Portwood-Stacer 2013: 6).

<sup>193</sup> ‘given the alterglobalization movement’s affinity for diversity (including as many different voices and goals as possible) and horizontality (a continuous process of challenging the centralization of power to attain as much equality as possible between actors) as the basis for new forms of network democracy; prefiguration is the most effective strategy (perhaps the only strategy) because it allows for goals to be open and multiple’ (Maeckelbergh 2011: 2).



that overlaps debates over strategy and which poses a tension that has rarely been satisfactorily resolved: institution and, by necessary implication, constitution.

Breines' prefiguration-strategy opposition fails because of its (inherited) myopic definition of strategy. Its definition of prefiguration as 'antiorganizational' is also highly misleading, but the intended meaning is clearly 'anti-institutional', and this does capture something common to most prefigurative politics of the twentieth century. Anti-institutionalism, not anti-strategy or anti-organisation, best describes the dominant prefigurative refusal to make lasting or scalable organisational structures or to formally delegate or constitutionalise internal power relations; and it is this anti-institutionalism that presents the most intransigent – and interesting – tension within prefigurative politics. No matter how strategic the practice may seem in the minds of participants, a refusal of lasting and scalable organisational structure leaves only local change and, at best, the ephemeral, aforementioned, 'exemplary' function of prefigurative politics.<sup>194</sup> As Harvey argues, this seems wholly insufficient as a serious strategy of social, political and economic transformation,<sup>195</sup> leaving us with the reactive folk politics of ineffectual protests that, despite their powerful effects of individual and collective subjectivation and counter-hegemonic impact on public discourse and the field of political possibility (both of which Occupy, for example, excelled at), ultimately fail to produce lasting, concrete change.

From the alter-globalisation struggles of the late 1990s, through the antiwar and ecological coalitions of the early 2000s, and into the new student uprisings and Occupy movements since 2008, a common pattern emerges: resistance struggles rise rapidly, mobilise increasingly large numbers of people, and yet fade away only to be replaced by a renewed sense of apathy, melancholy and defeat. Despite the desires of millions for a better world, the effects of these movements prove minimal.<sup>196</sup>

Meanwhile the 'tyranny of structurelessness' persists, internal informal hierarchies dominating without proper transparency, accountability or democratic control of leadership functions.<sup>197</sup>

The work of John Holloway is emblematic of prefigurative anti-institutionalism, and his explicitly anti-strategic, anti-institutional theory of 'anti-power' became highly influential in the alterglobal movement. Holloway draws on thinkers like Adorno and Lukács to produce a radically anti-identitarian brand of Marxism that prioritises fetishism as the key Marxist category for understanding power and resistance, arriving at a thoroughly anarchic and prefigurative form of

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<sup>194</sup> Swain 2019.

<sup>195</sup> Harvey 2012.

<sup>196</sup> Srnicek and Williams 2015: Chapter 1.

<sup>197</sup> Freeman 1972–73.

'open marxist' politics. He argues that 'Any institutionalisation of struggle is problematic',<sup>198</sup> because it is a key instance of the process of fetishisation, of the reification of identity or, in his negative-dialectical terminology, a negation of our power-to, a fracturing of the 'social flow of doing'. Holloway sees fetishism at the heart of domination, in the reification of forms, the falsehood of identity, the rule of the noun over the verb, the power of labour over 'doing'. For him, institutions, as identifications, are a violence, another instance of domination, trapping some inside their stultifying walls, excluding the rest, and everywhere closing down the social flow of doing that is the true stuff of revolution. Revolution must be recast, Holloway argues, neither as taking power nor building counterpower, but as a struggle against identity, institutionalisation and power itself:

What has failed is the notion that revolution means capturing power in order to abolish power. What is now on the agenda is the much more demanding notion of a direct overcoming of power relations. The only way in which revolution can now be imagined is not as the conquest but as the dissolution of power.<sup>199</sup>

Holloway presents a compelling critique of identity and institution. Surely he is correct that identity lies at the heart of hierarchy, exclusion and domination. The proliferation of identities (think especially of the contemporary proliferation of identities based on gender and sexuality) is a powerful defensive mechanism, carving out identitarian refuges that assert the countability of their constituents in the ontological order of society, but still always a reductive parcelling of the infinite variegation of living bodies. Utopia cannot be identitarian, it must surely be a utopia of nonidentity, a complete overcoming of identity in which we *are* not, we simply *do*. Holloway is a thinker of what was earlier called 'real utopia', or what Holloway prefers to frame in Blochian terms as 'concrete utopia', the present existence of the 'not-yet'.<sup>200</sup> To illustrate his prefigurative argument that we can and should enact utopia here and now, and that in so doing we will form 'cracks' in capitalism that will spread and undo capitalism's reified edifice from the inside, Holloway makes (telling) metaphorical (mis)use of a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. The protagonist of 'The Circular Ruins' sets himself to the task of dreaming a man into existence, piece by piece, organ by organ, and succeeds. This dreamt being, Holloway emphasises, is not an illusion, but 'his duration is an illusion: his existence depends, from one moment to another, on the creative activity of the dreamer.'<sup>201</sup> Holloway asks us to think of capitalism not as Frankenstein's monster, an autonomous creature outside of us and 'beyond our control', but as Borges' dreamt man, something that 'depends upon our act of constant re-creation.' In that case, we need not assail the monster to destroy it, we need

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<sup>198</sup> Holloway 2010: 224.

<sup>199</sup> Holloway 2010 [2002]: 20

<sup>200</sup> Bloch 1995 [1959].

<sup>201</sup> Holloway 2010: 229-30.

only 'stop creating it.' Capitalism exists 'because we created it today. If we do not create it tomorrow, it will not exist.'<sup>202</sup> But Holloway ignores the climactic realisation of the protagonist, that he himself is a figment of another's somnial imagination. Capitalism may be a fragile construct, but so are we. We exist as composites of other people's dreams, made real by the recognition of others; and recognition requires identity.

Borges himself makes this clear, at an even more fundamental level, in 'Funes the Memorious'. Funes falls from a horse and hits his head, thereafter losing the ability to forget. His memory is now practically infinite, both in its reach into the past and its infallible perception of detail.

He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once, and with the lines in the spray which an oar raised in the Río Negro on the eve of the battle of the Quebracho. These recollections were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his fancies. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day.<sup>203</sup>

Funes becomes indignant at the imprecision of everyday language, and is consumed by projects that make sense only to a mind 'incapable of general, platonic ideas':<sup>204</sup> a taxonomy in which every definable object ('each stone, each bird and branch') receives its own individual name; a catalogue of his entire life's experience, reduced to a mere 70,000 individual memories, each assigned a numerical value; a more precise number system in which, for example, 'thirty-three' could be expressed using a single noun rather than two ('In place of seven thousand thirteen, he would say ... *Máximo Perez*; in place of seven thousand fourteen, *train*; ... In lieu of five hundred, he would say *nine*').<sup>205</sup> The ridiculousness of these endeavours foreshadows the narrator's conclusion.

I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details.<sup>206</sup>

To think is to identify; and just as to think is to identify, to do politics is to organise; to organise is, to varying extents, to institutionalise; and to institutionalise is to constitute. To be

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid: 230.

<sup>203</sup> Borges 1993: 87-88.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid: 89.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid: 88-89.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid: 90.

against power is to have no understanding of one's own power. Even Holloway seems to realise this, reluctantly, when he channels Bloch to explain the concrete immediacy of utopia, its present existence as the 'not-yet': 'There is identity, but identity exists in an arc of tension towards non-identity. [This] double dimensionality is the antagonistic presence (that is, movement) of the not-yet within the Is, of non-identity within identity.'<sup>207</sup> So Holloway's negation of the negation is not a simple one, it is a constant struggle 'in-against-and-beyond', but Holloway does little to describe what the 'against' looks like, and nothing to describe what the 'beyond' looks like. As his 'be the change' (mis)reading of 'The Circular Ruins' highlights, Holloway's anti-institutionalism leaves him stuck in the present, his 'not-yet' defined by the now rather than any strategic relationship with the future.

What does this mean for political organisation? For Holloway, it means as little organisation as possible. 'To organise the rebellion', Holloway quotes Zibechi, 'is a contradiction'.<sup>208</sup> A poetic phrase, but one whose ineffectuality eventually becomes clear, again reluctantly, even to Holloway. First he admits the need for organising. He asks,

that any affirmation of identity (as indigenous, women, gay, whatever) be seen simply as a moment in a going-beyond the identity: we are indigenous-but-more-than-that. The same, surely, with institutions. We probably need recognisable forms of organisation (councils, neighbourhood assemblies, *juntas de buen gobierno*). However, the danger in any form of institutionalisation (or identity) is the possible separation of existence from constitution, the subordination of *we do* to *what is*. Identity and institution as concepts direct attention to what is, whereas the drive to social self-determination is a drive towards the absolute rule of *we do*. In this sense, the principles of council or communal organisation (the subordination of delegates to instant recall, the Zapatistas' *mandar obedeciendo* [lead by obeying], and so on) seek to ensure that these forms of organisation are anti-institutional, but obviously the danger of institutionalisation is always present. In a society in which doing is subordinated to being, any attempt to subordinate being to doing means a constant struggle against the current, in which any staying still will always be a moving backwards.<sup>209</sup>

Then, while debating Michael Hardt in a series of letters published in 2011, Holloway admits that even institutionalisation is necessary, if a necessary evil. They settle tentatively upon the unhappy compromise 'institutionalize and subvert – a good motto we can share.'<sup>210</sup> A generous reading of

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<sup>207</sup> Holloway 2010 [2002]: 7.

<sup>208</sup> Raúl Zibechi, cited by Holloway 2010: 282.

<sup>209</sup> Holloway 2010 [2002]: 242-43, emphasis Holloway's.

<sup>210</sup> Hardt and Holloway 2012.

Holloway's anti-institutionalism is that it poses the exciting challenge of building anti-institutional forms of organisation, self-subverting institutions, and that such a project might be essential to a truly radical, transformative prefigurative politics.

Of all the things that Holloway overlooks, however, the key element is that building anti-institutional organisations, or self-subverting institutions, is necessarily a constitutional question. Not only does Holloway not provide any tools for such radical constitutional thinking, he derides constitution (as he – usually – derides institution, and power), undermining the ability of any Hollowayan movement to conceive of their own constituent power and how it strategically connects their present to their future. Indeed, it is almost bizarre that prefigurative politics has for so long avoided and resisted the constitutional lens, given its widely acknowledged nature as an intense 'politics of process'.<sup>211</sup> The great challenge for prefigurative politics lies in the fact that it represents the fraught intersection of the anti-institutional impulse that has so often defined it, its under-acknowledged reality as an inherently constitutional 'politics of process', and its aspirations for significant social transformation and structural change.

### *Three Prefigurative Functions*

Various attempts have been made to more rigorously conceptualise political prefiguration,<sup>212</sup> or to typologise its diverse functions.<sup>213</sup> This thesis, however, prefers to develop a bespoke set of categories tailored to present needs; not intended to be exhaustive, but serving to emphasise the aspects of prefiguration most crucial to the task at hand. These three prefigurative functions overlap in practice but can be separated conceptually: the *temporal-ontological*, the *counter-hegemonic*, and the *constituent*. The latter two are inherently strategic functions that express an agential relationship between present and future. The former is the structural claim that underlies, whether explicitly or implicitly, any self-consciously prefigurative politics.

First, some exclusions. The above genealogy highlights how the organisational techniques most associated with 'prefigurative politics' are not always implemented for the primary reason of serving a grand transformational strategy. Sometimes, despite the stereotype of, say, consensus as inherently inefficient, it really is *pragmatically* the best tool for the job, or at least genuinely seems so to participants, as it seemed for Mary King in the SNCC. In other cases, tools like consensus are implemented neither because they are *efficient* ways to make collective decisions, nor because they are nevertheless the most *effective* way to make a decision, but simply because it seems like the most *ethical* way to make a decision, in accordance with whatever personal or collective non-

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<sup>211</sup> Maeckelbergh 2011.

<sup>212</sup> E.g. Gordon 2017.

<sup>213</sup> E.g. Yates 2015 and Yates 2020.

hierarchical philosophy. This resonates with presentist tendencies discussed above, with Breines' strategy-prefiguration conflict (the prefigurative element defined via Weber's 'ethic of absolute ends'), with anarchist thinkers like Franks, who prioritises the aspect of 'prefigurative ethics', and with my own anecdotal experience of organising in non-hierarchical movements in London, where methods like consensus were very much the overriding common sense, especially in the wake of Occupy and 15M in the early 2010s.<sup>214</sup> Rarely in that context was it questioned whether consensus decision-making was tactically or strategically the best method for the particular ends of the group, it usually just seemed like the *right thing to do*. Such pragmatic or ethical motivations are usually tied up with conceptions of strategy, but to the extent that prefigurative politics is enacted for purely ethical or pragmatic reasons, it does not really count as a *prefigurative* function in the crucial sense of expressing a strategic relationship between means and ends, present and future. An important political function, certainly, crucial for explaining and analysing the spread and persistence of the various constitutionalities of prefigurative politics, but a presentist function, not a prefigurative function in any useful sense.

Our first properly prefigurative function is the essentially astrategic *temporal-ontological* claim as to how social change happens over time that underlies any self-consciously prefigurative politics: that modes of behaviour do in fact engender social change in a similar direction. We saw this claim very clearly in the classical anarchist critiques of Marxist instrumentalism: that undemocratic means engender undemocratic ends. In a slightly different register, Marx often employed a prefigurative kind of ontological argument in arguing that capitalist socialisation of labour was prefiguring the possibility of socialism. Meanwhile sociology and institutionalist political science have largely settled upon path dependency as a robust model for a kind of prefigurative ontology. Broadly speaking, this kind of claim can ultimately be traced back to Christian theology, where a prophetic prefigurative ontology emerged that linked past to present and present to future. Retrospectively, the reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament transformed the text into what philologist Erich Auerbach called 'a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration' of the events and persons of the New Testament.<sup>215</sup> Prospectively, the second coming ties our present to a preordained future. Following Gordon, we can call this kind of prefigurative ontology *recursive*, insofar as its ends are fixed and predetermined, making it self-referential in a manner analogous to a recursive image.<sup>216</sup> An alternative prefigurative ontology is what Gordon calls the *generative* model. Here, as in the theory of path dependency, although social change is constrained by the past, the ends are not predetermined but rather generated in the process of social change itself. Politically,

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<sup>214</sup> Breines 1980; Franks 2014.

<sup>215</sup> Auerbach 1984: 29.

<sup>216</sup> Gordon 2017.

Gordon associates generative prefiguration (approvingly) with the anarchist tradition, and prospective-recursive prefiguration (critically) with orthodox Marxism and its fixed revolutionary programme of winning state power. Here we approach the grey area between temporal ontologies and political strategies, and so this discussion will be revived later in the chapter, when we ask whether Negri's method of the tendency presents a productive middle ground between the strategic openness of generative prefiguration and the closed strategy of vulgar, recursive Marxism. The key point at this stage is to acknowledge that prefigurative strategies necessarily express, whether explicitly or implicitly, an underlying astrategic ontological claim about how present and future (and sometimes past) are linked in the process of social change, a claim that itself can take a variety of forms, and which would have to be denied by any possible non-prefigurative politics.

The first inherently and necessarily strategic prefigurative function to be considered is *counter-hegemonic prefiguration*. The content of this function is not at all controversial as a core part of prefigurative politics, but the provocative label certainly is. The political content referred to here is majoritarian collective subjectivation. Subjectivation is a consistent part of the strategic assembly of prefigurative politics, in that at least one of the core functions of everything from inclusive language, to safer spaces policies and consensus decision-making, to the building of full-blown alternative structures and institutions, is always that it at least serves as 'exemplary activity' and thus spreads anti-oppressive, revolutionary subjectivity.<sup>217</sup> We can imagine these things occurring without majoritarian intent, but it would then be better described as a subcultural and presentist, rather than as a strategic prefigurative politics – or perhaps as not even meaningfully political at all, following Gilbert. To the extent that prefigurative politics is revolutionary or transformative it must necessarily aspire to the counter-hegemonic project of producing a new social majority. Gilbert goes even further, arguing that hegemony and counter-hegemony (defined as political leadership, persuasion or influence) must, by definition,

be undertaken to some extent by any political project which aspires to any kind of demonstrable success at all. ... Any political project which seeks either to change or to reinforce existing power relationships (and any project which does not seek either of these goals is clearly not political in any meaningful way) must to some degree seek to render itself [capable of (counter-)hegemonic articulation, here in the specifically Laclauian sense].<sup>218</sup>

Framing this prefigurative function as counter-hegemonic is not only accurate, it also serves once again to exclude subcultural presentism, as well as to facilitate the dialogue between left populism and prefigurative *asamblearismo* that both the thesis and *Ahora Madrid* are premised upon.

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<sup>217</sup> Swain 2019.

<sup>218</sup> Gilbert 2008: 221.

The final prefigurative function is the building of alternatives, whether transient decision-making processes or institutions proper. The label *constituent prefiguration* is used to emphasise that strategic prefigurative politics is an inherently constitutional task. The intense focus on ethical and non-hierarchical organisation leads to Breines' characterisation of a 'politics of process',<sup>219</sup> which is a phrase that could easily apply to much of liberal constitutionalism. Both liberal constitutionalism and prefigurative politics valorise the supremacy of process as the cornerstone of democracy, however much they differ on the content of that democratic process. When prefigurative groups codify their safer spaces policies, apply whatever models of consensus decision-making, or document their consensus agreements in minutes, these are constitutional acts, these acts constitute the group, i.e. they form the group's constitution. The grander and more serious the group's revolutionary or transformative aspirations, the more their behaviour necessarily deserves to be thought of as a *constituent* process. This framing might be antithetical to the most anarchic and anti-institutional prefigurative groups (though I would argue this is a contradictory cognitive dissonance in those groups), but it has become increasingly explicit within prefigurative social movements, and especially in Spain, which will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.2.

### 2.1.2 Negri: The Prefigurative Force of Constituent Power

15M [has] expressed the desire and the demand for democracy. ... Its principal achievement: to push the regime crisis to its end. Such has been the destituent power of the movement. ... Its articulation as constituent movement ... is the necessary next step in the democratic revolution.<sup>220</sup>

The introduction to Chapter 2 discussed one early vision of municipalism, as a prefigurative 'constituent process "from below"'.<sup>221</sup> It bears repeating that the idea of a constituent process is fairly mainstream in Spain. Even the idea of a constituent process *from below* is common enough on the left, via the powerful influence of Latin America.<sup>222</sup> What Negri facilitates is a rich theorisation of the *prefigurative* relationship between movement, constituent process and radical democracy. Emmanuel Rodríguez, early municipalist and co-author of *La Apuesta Municipalista*, quoted above, reads 15M as existing at the interstice between wildly successful destituent power, potent expression of constituent power, and the tentative beginnings of a radical constituent process:

As an act of constituent power, the new movements for democracy have signalled, at last, ... the ultimate source of democracy. A politics of innovation, as an act of social self-institution

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<sup>219</sup> Breines 1989: 43.

<sup>220</sup> Rodríguez 2013: 227, 296-97.

<sup>221</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 14.

<sup>222</sup> E.g. Santamaria Chavarro 2013; EFE 2014; Delgado 2017; Castillo Martínez 2014.



that determines the only democratic constitution to be that which experiences ‘constant innovation.’ ... What these movements express is the demand for institutions permanently open to reform and recall.<sup>223</sup>

The quote, ‘constant innovation’ is from Negri.<sup>224</sup> Again, Ganemos was not a Negrian project in anything remotely like the way in which early Podemos was a Laclauian project. Negrian and autonomist ideas more generally were, however, influential, and occupy a particularly privileged position in being best placed to help theorise the most radical implications of 15M and municipalism as components of a prefigurative constituent process ‘from below’. Negri helps express the project’s most radical potential, while also highlighting its constitutional challenges and limitations. No other thinker has developed a theory so apt to analysing 15M, incubator of *asamblearismo*, as inchoate expression of constituent power, as progenitor of municipalism as ‘constituent candidature’ with the task not ‘of governing, but of pushing through the democratisation of the country. ... The first political force under a binding mandate, in principle non-negotiable or, at least, only negotiable with itself.’<sup>225</sup> The explicitly Negrian framework may be partial to Rodríguez and parts of the Traficantes milieu, but it describes the ultimate constitution of Ganemos too perfectly to be ignored – and the reading of Ganemos’ *asambleario* constitutionality will productively catalyse our critique of Negri’s limitations.

The beating heart of this section is Negri’s unique conception of constituent power, which seeks a radical new solution to the ‘paradox of constitutionalism’.<sup>226</sup> This paradox is simultaneously the paradox of democracy itself: ‘governmental power ultimately is generated from the “consent of the people”’, and yet ‘to be sustained and effective, such power must be divided, constrained, and exercised through distinctive institutional forms.’<sup>227</sup> Attempting to square the circle, a constitution’s de facto extra-legal origins must be framed as a de jure form of legality, and ongoing constitutional constraints on democracy must be framed as democratic. This is the role of mainstream conceptions of constituent power: to legitimise the founding moment and to frame the institutional division and restriction of the democratic will as a democratic expression of that founding moment. The list of mechanisms by which liberal democratic constitutionalism is said to express constituent power is long. To name just a few: the plebiscite;<sup>228</sup> parliamentary sovereignty;<sup>229</sup> and the election of

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<sup>223</sup> Rodríguez 2013: 228-29.

<sup>224</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 28.

<sup>225</sup> Rodríguez 2013: 297.

<sup>226</sup> Loughlin and Walker 2007.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid: 1.

<sup>228</sup> Oliver and Fusaro (2011: 386) describe Switzerland’s regular referenda as ‘the purest form that the sovereignty of the People can take.’ Cameron and Sharpe (2010) also discuss the recall referendum as an expression of constituent power.

<sup>229</sup> Colón-Ríos 2017.

representatives, or even some vague sense of public opinion.<sup>230</sup> All ridiculous claims – from a Negrian perspective.

Negri's answer to the paradox of constitutionalism takes a radically different tack. He agrees that 'Constituent power and constituted power exist in a dialectical relation,' but not in Loughlin's sense in which 'constituent power cannot be understood without reference to constituted power.'<sup>231</sup> Rather it is constituted power that seeks to reduce constituent power to a recuperative negative dialectic, while constituent power exists as its own autonomous positive ontology, in a relationship of irreducible antagonism to constituted power. Really it is constituted power that cannot be understood without reference to constituent power. Negri's solution to the paradox is therefore not internal dialectical accommodation but exodus from the dialectic itself, a complete unbridling of constituent power, neatly summarised in the concept of autonomy. Negri's constituent power *is* democracy; both absolute yet interminable. It is a radically prefigurative process of becoming. To fully understand the prefigurative force of Negri's constituent power, but also to fully understand its Marxist and Spinozan constraints, it is necessary to start at the beginning, with its precursor: self-valorisation.

#### *Dialecticide: Autonomy, Antagonism, Self-Valorisation*

Negri's theory of self-valorisation, which he will later describe as the one and only 'prefigurative power,'<sup>232</sup> is underpinned by the novel, non-dialectical conception of autonomy and antagonism found in the workerist hypothesis of Italian *operaismo* – the self-declared 'Copernican revolution' introduced to Marxian theory by Mario Tronti and others working in and around Italian journals such as *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*. *Operaismo* pushed Marx's initial 'Inversion of Class Perspective' to its radical conclusion.<sup>233</sup> No longer putting 'capitalist development first, and workers second,' the workerist hypothesis sought to 'reverse the polarity, start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class.'<sup>234</sup> For Tronti, such a perspective revealed that it is not only capitalist development that drives changes in working class composition and resistance, it is also 'the specific, present, political situation of the working class that both necessitates and directs the given forms of capital's development'.<sup>235</sup> This means that workers have an inherent *autonomy* from capital, expressed, inter alia, in their quotidian resistance to

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<sup>230</sup> Griffin 2011.

<sup>231</sup> Loughlin 2010: 227-28.

<sup>232</sup> Negri 2003 [1981]: 97.

<sup>233</sup> Cleaver 1992.

<sup>234</sup> Tronti 1964.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

exploitation,<sup>236</sup> and in their successive claims to an ever-expansive necessary labour time, which tends towards a ‘destructuring’ effect on capital.<sup>237</sup> Capital attempts the dialectical negation of this autonomy by using ‘the workers’ antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development.’<sup>238</sup> The workers, on the other hand, must take their own inextricable mediation ‘of capital’s interests and organize it in an antagonistic form, as the tactical terrain of struggle and as a strategic potential for destruction.’<sup>239</sup> Toscano describes this, helpfully, as capital’s ‘dialectical use of antagonism’ in contrast to the ‘antagonistic use of antagonism’ of the working class.<sup>240</sup> This power of autonomy further implies not only a theoretical and historical agency over capital, but also strategic autonomy from ‘the old organisations’ that ‘the workers have already gone beyond’: the unions and the established Italian communist parties.<sup>241</sup> The discovery of working class autonomy occurs, however, in the context of what Tronti called the ‘social factory’, the historical phase in which ‘real subsumption’ was reaching an apogee:

At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society.<sup>242</sup>

This might appear to collapse into contradiction, with workers simultaneously autonomous from but also completely subsumed under the logic of capital. Negri would present a particularly powerful theorisation of why real subsumption is never total, why in the age of the social factory capital may even be uniquely vulnerable to acts of resistance and, especially, prefigurative self-valorisation.

For Negri to even begin along this path, he would have to break with the early Hegelianism of his first publication, ‘State and Right in the Young Hegel’.<sup>243</sup> This would occur six years later, in

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<sup>236</sup> ‘Planned non-cooperation, organised passivity, polemical expectations, a political refusal, and a permanent continuity of struggles — these are the specific historical forms in which working class struggle today is generalising and developing itself’ (ibid).

<sup>237</sup> Negri (2005 [1977b]) will later make an important distinction between this process of ‘destructuring’, and the ‘destabilization’ of deliberate, violent acts of sabotage.

<sup>238</sup> Tronti 2007 [1965]: 29, emphasis Tronti’s.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Toscano 2009: 115-16.

<sup>241</sup> Tronti 1964.

<sup>242</sup> Tronti 1962, cited in Cleaver 1992: 137. Marx argued that ‘formal subsumption’ began with the initial moulding of handicraft into production, peasant into worker, ‘living labour’ into ‘objectified labour’, confronting the worker as the production of absolute surplus value (produced in the struggle over the working day) (Marx 1976: 283-428). Formal subsumption is limited to the cooption of ‘an existing labour process’ (Marx 1976: 1021). ‘Real subsumption’ is the stuff of factories and relative surplus value (produced through cooperation, division of labour, and the use of machinery), and begins to fundamentally alter relations of production, tending towards the total subsumption of society under the law of value (Marx 1976: 429-642).

<sup>243</sup> Negri 1958.

'Labor in the Constitution', written in 1964.<sup>244</sup> Here it is through Marx that Negri finds the text of Hegel's death warrant, which the 'social worker' of Tronti's social factory would execute. Negri first combines the workerist hypothesis with a critical state theory, outlining his early understanding of the antagonistic break of the working class from Hegel's recuperative dialectic. In analysing the 1948 Italian Constitution, Negri sees in its socialist impulse towards the 'Constitutionalization of Labor'<sup>245</sup> merely an expression of the continuing real subsumption of labour by the law of value:

At this level of capitalist organization, the people, as social labor-power, are thus called upon to manage their own social exploitation, to guarantee the continuation and reproduction of the general movement of accumulation.<sup>246</sup>

The role of the contemporary juridical system generally, and the Italian Constitution specifically, Negri claims, is the mediation of the fundamental antagonism between concrete and abstract labour. The Hegelian popular state seeks to reduce this antagonism first to dialectical contradictions, and eventually towards a hypothetically stable, but practically vanishing unity. No longer his youthful self, so enamoured by the popular state as 'substance and motor of the dialectical procedure',<sup>247</sup> Negri now unravels the dialectic in the face of the irreducible antagonism discovered in Marx: 'abstract labor and concrete labor are irremediably contradictory, and each seeks the solution of its own problem';<sup>248</sup> thus, 'where there is unity we can see contradiction, and where there is contradiction we can see antagonism'.<sup>249</sup> In attempting to spread the reconciliation of abstract and concrete labour, the constitution merely spreads their irreducible antagonism throughout society. Negri concludes bluntly:

The dialectic is finished. Hegel is dead. ... The bourgeois world is dialectical and cannot but be dialectical. But we are not. The workerist critique is not today the restoration of the dialectic, but rather the discovery of the terrain and the form of the conflict.<sup>250</sup>

Working class antagonism is no longer the negation of the negation (i.e. the revolutionary negation of capital's negation of working class power and autonomy).<sup>251</sup> Living labour rather possesses a positive, prior and affirmative autonomy from capital, expressed fundamentally as sheer tumultuous antagonism, but also as a creative, productive, prefigurative force, that Negri comes to

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<sup>244</sup> It was, however, not published in Italian for another thirteen years, and does not appear in English until doing so as the third chapter of Hardt and Negri's first collaboration, *Labor of Dionysus* (1994).

<sup>245</sup> E.g. Article 1: 'Italy is a Democratic Republic, founded on work.' *Constitution of Italy*, adopted 22 December 1947.

<sup>246</sup> Hardt and Negri 1994 [1964]: 80.

<sup>247</sup> Negri 1958, cited in Murphy 2012: 60.

<sup>248</sup> Hardt and Negri 1994 [1964]: 135.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*: 134.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*: 135.

<sup>251</sup> As in Holloway's theory of anti-power.

call *self-valorisation*. The term derives from Marx, where he mocks the mystified capitalist gaze that sees in value ‘the occult ability to add value to itself’.<sup>252</sup> Just as capital revels in making believe that the productive power of cooperation is a force of its own creation rather than a potential inherent to labour,<sup>253</sup> value in circulation seeks to eclipse the role of exploitation in its valorisation process. In this way it becomes,

the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorizes itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization.<sup>254</sup>

Negri first employs the term in 1977, coinciding with his return to the Italian Constitution in ‘Toward a Critique of the Material Constitution’.<sup>255</sup> He begins by describing the fulfilment of the prophesy of 1964’s ‘Labor in the Constitution’:

The Constitution of labor of 1948 registered a certain set of relations in order to control them: it accounted for a state of diffuse conflict in the relations of production that was nevertheless not meant to turn into antagonism. *Today the dimensions and quality of conflict are instead immediately antagonistic: the whole circuit of reproduction is involved in such antagonism.*<sup>256</sup>

Whereas ‘Labor in the Constitution’ relied almost exclusively on *Capital* for its Marxist tenets, Negri now draws equally on the *Grundrisse* to argue that as capital seeks to reduce circulation time to zero, it increasingly reaches outwards from the sphere of production to that of reproduction (extending the real subsumption thesis). This serves to accelerate even further the spread of ‘class antagonism over the entire terrain of society’.<sup>257</sup> Working class resistance in this context, and most especially the refusal of work, ‘assumes a positive connotation’:

in pursuit of capitalist development, it shifts the terrain of struggle from production to the totality of social (production and) reproduction; here again, it anticipates capital and determines not only the crisis but also its quality, framing the crisis around its own needs.

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<sup>252</sup> Marx 1976: 255.

<sup>253</sup> ‘Because this power costs capital nothing, while on the other hand it is not developed by the worker until his labour itself belongs to capital, it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature – a productive power inherent in capital’ (ibid: 451).

<sup>254</sup> Ibid: 255.

<sup>255</sup> Negri 2005 [1977a].

<sup>256</sup> Ibid: 181, emphasis Negri’s.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid: 197.

*The refusal of work defines the modes of working-class self-valorization in reproduction, it demands differential and/or indirect wages – it no longer seeks to realize itself on the terrain of production – it determines counterpower and proves itself willing to exercise it.*<sup>258</sup>

This 'working-class self-valorization in reproduction' beleaguers and destabilises the administrative equilibrium of the capitalist state; but it also quantises the rhythm of changes in the material constitution.<sup>259</sup>

To explain the (still only implicitly prefigurative) power of self-valorisation, Negri returns in *Marx beyond Marx* to the real subsumption thesis (wherein the antagonism between abstract and concrete labour metastasises throughout the entire sphere of reproduction). To this Negri adds the microcosm of the capital relation that is the working day, wherein we see, 'in its division between social surplus labor and socially necessary labor, the basis for the deadly struggle that is put up by the two classes'.<sup>260</sup> What this combined analysis reveals is that the socialisation of work is further provoking and accelerating the steady distension of the sphere of necessary labour: 'The more work becomes abstract and socialized ... the more the sphere of needs grows. Work creates its own needs and forces capital to satisfy them'.<sup>261</sup> What this amounts to is both the *reappropriation of surplus value* by labour, as well as, crucially, the *decomposition of surplus value into use value*. This is, for the proletariat, 'an immediate revindication and immediate practice of power'.<sup>262</sup>

The importance, the utility, the profundity of this innovation can scarcely be overstated. The decomposition of surplus value into use value is nothing other than the transformation of labour itself, and the immediate prefiguration of post-capitalist social relations. By re-reading negative refusal as positive construction of alternatives, Negri's concept of self-valorisation brought prefiguration crashing into the heart of Marxist theory. Cleaver powerfully captures the significance of this theoretical event:

this focus on the inventive, positive content of our struggles ... helps us to see beyond the orthodox Marxist vision that focuses almost uniquely on reactive struggles against capitalist domination and relegates the building of a new world to the post-revolution 'transition' and beyond. It helps us look for, and recognize when we see, our power to create the world

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid: 184-85, emphasis Negri's.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid: 184-85.

<sup>260</sup> Negri 1991 [1978]: 93.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid: 133.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid: 137. The theoretical possibility for this decomposition is argued by way of an analysis of the *Grundrisse's* treatment of 'small-scale circulation', necessary labour, and their particular relation to capital valorisation, which is much too turgid to deal with here.

autonomously of capital, not just in theory, not just in some future after the seizure of state power, but in the present, within those struggles.<sup>263</sup>

Self-valorisation thus facilitates a prefigurative reading of struggle, but not one of mere ethical practice nor a recursive model that prefigures a fixed end.<sup>264</sup> The collective decomposition of surplus value and its autopoietic reconstruction into use value already implies a constituent process of becoming that links present resistance to a non-determined future while accounting for its material relationship with circuits of production.

Negri himself does not explicitly recognise the ‘prefigurative power’ of self-valorisation until three years after *Marx beyond Marx*, in 1981’s ‘The Constitution of Time’.<sup>265</sup> This is where Negri places temporality at the heart of class struggle, as the capitalist state must battle with the multitude (which has now, by way of Spinoza, replaced Negri’s concern for the worker) not only in the present, but also over the future. The Keynesian planner-state sought to ‘defend the present from the future’, by planning ‘the future according to present expectations’.<sup>266</sup> This exemplifies how constituted power, for Negri, always looks towards the past. Self-valorisation (and later, constituent power) looks always towards the future; it proclaims that ‘the past no longer explains the present, and that only the future will be able to do so’.<sup>267</sup> This temporal distinction was already present in *The Savage Anomaly*, but is greatly developed in ‘The Constitution of Time’.<sup>268</sup> Where the decomposition of surplus value into use value constituted the link between destructuring refusal and constituent self-valorisation, time now serves to catalyse the ‘transformation of refusal into co-operation, of co-operation into production, of production into liberation’.<sup>269</sup> Capitalist valorisation reduces the ‘time-of-life’, of use value and useful labour, to ‘time-as-measure’, as undifferentiated equivalent, as labour-time. During formal subsumption the time of life exists outside capital and is brought inside, where it is transmuted into time-as-measure within the working day. Real subsumption is the historical moment that first brings the time of life entirely within capitalism and attempts to destroy the distinction altogether, but this is also therefore the moment that time can most effectively be weaponised against capital. This is possible to the extent that collective self-valorisation can destructure time-as-measure into liberated time and become ‘auto-determination’: creative

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<sup>263</sup> Cleaver undated.

<sup>264</sup> Gordon 2017.

<sup>265</sup> Negri 2003 [1981]: 97.

<sup>266</sup> Negri 1988 [1968]: 25.

<sup>267</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 11.

<sup>268</sup> Negri 2003 [1981].

<sup>269</sup> Ibid: 80.

productivity, imagination and true innovation.<sup>270</sup> Thus, 'The time of class struggle in itself contains the future'; it is a 'constitutive time'; it is the one and only 'prefigurative power'.<sup>271</sup>

### *Becoming-Absolute: Constituent Power as Disutopia*

Negri's theory of constituent power is a direct evolution of the concept of self-valorisation, which tries to resolve a crucial question for prefigurative politics: what is the precise relationship that prefiguration entails between present and future, means and ends? One immediate problem faced by the conception of prefiguration as means-ends unity is that of tautology. As Michael Hardt explains, if ends and means are the same, for example if the answer to both is 'democracy', then how does change occur? Surely such a conception 'is paradoxical insofar as it collapses means and ends; pretending to achieve democracy through democracy it merely stands in place.'<sup>272</sup> The converse of this problem of tautology is the problem of utopia. If our ends are utopian (full emancipation, pure freedom, absolute democracy) – and the ultimate ends of revolutionaries like Negri generally are – then no means can ever fully match those ends. We exist in an imperfect world of power (oppression, unfreedom, hierarchy), both formally and informally. Are we not therefore constantly prefiguring the opposite of our utopian ends, paradoxically seeking to achieve freedom through unfreedom, precisely the instrumentalist contradiction that prefigurative politics seeks to avoid? Clearly prefiguration cannot be a case of static identity, but rather an iterative process. As Hardt puts it:

means and ends are not identical here but neither are they entirely separate. The democracy aimed for always exceeds the democracy practiced, and thus the transition is recast as a process of infinite becoming.<sup>273</sup>

Means-ends unity ceases to be a relationship of simple identity and becomes an ongoing, intertwined but asymmetrical interaction. In Negri's work, this idea is captured in the concept of *disutopia*.

Before Negri began to speak of constituent power, he discovered in Spinoza an ontological foundation for antagonism even more primordial than that previously pursued through Marx (variously expressed as abstract and concrete labour, dead and living labour, etc): the opposing forces of *potestas* and *potentia*. Negri takes for granted the terminological divergence between Spinoza's use of these two words, imputing to them the respective meanings of transcendent and

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid: 121.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid: 97.

<sup>272</sup> Hardt 2007: xx.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid: xx.



immanent power.<sup>274</sup> Negri is then able to identify *potestas* with the class command of appropriation, as, 'in effect, the transcendental of the capitalist revolution'; and *potentia* with the productive force of political constitution: the immanent power of living labour to create value (and to destructure it through self-valorisation).<sup>275</sup> In Spinoza Negri also sees the continuation of an alternative modernity in the form of a constructivist, non-essentialist humanism that has, though a beleaguered underdog, rivalled its essentialist counterpart since the Renaissance.<sup>276</sup> The collective subject of this altermodernity is not the unitary and transcendent 'people', but rather what Spinoza calls the *multitudo*: 'This new quality of the subject, that ... opens up to the sense of the multiplicity of subjects and to the constructive power that emanates from their dignity'.<sup>277</sup> This multiplicity is of subjects conceived as singularities, which importantly draws Negri conceptually closer to Deleuze, who will continue to gain influence in Negri's work from this point on.<sup>278</sup> Negri also identifies in Spinoza not just a theory of rupture, but a theory of revolutionary *process*, in which the constitutive realisation of the multitude's *potentia* strives ever closer towards 'absolute democracy'. Democracy for Spinoza is the only form of absolute government because, of the alternatives, the *potestas* of monarchy or aristocracy is always limited by the *potentia* of the multitude. In Spinozan democracy, the ultimate *potestas* is completely and immanently constituted by the multitude's *potentia*, it is the (self-)rule of pure constituent power.<sup>279</sup>

The nature of Spinozan democracy's absoluteness is synonymous with its nature as process of becoming, summarised in the concept of the disutopia: an anti-nowhere; an immanent location of immediate realisation that nonetheless trails off to infinity; a meeting point at which the potentiality of the future is ensorcelled within the actuality of the present; a paradigmatic process of becoming. Disutopia finds its historical roots as a model for the immanent, insistent becoming at the heart of the constructivist Renaissance humanism that Negri finds in Spinoza, Machiavelli and Marx, in contrast with essentialist humanism, and its elusive utopia:

Renaissance liberation, already presented as a utopia, can be real only if it is reduced to a disutopia, to a realistic proposition of the ethical universe of the revolution, only, that is, if it

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<sup>274</sup> Note that in the field of Spinoza studies the very existence of any meaningful divergence of meaning between Spinoza's use of the two words remains contested. For example, Edwin Curley, translator of *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Curley 1985: 651) argues: 'It is unclear that a systematic examination of Spinoza's usage would confirm even a prima facie distinction between *potentia* and *potestas*'. For further discussion, see Hardt 1991: xii.

<sup>275</sup> Negri 1991 [1981]: 137.

<sup>276</sup> These two modernities are seen in political philosophy most prominently via the lineages of, on the one hand, Hobbes-Rousseau-Hegel, and on the other, Machiavelli-Spinoza-Marx (Negri 1999 [1992]: 28-29).

<sup>277</sup> Negri 1991 [1981]: 8.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*: 60.

<sup>279</sup> Hardt 1991: xvi.

inscribes within itself the end of the utopia. ... The disutopia is the discovery of a real and future revolutionary horizon.<sup>280</sup>

It is in this disutopian sense that Negri could claim in 'The Constitution of Time' that 'Prefiguration is *not* then in any sense *utopia*, it is concrete activity'.<sup>281</sup> This prefigurative 'concrete activity' is a volatile temporal game: a playing out of the 'prefigurative tension' between pre-constituted present and revolutionary future, between actuality and potentiality, between 'actual determination and constitutive project'.<sup>282</sup>

In 1992's *Insurgencies*, Negri finally returns explicitly to constitutional theory, confronting us with his radical reimagining of constituent power as the culmination of all his theoretical work so far. From *potestas* we arrive at constituted power, the ossifying force of order, the transcendent command of the constitution. From the constitutive *potentia* of the *multitudo* flows forth the constituent power of the multitude: the productive, creative 'faculty to construct a political arrangement',<sup>283</sup> that overflows constitutionalisation, 'a force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any preexisting equilibrium and any possible continuity'.<sup>284</sup> Constituted power is command, dead labour, exchange value, 'constructed on abstraction, alienation, and the expropriation of the cooperative creativity of the multitude, [it] is privilege: the fixed and unified appropriation of constituent power'.<sup>285</sup> Constituent power is cooperation, reappropriation, living labour, use value, 'the living and productive pulsation of the multitude' and 'the articulation in which an infinite number of the singularities are composed as productive essence of the new'.<sup>286</sup>

In constituent power we can clearly see the expansion of the workers' power of self-valorisation towards an even more fundamental political power adequate to the generalised multitude. Just as the ruptural antagonism of self-valorisation was the very crisis of capital, Negri's constituent power is a theory of the state's constant crisis and the permanence of revolutionary possibility: 'from the crisis of the concept of constituent power to the concept of constituent power as crisis'.<sup>287</sup> Unlike conventional accounts, which seek to relegate constituent power to the extraordinary (in time) and the fixed (in space),<sup>288</sup> in order to neutralise and mystify it,<sup>289</sup> Negri's constituent power persists far beyond any constitutional recuperation or representative subdivision.

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<sup>280</sup> Negri 1991 [1981]: 175-76.

<sup>281</sup> Negri 2003 [1981]: 125, emphasis Negri's.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 35.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*: 11.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*: 332.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*: 333.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*: 319.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*: 13.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.

It 'resists being constitutionalized',<sup>290</sup> and is in fact, by virtue of its being essentially unrealisable within juridical and constitutional theory, precisely the crisis of constitutionalism, and of all constituted *potestas*.

Where constituted power seeks limited government, constituent power is Spinozan democracy as absolute government.<sup>291</sup> Where constituted power seeks mediation, constituent power seeks an 'absolute procedure' of pure, direct democracy.<sup>292</sup> Thus, 'instead of trying to overcome the crisis' that constituent power poses within juridical thought,<sup>293</sup> Negri's answer is to accept it, and to unleash it: 'not to limit constituent power, but to make it unlimited'.<sup>294</sup> To further explain this conception of constituent power as absolute democracy and process of disutopian becoming, we turn first to Negri's work on temporality, and then to *Commonwealth's* metaphor of the asymptotic curve.

*Insurgencies* pursues the question of temporality through the writings of Machiavelli, wherein Negri discovers a theory of time as weapon of political struggle. First, Negri sees in Machiavelli's concepts of *virtus* and *fortuna* (virtue and fortune) a foreshadowing of the fundamental antagonism between living labour and capital, *potentia* and *potestas*. Second, Negri finds the understanding of politics as a strategic temporal game, which ultimately requires the realisation of a fully autonomous time if constituent power is to flourish. This first appears when Machiavelli speaks of revolution – or as he calls it the *mutatio* (mutation) – as 'an absolute acceleration of history'.<sup>295</sup> This absolute acceleration is virtue's temporal rupture with the rigid, slow temporality of fortune, 'the breaking of the preexisting orders and symmetries'.<sup>296</sup> Within this game, the enemy's delays – 'which is to say, the lack of "virtue"' – must be seized upon and attacked with 'immediacy' and 'punctuality'. And so,

Between these two poles takes shape the definition of 'virtue' and 'fortune' as different apparatuses for grasping time, as producers of subjectivity on a certain temporal rhythm. The political is configured as a grammar of time. ... The temporal game, on its surface, is made of exemplary fraud, deceit, and violence but actually consists of slowdowns or accelerations of time.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid: 1.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid: 12-13.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid: 24.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid: 38.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid: 41-42.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid: 42.

Constitutionalism then represents the temporal ‘inertia’ of constituted power’s negation of constituent power,<sup>298</sup> whereas ‘Through the acceleration of revolutionary time is formulated the idea of time as strength [*potentia*]’.<sup>299</sup>

*Insurgencias* only identifies acceleration as a temporality inherent to constituent power; but Negri hints towards something more when he argues that this temporal game implies a self-valorisation of one’s ‘being in time’.<sup>300</sup> Hardt and Negri will later realise, learning directly from the movements of the squares, that after ‘the insurrectional acceleration of events’ that initially ruptured the stagnant space-time of constituted power, the long, slow deliberative processes of the assemblies in fact constituted a deliberate (and equally radical) *deceleration* of time. With both acceleration and deceleration now playing complementary parts in Negri’s revolutionary temporality, what matters is rather the *autonomy* of constitutive time, that it should be free to mix ‘speed, slowness, deep intensities, and superficial accelerations’, in antagonism to ‘the schedule imposed by external pressures and electoral seasons’.<sup>301</sup> Clearly this represents an important facet of the immense challenge faced by Ganemos in adapting *asamblearismo* to an electoral project.

This idea of autonomous time underlines the fundamental agency imbued in Negri’s temporal ontology. Like self-valorisation, it is ‘grounded in human productive capacity’ and thus ‘in the ontology of its becoming’.<sup>302</sup> Constituent power must therefore incorporate both an autonomous temporality, if it is tactically to break from the rhythms of constituted power, and a constitutive temporality, in its negotiation of the prefigurative tension between present and future, and as guarantor of revolutionary innovation. Autonomous, constitutive temporality as disutopia helps to explain the shocking radicalism of Negri’s definition of constituent power as absolute procedure: it is absolute in that it is immanently becoming-absolute; the relationship between means and ends is a strategic relationship that relies, in part, on the ability of the constituent process to guard the autonomy of its temporality from the pressures of time-as-measure.

In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri introduce a metaphor to aid in understanding the relationship between means and ends within a process of disutopian becoming: the asymptotic curve.<sup>303</sup> In mathematics, an asymptote is a straight line towards which a given asymptotic curve draws infinitesimally close, approaching a distance of zero as the length approaches infinity; logarithmic and exponential curves are typical examples. Metaphorically then, the ends are the

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid: 11.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid: 198.

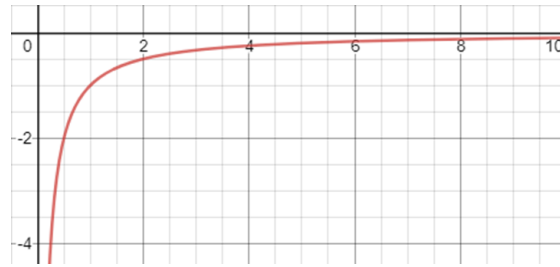
<sup>300</sup> Ibid: 41.

<sup>301</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 49-50.

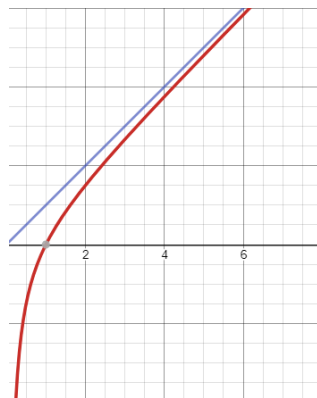
<sup>302</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 30.

<sup>303</sup> Hardt and Negri 2009: 363.

asymptote, and the means are the asymptotic curve. A typical representation looks like the following graph of  $y=-1/x$ :



This intuitively seems to satisfy the basic conditions for a process of becoming, but raises further questions. Should the asymptote run flat along the x axis, as in the above graph? This would imply that the ends of prefiguration are fixed, rigid, a utopian dogma. Perhaps, then, the asymptote would be better represented by the straight, diagonal line  $y=x$  (requiring the asymptotic curve  $y=x-1/x$ ). In this way both the means and ends are seen to progressively evolve over time:



But is not the straightness of the asymptote still troubling? Do ends and means actually remain so perfectly isolated, never directly interacting? Is it only means that are conditioned by ends, or are ends not also conditioned in turn by means, or by external conditions? Perhaps both the asymptote and the curve should meander around the graph, depicting the historical contingency of both democratic values and methods. Perhaps the asymptote should not even be a distinct line of zero width; perhaps it should rather be a centrality gradient that the curve traverses through, trying but usually failing to maintain asymptotic direction in a field whose definite centre cannot be determined from within, the curve no longer perfectly asymptotic but rather itself becoming-asymptotic. Perhaps we should not be using a two dimensional graph at all but rather plotting field equations in multiple dimensions! This flippant exaggeration has its purpose: it emphasises yet another issue for prefigurative democracy. Both the metaphor of the graphed asymptotic curve and the words of Michael Hardt (where he speaks of a democracy that ‘exceeds the democracy practiced’) imply a scale of ‘more’ and ‘less’ democracy, itself hardly unproblematic.

The asymptotic metaphor provides us with a useful vocabulary and visualisation of prefiguration, while its very insufficiency speaks to the intractability of the complexities of a prefigurative strategy for radical democracy, of the challenge of defining means, ends, and the nature of their attempted unity, both in theory and in practice. Does disutopia alone provide a satisfactory resolution to these problems? It takes us far indeed, dramatically underlining the necessity of conceiving of prefiguration as strategic process of becoming that hinges on an autonomous relationship between present and future; but precisely in its over-reliance on the almost magical powers of antagonistic autonomy, and its lack of development on the question of the more precise nature of prefigurative *strategy*, it tends to collapse into a kind of voluntarism. Gordon's model of generative prefiguration, introduced in Chapter 2.1.1, offers a more nuanced relationship between means and ends, present and future. Generative prefiguration is grounded in experimentation, in the 'repeated, concrete experiences of social struggle in which the tension between aspirations and experience is continuously worked out.'<sup>304</sup> This means that 'the ends expressed in practice undergo constant re-evaluation':

Such an open-ended politics lends a measure of indeterminacy to any notion of future 'accomplishment'. ... Such a partial indeterminacy of ends is only intelligible within a generative temporal framing, wherein the future is seen as the product of the affordances and contingencies preceding it.<sup>305</sup>

Such a model is more satisfactory in its complexity, and perhaps more honest in its modest indeterminacy, than the linearity and fixity of the disutopian asymptote. Despite these strengths, however, Gordon's generative prefiguration goes too far in the direction of indeterminacy, becomes too purely generative. It tries valiantly to exist within the productive middle ground between presentism and dogmatic, instrumentalist, 'recursive' temporality, but leans too heavily towards the former. In his anarchist insistence on a temporal framework that 'develops forward in time without recursive projection from an imagined future endgame,' Gordon effectively eschews the difficult question of strategy that necessarily involves some conception of an 'endgame', however indeterminate, however open to debate and re-evaluation.<sup>306</sup> As Gordon makes clear, for his generative prefiguration,

the interpretation of the present is self-contained – dependent on ethical values rather than a promised or imagined prototype. ... Its experimental nature pulls such a framing ... towards

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<sup>304</sup> Gordon 2017: 530.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid: 531.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid: 527. Gordon does mention the idea of strategy, but tellingly tends to refer to anarchist generative prefiguration as 'ethical strategy', emphasising its prioritisation of ethical action in the present over strategic debate over the future.

a more modest view of future-oriented designs as the ‘product of situationally and chronologically determined insight which goes no further than these limitations’.<sup>307</sup>

Gordon does, in an admirable gesture of eclecticism, ultimately advocate for Bloch’s concrete utopia as a useful embellishment to the idea of generative prefiguration – indeed as a preferred terminology to ‘prefiguration’ itself, which Gordon fears is too amenable to overly presentist or recursive framing; but it does not satisfyingly fill the strategy-shaped hole.

If we return to disutopia but reconsider it within the context of Negri’s method of the tendency, we arrive at a happier middle ground between the overly presentist generative model and a purely recursive prefiguration. The method of the tendency, as discussed in Chapter 1, manages to combine ‘ethical strategy’, in Gordon’s words,<sup>308</sup> through the perspectival ethical choice, with material analysis of class composition and the material constitution, plus a healthy dose of indeterminacy of ends, but also the ‘adventure of reason’, the willingness to propose, to theorise, to conceive of ends beyond present ethical practice, to *strategise*.<sup>309</sup> There remain two crucial lacuna in our reconstructive analysis of prefiguration: the relevance of *hegemony*, to be introduced in the next chapter; and the nature of the constitutionality adequate to a radically prefigurative constituent process, or how to *constitute* Negri’s constituent process. The latter is a question addressed most directly in Hardt and Negri’s later work, where they make the vitally important ‘adventure of reason’ of proposing constitutional principles for a new ‘institutionality of the common’.<sup>310</sup>

### *Constituting the Constituent Process*

The constituent process is the name Negri gives to the actual practice of unleashing and sustaining constituent power as absolute democratic procedure. He is usually wary of prescribing a clear programme,<sup>311</sup> preferring to analyse the prefigurative force of constituent tendencies he sees in important struggles (e.g. the English, American, French and Russian revolutions in *Insurgencies*, and the 2011 cycle of struggle in *Declaration*). However, a crucial question for the Negrian constituent process is how it can be constituted without constituted power. The answer seems to be that constitutional principles should be implemented that express only constituent power – a constitution of pure constituent power. This is Spinoza’s absolute democracy in which *potestas* is fully constituted by the multitude’s *potentia*. This is a highly problematic proposition, which will be confronted more directly at the end of this section, and again at the end of the chapter. First, what are the constitutional principles that might express a pure, absolute constituent power? Or at least

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid: 530-31; the quotation is of Koselleck.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid: 526.

<sup>309</sup> Negri 2005 [1971]: 27.

<sup>310</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012.

<sup>311</sup> ‘We have no presumption to write a new constitution’ (ibid: 85).

constituent power's becoming-absolute? What is a Negrian prefigurative constitutionality? The answer comes by way of a close reading of Hardt and Negri's work, especially *Insurgencies* and *Declaration*, extracting constitutional concepts and categories in essentially the manner of grounded theory methodology.

In *Declaration*, we see Hardt and Negri stress more emphatically than ever the vital command to 'Constitute Yourself'.<sup>312</sup> They explain the constituent process as the institution of constituent power, the purpose of which is:

not to bring the revolution to an end but to continue it, guarantee its achievements, and keep it open to further innovations. A constituent power is necessary to organize social production and social life in accordance with our principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity. Constituent processes constantly revise political structures and institutions to be more adequate to the social fabric and material foundation of social conflicts, needs, and desires.<sup>313</sup>

Constituent processes are both '*dispositifs* of the production of subjectivity' (i.e. modes of the counter-hegemonic prefigurative function) and spaces where the multitude can 'discover [new] forms of participation', produce new rules, which 'must function and be continually renewed from below'.<sup>314</sup> Most crucially, constituted power must be avoided at all costs: 'The task is not to codify new social relations in a fixed order,' but rather to organise those relations 'while also fostering future innovations and remaining open to the desires of the multitude'.<sup>315</sup> The constitution of democracy as absolute procedure, as process of becoming-absolute, exceeds simple progressive reform, which rather reconstitutes itself anew at every opportunity. There are four core constitutional categories that seem to define the Negrian constituent constitutionality: *commons*, *direct democracy*, *autonomy*, and the *constitution of absolute becoming*.

### Commons

The commons, or the 'right to the common', is the category that ties the constituent process to the material constitution.<sup>316</sup> Through Hardt and Negri's collaborations the commons becomes increasingly synonymous with democracy, such that democracy becomes almost meaningless if it is not managing the commons. The commons anchors Hardt and Negri's analysis of the biopolitical productivity of the multitude in a form of property beyond the public-private myopia of either

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid: 43.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid: 44

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>316</sup> Hardt 2012.



capitalism or socialism.<sup>317</sup> Even more, it expresses the very ontology of the multitude: 'The commons is the incarnation, the production, and the liberation of the multitude'.<sup>318</sup> By *Declaration*, the constituent process has become synonymous with 'constituting the common',<sup>319</sup> and building an 'institutionality of the common'.<sup>320</sup> Hardt and Negri state quite unequivocally that they 'consider to be constituent the struggles that are posed on the terrain of the common'.<sup>321</sup>

Commons and commoning have also constituted an important thread within the new municipalism, in debates around public/common space, urban ecology, fostering the social and solidarity economy, and much more.<sup>322</sup> Just as Hardt and Negri approvingly describe the Cochabamba Water Wars as a 'double combat', simultaneously against the private and for the public, and against the public and for the common, a central priority for the new municipalism has been the remunicipalisation of common resources like water and energy.<sup>323</sup>

Common resources demand political 'schemes of self-management [that] subject all decisions to procedures of democratic participation',<sup>324</sup> and two key principles emerge to describe Hardt and Negri's constituent vision for managing the commons: the *difference principle* and the *will of all*. Hardt and Negri's *difference principle* adapts that of Rawls:

inequalities in the distribution of goods should be permitted only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. In every social decision, other factors being equal, preference should be given to benefit the poor.<sup>325</sup>

Their extension of the principle states that 'every social function regulated by the state that could be equally well managed in common should be transferred to common hands'; and similarly, 'common, democratic management of natural resources should always take priority when it is at least equally effective and efficient'.<sup>326</sup> In this way common self-management steadily takes over from state management through a managed transition.<sup>327</sup>

The *will of all* further catalyses the fusion of commons and procedural democracy. As the heart of the popular sovereignty of the unitary, transcendent people, the Rousseauian general will is

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<sup>317</sup> Hardt and Negri 2009: xi.

<sup>318</sup> Hardt and Negri 2000: 303.

<sup>319</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 46.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid: 72.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid: 48.

<sup>322</sup> See for example the work of Madrid-based municipalist and former Ahora Madrid council employee Ana Méndez de Andés (2016; Méndez de Andés, Hamou and Aparicio 2019; Aparicio Wilhelmi and Méndez de Andés 2017).

<sup>323</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 70.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid: 66.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid: 70.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> For an immensely promising contemporary proposal along similar lines, which has emerged from the international municipalist milieu, see Milburn and Russell's 'public-commons partnerships' (Milburn and Russell 2019).

demystified, Hardt and Negri argue, by 'Making the common the central concept of the organization of society and the constitution'.<sup>328</sup> Because their conception of the common is itself a constituent process of 'Becoming common', which must 'be constructed, possessed, managed, and distributed by all', the right to the common as constitutional principle cannot be bequeathed by a central, 'imperial general will' that stands above all and belongs to no one. It must rather be an immanent, productive process that enmeshes and expresses the will of all.<sup>329</sup> Clearly the right to the common as expression of the will of all suggests a radical kind of participatory democracy, and this leads us to the second core category of the constituent process: direct democracy.

### Direct Democracy

The concept of representation per se does not take centre stage in Negri's work until *Insurgencies*, although he had already denounced it as a temporal *dispositif* of the state's time-as-measure, as it works to limit the autonomy of constitutive temporality through its strict regularisations (its 'analytic projection and the systemic function'), annulling the free flux of 'collective and productive time' necessary for the constituent process.<sup>330</sup> *Insurgencies* adds to the list of charges representation's cooptive function of dividing and mystifying the multitude's power of decision in accordance with the model of the division of labour.<sup>331</sup> For Negri this is 'nothing but the negation of the reality of constituent power, its congealment in a static system, the restoration of traditional sovereignty against democratic innovation'.<sup>332</sup> What, then, could replace representation as a scalable model of political cooperation adequate to constituent power as absolute procedure? Three key principles ground *Declaration's* account of a direct democracy that ruptures the sovereign principle of representation as general will, moving closer towards concrete expression of the will of all: *plurality*, *federalism* and *delegation*.

Negri quickly became enchanted by the *plurality* of social forces that he saw on the streets of Italy during the struggles of *Autonomia*, that he found confirmed in Foucault's theory of the immanent 'multiplicity of force relations',<sup>333</sup> and in Deleuze's grasp of 'the dimension of the singularity' in Spinoza's work.<sup>334</sup> Negri's multitude is now fundamentally defined as the plurality of singularities: the multiplicity of 'singular and determinate bodies',<sup>335</sup> and thus 'of innumerable internal differences'.<sup>336</sup> A Negrian constituent process must express this irreducible plurality, against

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<sup>328</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 63.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*: 64.

<sup>330</sup> Negri 2003 [1981]: 84.

<sup>331</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 4.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid*: 4.

<sup>333</sup> Foucault 1978: 92.

<sup>334</sup> Negri 1991 [1981]: 267 n4.

<sup>335</sup> Hardt and Negri 2000: 30.

<sup>336</sup> Hardt and Negri 2004: xiv.

the flattening out of difference within the general will. *Declaration* develops the principle of plurality by way of a discussion of majorities, minorities and tolerance. Rather than treat the problem of the tyranny of the majority as an argument for representation, Hardt and Negri argue that the singular nature of multitudinous relationships, once sufficiently developed through collective democratic education and subjectivation, and when given proper expression in decision-making procedures, itself 'provides mechanisms for the inclusion and expression of differences' that can protect minorities by fostering diversity and plurality.<sup>337</sup> They point explicitly towards the democratic experiments of the squares, which worked to devise 'new practices of majority rule that result in new conceptions of tolerance'.<sup>338</sup> Though they do not name it as such, it is clear they are referring to the complex of procedures encapsulated in the methodology of consensus decision-making. For Hardt and Negri, desirable qualities of decision-making include a progressive process of 'differential inclusion', or, 'the agglutination of differences'; a pluralist process should be 'open to conflicts and contradictions' in order to be 'not a homogeneous unit or even a body of agreement but a concatenation of differences'; and in this way it develops a new conception of tolerance. Not a negative tolerance of the segregation and invisibilisation of difference, but a positive tolerance that gives 'everyone the power to participate *as different*'. In such a way, they believe, minorities are protected 'not by being separated but by being empowered to participate in the process'.<sup>339</sup> Consensus decision-making does not always function in such an ideal manner, sometimes serving to repress differences in service of a fetishised consensus; but these are certainly qualities that characterise consensus decision-making at its best, where consensus agreements should emphasise the autonomy of participants to act freely to the extent that they do not undermine others' capacity to do so.

We can see this inclusive aspect of pluralist politics in one of the central themes of the new municipalism: the 'feminisation of politics'.<sup>340</sup> BComú activists Roth and Shea Baird describe its objective as 'breaking with masculine logics that tend to reward styles that are not as widespread or popular among women, such as competition, generalisation and hierarchy'.<sup>341</sup> Mayor Colau of Barcelona has been a particularly vocal proponent, proclaiming that,

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<sup>337</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 56.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid: 57.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, emphasis Hardt and Negri's.

<sup>340</sup> Further reading: Pérez 2019; Gutiérrez 2017: 94-110.

<sup>341</sup> Roth and Shea Baird 2017.

We have to feminise the institutions, changing their rhythms and priorities. ... We have to transform how we do politics and the institutions themselves, so they are at the service of the common good and are compatible with people's lives.<sup>342</sup>

Manuela Carmena has been less vociferous, but firmly approves.<sup>343</sup> Ahora Madrid councillors Galcerán and Carmona go further still, defining the feminisation of politics as confronting 'three great challenges: diversity, co-responsibility and care.'<sup>344</sup> These three ideas, they argue,

have a devastating impact on classical conceptions of power, [they require] a deep questioning of representation and the reinforcement of a politics of collective action. This forces us to redesign the basic foundations of the political. ... [The feminisation of politics] is about making the logic of care the most urgent political framework, [and] is intended to escape from the dichotomies of winners and losers, majorities and minorities, incorporating the politics of care as the central lens of the new forms of collective construction.<sup>345</sup>

For Hardt and Negri, these kinds of targeted pluralisations must be utterly generalised, as a thorough 'plural ontology of politics', as well as scaled; and this task of scaling implies a kind of federalism.<sup>346</sup>

*Federalism* is the scaling principle of a Negrian pluralism. Not a centralised, hierarchical model of federal sovereignty, but a loose 'federalist logic of association'.<sup>347</sup> 'not pyramidal but horizontal and extensive'.<sup>348</sup> In this way the legislative function of a constituent process can try to both 'reflect *and* embody the multiplicity of social movements and social forces and thereby interpret the plural ontology of politics'.<sup>349</sup> Tentative examples include recent Latin American constituent assemblies, which have 'played an innovative role by bringing together and giving expression to a range of social forces',<sup>350</sup> as well as federated systems of worker councils from the Paris Commune to the Russian soviets.<sup>351</sup> We might also look for inspiration to Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalism.<sup>352</sup> Bookchin's key principle for scalable coordination between confederated municipalities is that, while it must in his view be somewhat pyramidal in structure, the pyramid should be inverted, such that most or all decision-making power is invested at the most local levels, with zero or incrementally less political power as decisions flow up the pyramid, where the higher

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<sup>342</sup> Colau, quoted in Font 2015.

<sup>343</sup> Europa Press 2018.

<sup>344</sup> Galcerán and Carmona 2017.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 58.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*: 59

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*: 77.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis Hardt and Negri's.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*: 79.

<sup>352</sup> Which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.2.3.

echelons function as mere coordinators and implementers of local, directly democratic decisions.<sup>353</sup> Such a decision-making structure clearly necessitates a third principle of direct democracy: *delegation*.

What representation is to liberal democracy and the general will, *delegation* is to direct democracy and the will of all. Although it seems Hardt and Negri only ever discuss the concept once,<sup>354</sup> it is among the principles that best encapsulate the necessary plurality, (con)federalisation, and the many other constituent aspirations of a scalable but direct democracy. In considering the transition towards an absolutely direct delegative democracy, it is useful to conceptualise the process as the steady deprofessionalisation of politics, making it a fact of ordinary everyday life rather than the preserve of a political caste.<sup>355</sup> While a fully delegatised politics remains distant, we can more easily imagine, and realise, a democracy becoming-delegative, incrementally bolstering the delegatisation of politics with measures such as short terms, strong powers of recall, forms of direct online participation, and political education. Transparency, too, could be seen as a method of beginning, incipiently, to bridge the gap between representative and represented, restricting the former's autonomy in favour of that of the latter.<sup>356</sup> Podemos and Ahora Madrid have both been active in this regard – a necessary complement to their strident criticism of the corruption of the old duopolistic political system. For instance, Podemos has uploaded every one of their party expenses to a public online database, complete with scanned receipts for every entry, which can be browsed by anyone.<sup>357</sup> What Ganemos proposed, however, would be a radical acceleration in democracy's becoming-delegative: binding mandates flowing both from organs of public participation and from the movement-party apparatus itself, producing near-fully delegatised representatives whose role would be little more than the implementation of citizen demands.

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<sup>353</sup> Confederalism is 'above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy making one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government' (Bookchin 1989).

<sup>354</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 79.

<sup>355</sup> 'If power is to be regained by the people from the state, the management of society must be deprofessionalized as much as possible' (Bookchin 1992: 285). 'Local institutions were those with the greatest potential to act as vehicles for achieving many of the principal goals of the Indignados, in particular the deprofessionalization of politics' (Castro 2018: 187).

<sup>356</sup> Hardt and Negri (2012: 72) identify transparency as one of the key demands of Latin American social movements in their complex counterpower relationship with progressive states. They also speak approvingly of such an incremental process of rebiasing the respective autonomy of representatives and represented: working to 'transform all patriarchal or appropriated forms of representation into limited, liberal forms, and transform those limited forms into more directly instructed ones, making ever stronger the connection between the represented and their representatives' (2004: 247). Though of course they also highlight the need for an eventual radical break from the separation of the 'dual nature of representation', no longer a rebalancing of proportions but a new paradigm; lest we forget that 'Democracy requires a radical innovation and a new science' (ibid).

<sup>357</sup> Podemos's 'transparency portal' can be found at <<https://transparencia.podemos.info>> accessed 18 May 2021.

## Autonomy

Autonomy is, of course, the fundamental constant of Negri's work. In collaboration with Hardt, autonomy morphs into exodus. Exodus has the strength of articulating an understanding of autonomy as prefigurative process. Full exodus from capitalist and constitutional relations of domination is the ultimate end, but it is a disutopian end, a process of becoming-autonomous. There are also some weaknesses in the ways exodus has been presented, and in its connotations of insularity and isolation.<sup>358</sup> By *Declaration*, however, Hardt and Negri have shed the sometimes overly-radical presentation that in *Empire* made exodus seem like the abandonment of society, a retreat to autonomous enclaves. Here they present a much clearer vision of a prefigurative autonomy that breaks with key principles of representation, capital and constituted power wherever possible, that ultimately seeks full exodus from domination, but that starts pragmatically from where we are:

Prison creates a society that needs prisons, and the military creates a society that needs militarism. Going cold turkey would be suicide. The body must be cured instead over an extended period to purge itself of the poison.<sup>359</sup>

Exodus must be slowly constituted through incremental refusal tied simultaneously to the constituent process and its 'collective construction of freedom'.<sup>360</sup> In 2015, in collaboration with Sánchez Cedillo, Negri goes further still, offering a critical but constructive appraisal of Podemos' project 'to verticalize horizontality', conceding the importance of the *asalto institucional*, and even congratulating Podemos for its daring (if while highlighting its contradictions):

The comrades of Podemos are the only ones in Europe who have seriously dared to take this step and construct a vertical axis from a movement of a new potentiality and unprecedented power, organizing without demagoguery or subterfuge a pathway out of grassroots democracy – ultimately powerless in [the] face of that which the times demand, in the contemplation of its horizontality. Only the Baron Munchausen was able to boast saving himself from drowning by pulling on his own hair until he could fly... Now Podemos has managed to do the same.<sup>361</sup>

Negri and Sánchez Cedillo in fact precisely highlight municipalism as the preferred, privileged site for this shift 'from horizontality to verticality; from the agitation and resistance of movement to government':

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<sup>358</sup> Exodus has probably been the most heavily critiqued of Hardt and Negri's concepts. One particularly effective example is Rancière 2010.

<sup>359</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 42.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid: 43.

<sup>361</sup> Negri and Sánchez Cedillo 2015.

is it not true that only if the action of all citizens is directed towards a powerful renewal of city government, only in this case, will it be possible to make a tangible, local example of an effective constituent project? We think so. Because the city and the municipality, the life of the city and its forms of encounter can shape solid figures of administration and constituent initiative. ... Making democracy and (re)production of the city interact, we have the possibility to articulate the political, that is, to connect the will to win and the capacity of decision to a broad, plural and active fabric of militant presences and the production of programs of transformation.<sup>362</sup>

This helps immeasurably to bridge the gap between Negri's most radical expressions of the principle of autonomy and the municipalist wager, whose electoralism might otherwise seem irreconcilable. The key principles of the category of autonomy are: *dual power*, *counterpower* and the autonomy of the *constituent process* itself.

To the extent to which Ganemos and Ahora Madrid express constituent power, they could themselves be considered *constituent processes*, as was the (not necessarily Negrian) intent of early municipalist agitators such as the authors of *La Apuesta Municipalista*. To the extent that it is directed 'from below', such a constituent process could be an expression of grassroots autonomy.<sup>363</sup> Ahora Madrid's participatory governance, and even more so Ganemos' more radical participatory vision, certainly serve this purpose to some extent. Municipalism as constituent process exists, however, in tension with its role as *counterpower*; and municipalist government exists in tension with municipalism as social movement. Hardt and Negri saw a constructive example of these relationships in Latin America where, at times, a productively external relationship developed between social movements and progressive governments: a form of 'open relationship'.<sup>364</sup> In contrast to the internalist relationship favoured by old socialist practices, in which 'socialist governments configured the activities of social movements as within their ruling structures', Latin American movements have often managed to maintain autonomy from their progressive governments, such that they are able to 'maintain cooperative or antagonistic relationships (or both simultaneously) with the government so that they can act autonomously on specific ... issues'.<sup>365</sup> This allows, ideally, the government to be wielded by the movement as a *counterpower*, 'in case of emergency, against the causes of danger'.<sup>366</sup> This is something municipalism in Spain has struggled

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 14.

<sup>364</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 72.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid: 71-72.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid. Even more, Hardt and Negri see this relationship potentially opening up an entirely new process of 'governance' (as opposed to government): 'the governing function can dilute sovereign power to become instead an open laboratory of consensual interventions and plural creations of legislative norms' (ibid).

with, but consciously and carefully so. Much attention was paid in the early days of Ganemos to the relationship between municipalist government, municipalist party and municipalist movement. The reality of municipal government was even harder to reconcile with the other two categories than could, perhaps, have been predicted. Meanwhile the ephemerality of Ahora Madrid as municipalist party contributed, among other factors, to the demobilisation of any vibrant, powerful municipalist movement.<sup>367</sup> Perhaps the most radical expression of prefigurative autonomy, however, is *dual power*.

Lenin first described the *dual power* arrangement when discussing the rise of the soviets to challenge the state: ‘this other government ... of the proletariat and the peasants’, this ‘entirely different kind of power’ that, channelling the Paris Commune, could fully challenge the bourgeois Provisional Government (if not for ‘insufficient class-consciousness’).<sup>368</sup> Bookchin explicitly considers libertarian municipalism to be a dual power struggle, as its aim is similarly to spread confederated counter-institutions until they can ‘seriously challenge the nation-state and multinational corporations ... in order to wrest important and immediate concessions from the existing system and ultimately to supplant it’.<sup>369</sup> Negri, curiously, hardly mentions it, except to occasionally attribute it to others.<sup>370</sup> He seems to think it is too dialectical a concept. Yet at some point a situation of dual power becomes an inevitable consequence of a Negrian strategy of prefigurative autonomy, even if it is not framed as a strategy of dual power per se. So dual power is not a properly Negrian principle, but seems an important complement, as recognised by Ganemos where they speak of ‘new democratic institutions that, without being obligatorily inside the public institutions, would have at least a dual power,’<sup>371</sup> and by councillors like Pablo Carmona, who is especially fond of the term.<sup>372</sup> Really, though, it is a Bookchinian concept, and uniquely so insofar as it is pursued, as proposed by Bookchin and as developed by Ganemos, in tandem with an electoral strategy of taking municipal state power and using that power, paradoxically, to build dual counterpowers that challenge the authority of that very state.

### Becoming

All the above principles serve in their own ways to dilute, limit or prevent the formation of constituted power; they all express some aspects of prefigurative becoming; but none directly address the fundamental question of how to articulate a principle of *constitutional change* adequate

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<sup>367</sup> See also Sánchez Cedillo (2015) on Podemos as a kind of counterpower, arguing that it should not be a ‘prosthesis’ of the people, but an instrument and weapon of the multitude.

<sup>368</sup> Lenin 1974: 38-40.

<sup>369</sup> Bookchin and Foreman 1991: 83.

<sup>370</sup> To Laclau (Negri 2015); to the Gilets Jaunes (Negri 2018); and, of course, to Lenin (Negri 1999 [1992]: 251-302).

<sup>371</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

<sup>372</sup> ‘We think a strategy of dual power and counterpower is possible’ (Pablo Carmona, interviewed in Ancelovici and Emperador 2017).



to democracy as absolute procedure: the question of *the constitution of absolute becoming*. Even liberal constitutionalism could be said to achieve democracy as a 'process of infinite becoming'.<sup>373</sup> Liberal constitutionalists have always recognised the need for constitutional amendability, if not always as prefigurative-democratic end in itself then at least as a pressure valve to prevent dissent from boiling over into insurrection. Thus the mere *constitution of becoming* is hardly a problem if only a moderate quality and quantity of democratic becoming is desired. For Hardt and Negri, however, such a moderate 'becoming' does not deserve the name. It is mere progression, not true becoming, a continuation of the old constitution through adaptation that in fact seeks to block the ontological novelty of constituent power's becoming-absolute. For them, constitutionalism is inherently the rule of constituted power and thus of being, of stasis and domination. Constituent power should not be engaged in a dialectic with constituted power, it must constitute a radical break and autonomously pursue its own positive ontology. Disutopia's becoming-absolute must encapsulate not only the tension between present and future democracy, but also between insurrectional rupture and institutional consolidation. There must be a radical rupture to inaugurate the newness of the constituent process, but that insurrectional event must then be 'consolidated in an institutional process of transformation that develops the multitude's capacities for democratic decision making'.<sup>374</sup> This institutional process must then find a way to turn insurrectional *event* into inherently insurrectional *process*: 'as much as insurrection is swept up in the process of transition, transition must constantly renew the force of insurrection'.<sup>375</sup> Here we meet back up with Holloway's anti-institution of anti-power (discussed in Chapter 2.1.1), but now with at least *some* tools for thinking its constitution; and it must by definition be constituted.<sup>376</sup> Even Hardt and Negri, by *Declaration*, are clear that constituent struggles must 'not only express the urgent need but also chart the path for a new constitutional process'.<sup>377</sup> But is such a thing even possible without any vestige of constituted power? How does a constituent anti-constitution entrench its own continual demise and renewal? Is not constitution the enemy of becoming? Is not institution the enemy of insurrection? The constitution of absolute becoming would appear to be an oxymoron. Hardt and Negri do not directly address this problem because, as I will argue, their binary understanding of power poses insurmountable problems for doing so. Yet despite the fact that Hardt and Negri's theory cannot fully account for it, we can find in their writing two concrete constitutional principles that offer at least a point of departure for thinking the apparently paradoxical constitution of absolute becoming: the *permanent constituent assembly*, and the *right to revolution*.

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<sup>373</sup> Hardt 2007: xx.

<sup>374</sup> Hardt and Negri 2009: 363.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid: 363.

<sup>376</sup> As Bookchin puts it, 'the libertarian municipality, like any social artifact, is constituted' (Bookchin 2015: 190).

<sup>377</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 48.

A key constitutional stone as yet unturned is whether a constituent constitution should be written or unwritten. On the one hand, the lack of a codified constitution might suggest a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’;<sup>378</sup> on the other, a written constitution is surely the archetypal expression of constituted power. *Insurgencies* pays special attention to the constituent assemblies of past revolutionary moments, as ‘the popular organizational frameworks’ in which constituent power was mobilised;<sup>379</sup> *Empire* claims that ‘The real truth commissions of Empire will be constituent assemblies of the multitude, social factories for the production of truth’;<sup>380</sup> while *Declaration* speaks approvingly of recent Latin American constituent assemblies,<sup>381</sup> and goes on to describe ‘an open constituent assembly’ as a desirable structure for the playing out of the multiplicity of difference, and as a multitudinous mode of checks and balances within a constituent process.<sup>382</sup> Could then a *permanent constituent assembly* be all the constitution that a constituent process needs? It would seem to fit with Negri’s calls for constituent power to be unlimited, for the constituent process to be always open, and perhaps does indeed approach a kind of absolute procedure. We see the idea emerge in more detail when Hardt and Negri directly address the three branches of republican government. They identify the aporias each has reached in the ‘contemporary constitutional predicament’,<sup>383</sup> and then take the bold step of outlining how ‘the principles and truths constructed by the movements’ could form the basis for rethinking the functions of each branch in a disutopian constituent process.<sup>384</sup> The result is that each branch represents functions that should, for the most part, be brought together in a single, pluralist, participatory legislative power. Executive functions of planning and development must be made common, participatory and federalised, and ultimately ‘completely intertwined’ with legislative power, which presumably would entail either a parallel participatory system or two faces of a single system.<sup>385</sup> Meanwhile judicial powers are separated out into types. The ‘tasks of administering civil and criminal law’ should remain depoliticised.<sup>386</sup> The other key judicial functions – checks and balances, and constitutional interpretation – are ‘inevitably political’, and so should also be brought into and ‘reconfigured on the political [i.e. the legislative] terrain’.<sup>387</sup> Such a constitutional apparatus might then be at least vaguely analogous to parliamentary sovereignty, in that ‘Parliament’ (the constituent assembly), as expression of an irreducible democratic constituent power, could be checked only by its own ‘substantial field of

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<sup>378</sup> Freeman 1972-73.

<sup>379</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: vii.

<sup>380</sup> Hardt and Negri 2000: 156.

<sup>381</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 77.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid: 74.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid: 77.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid: 83.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

differences',<sup>388</sup> and not by any transcendent constituted power. Negri's permanent constituent assembly would logically share the core principle of parliamentary sovereignty, that the assembly cannot bind itself. Constitutional norms enacted through the assembly would be non-binding in this regard, but could form binding mandates on the other organs of governance outside the sovereign assembly. Would that be a binding form of constituent power? Or would that necessarily be a form of constituted power? The fact that we are immediately drawn to the term *sovereign* assembly would suggest the latter. This model of the permanent constituent assembly matches the organisation of Ganemos very closely indeed, as we will see in Chapter 2.2.4; but it is not a form of pure constituent power without constituted power, it is a reimagining of the balance between constituent and constituted power, perhaps even the development of a new form of multitudinous sovereignty and democratic constituted power. Such an innovation is incomprehensible within Negri's binary framework.

There is one more candidate for a constitutional principle of absolute becoming: *the right to revolution*. Negri identifies the fusion of constituent power with revolution as a key method for avoiding constituent power's reduction to constituted power:

What does constituent power mean if its essence cannot be reduced to constituted power but must, rather, be grasped in its originary productivity? It means, first of all, the establishment of a continuous relationship between constituent power and revolution, an intimate and circular relation such that where there is constituent power there is also revolution.<sup>389</sup>

The *right to resistance* plays a preliminary role in the emergence of the *right to revolution*. Negri describes the right to resistance as 'the negative power par excellence, whose prefigurative force can hardly be eliminated from the history of modern constitutionalism',<sup>390</sup> and as 'a negative essence, an essence of liberation' that forms the root of constituent power 'as positive determination'.<sup>391</sup> This inversion from the negative to the positive does not negate the former but, as one might expect of Negri, builds upon it, constituent power itself becoming the 'positive organization of the right to resistance'.<sup>392</sup> The archetypal expression of the right to revolution is the *US Declaration of Independence*:

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<sup>388</sup> 'In other words, in an open and constituent assembly structure, diverse and conflicting forces serve to check one another, creating a dynamic balance' (ibid).

<sup>389</sup> Negri 1999 [1992]: 23.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid: 21.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid: 187.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid: 126.

when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.<sup>393</sup>

Negri reads the *Declaration* as the crucial turning point from the negativity of the right of resistance, towards the positivity of constituent power:

The right to revolution is a negative right, aimed at the destruction of the adversary and the maintenance of the natural basis of survival, but it is also a positive right, in the sense that it opens the constituent will.<sup>394</sup>

The right to revolution breaks the negative cycle of resistance and opens a positive escape trajectory towards constituent self-valorisation.

What would a right to revolution mean in constitutional practice? The problem with leaving such a right to the extreme vagueness of the *Declaration of Independence* is that it reduces its democratic quality to zero, to might-makes-right, inviting coups from any reactionary minority just as much as from an oppressed majority. It would be a kind of tyranny of structurelessness at a grand scale, which by refusing to constitutionalise power makes it all the more dangerous. Surely, if counterintuitively, the only *democratic* right to revolution is a constitutional right followed in accordance with constitutional procedure? How could this possibly work? There is at least one example of such an idea, to which Negri at times refers: the Jeffersonian principle, to every generation its own constitution. Jefferson set out this idea in a letter to Samuel Kercheval:

We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors. ... let us provide in our constitution for its revision at certain periods. What these periods should be, nature herself indicates. By the European tables of mortality, ... a majority will be dead in about nineteen years. At the end of that period, then, a new majority is come into place; or, in other words, a new generation. Each generation [has] the right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness.<sup>395</sup>

To put this principle in context, at the (pre-COVID) death rate of nine people per 1000 per year, half of the UK's roughly 64 million people will have died within about 55 years. However, a more accurate method for determining a majoritarian-generational transition would be based on median age. With a median age of about 40, of the people alive in the UK today, about as many were born in

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<sup>393</sup> *US Declaration of Independence*, quoted Ibid: 150-51.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid: 150.

<sup>395</sup> Jefferson 2007 [1816]: 73-74.

the last 40 years as were born more than 40 years ago. Thus, by the median age method, a Jeffersonian constitutional convention would be required once the number of years since the last convention is equal to the median age of the population.<sup>396</sup> Hardt and Negri only mention this Jeffersonian principle to underline the importance of grasping ‘the dramatic break that is determined between the existing constitutional institutions and the democratic needs that common sense demands’, to reinforce the general right to ‘throw off [despotic] government’;<sup>397</sup> but it is easy to see its appeal for a politics of radical becoming. It could be further radicalised by arbitrarily reducing the generational cut-off to a smaller proportion, to a quarter or an eighth of the population for example, or to a certain length of time. It could also work at the smaller institutional scale of movement or party, through the rule that as soon as the number of still-active founding members is overtaken by the number of new members, there should be an internal constitutional convention; and then again once the number of still-active members who were active during the first constitutional convention is overtaken by the number of members who joined since the first constitutional convention; etc. Through the right to revolution, the constitution of radical becoming seems to be (very) tentatively conceivable: the constitution becomes creatively self-destructive. Yet still, the right to revolution cannot seem to function *democratically* without some formal constitution, without constituted power. In Chapter 3.2.3 we will see how this principle of radical becoming has been constituted in Podemos, whose constituent Citizen Assembly must meet at least every two-four years,<sup>398</sup> where each time brand new constitutional documents are agreed.

### *Negri beyond Negri*

The primary service Negri offers to this thesis is a simple one: as we will see in the following section, the profound synergy between the principles of a Negrian constituent process and the principles of Ganemos’ *asambleario* constitutionality emphasises the sheer radicalism of the Ganemos project. But more than that, Negri takes us further than anyone else along the path of theorising the prefigurative constitution of radical democracy, and its many challenges. However, this task is fundamentally both confused and limited by Negri’s binary conception of power and his arbitrary exclusion of any form of constituted power. Negri too readily reduces constituent and constituted power to good versus evil. Like general relativity, Negri’s beautifully symmetrical theory breaks down at the quantum level. What is revealed with particular clarity by lowering ourselves to the molecular scale of movement and party is that constituent power alone does not seem to be enough. Ultimately Negri’s theory of constituent power cannot fully account for the constitution of

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<sup>396</sup> Credit for this median age method goes to my good friend Michael Alexander, of the University of Glasgow’s School of Physics and Astronomy.

<sup>397</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 48.

<sup>398</sup> The precise period has been amended at least once.

its own constituent process. The simple Marxist binary has in many places been outgrown by Deleuzian multiplicities, yet clings to power like a Leninist socialist state, refusing to wither away. Meanwhile the Spinozan influence (wherein absolute democracy's *potestas* is in fact fully constituted by constituent *potentia*) tends towards an even more restrictive kind of monism: conceiving the constituent process as solely the expression of constituent power becomes equivalent to Holloway's theory of anti-power in its inability to fully conceive of the 'multiplicity of force relations'.<sup>399</sup> The theoretical Negrian challenge, then, is to develop a more nuanced, more truly pluralist understanding of power. Later we will consider what, if anything, Negri can learn from Laclau and Mouffe and their in fact more thoroughly multitudinous conception of the irreducible plurality of social antagonisms, and from closer attention to the vital constitutional problem of leadership. This is the exciting challenge of a Negri beyond Negri.

## 2.2 Ganemos: Constituent Candidature

### 2.2.1 *Asamblearismo*: Becoming Constituent

The introduction to Chapter 2 has already identified mainstream neighbourhood associations and anarchic social centres as key sites within the broad tent of Spanish *asamblearismo*;<sup>400</sup> but the term has been applied even more broadly, indicating just how deeply embedded the idea is in Spanish culture and history. For example, historical research on the *concejos cerrados* of late medieval Spain describes them as a form of *asamblearismo*;<sup>401</sup> the anarchist legacy of 1930s Spain is of course a strong influence on more radical *asambleario* traditions; and even the Partido Comunista de España (PCE) has been described as fostering *asamblearismo* among the peasantry of Andalucía between 1921 and 1960.<sup>402</sup> The most radically libertarian lineages were largely broken by Franco;<sup>403</sup> though the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) of course preserved something of the anarchist tradition, including certain veins of *asamblearismo*.<sup>404</sup> The *okupa* movement of occupied social centres is perhaps the most crucial element, however. It 'flourished' particularly in Madrid, according to Flesher Fominaya, in the years 1985-1999. García López, academic and Madrid activist, describes the movement as developing 'a whole set of new sociabilities, whose centrality will be articulated around domestic self-management, *asamblearismo*, community radicalism, rejection of

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<sup>399</sup> Foucault 1978: 92.

<sup>400</sup> Oikonomakis and Roos 2016: 234; Castells 1983; Flesher Fominaya 2015: 149.

<sup>401</sup> Jara Fuente 1999.

<sup>402</sup> Navarro 2012.

<sup>403</sup> As perceived by one Madrid activist: 'there is a whole libertarian tradition that has been reborn because after the war there weren't even four anarchists left' (Xurxo, interviewed by Flesher Fominaya 2007: 348).

<sup>404</sup> Bellver Loizaga 2018.

the public-private division, collective spatial appropriation and creative exploration.<sup>405</sup> Botella-Ordinas argues emphatically that the form of organisation found in the *asamblearismo* of Madrid's 'Self-Managed Social Centres ... is very similar to that found in Acampadasol.'<sup>406</sup> Xurxo, the Madrid activist interviewed by Flesher Fominaya, may describe the *okupa* movement as expressing 'almost *non*-decision-making as a political form,'<sup>407</sup> but there is evidence that this 'political form' was already highly developed in 2001, when Traficantes de Sueños published the first edition of *Asambleas y Reuniones: Metodologías de Autoorganización*.<sup>408</sup> The text is remarkable in its comprehensiveness, but also its Spartan practicality: 91 pages of detailed, concrete guidance on different 'types of meetings according to objectives', issues of meeting facilitation, minute taking, advice on verbal and non-verbal communication, self-evaluation of the assembly, etc. Tellingly, the introduction opens with a photograph of Centro Social Seco, a long-running and influential social centre in Madrid, which was an important site of political apprenticeship for a number of Ahora Madrid participants.<sup>409</sup>

By 15M, then, these intricate methods of assembly democracy did not need to be invented, nor imported. The influence on 15M of the Zapatistas, the wider alterglobal movement, especially Argentinian *horizontalismo*,<sup>410</sup> but also the whole diverse range of international expressions of 'prefigurative politics', was all profound; but that influence did not occur suddenly and all at once on 15 May 2011. It had already long been absorbing into local traditions of *asamblearismo*, which had itself always been a complex mixture of local and global influences.<sup>411</sup> Already in June 2011, Acampada Murcia had published the exemplary 'Practical Guide for *Asamblearismo*', defining it as 'a democratic decision-making technique based in participation and deliberation,' that should be organised 'at various levels: commissions, platforms, coordination, assemblies, and regional meetings of assemblies. ... The neighbourhood and district assemblies,' claim Acampada Murcia, 'are the ultimate expression of citizen popular sovereignty. All initiatives or actions require, as far as possible, the approval of the assembly.'<sup>412</sup> This vision of *asamblearismo* will, as we will see shortly, be replicated very closely in Ganemos, from the structure to (something like) the principle of the sovereignty of the assembly. Acampada Murcia define the purpose of the assembly in simultaneously pragmatic and strategic-transformative terms: '*asamblearismo* is an instrument for efficiently changing the world.' Its two core principles are defined as *autonomy* and *transversality*. Autonomy in the sense of the 'equality of opinions and votes of all members of the movement,'

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<sup>405</sup> García López 2014. For a particularly thorough treatment of Madrid's social centre movement, covering 1985-2011, see Seminario de Historia Política y Social Okupaciones en Madrid-Metrópolis 2014.

<sup>406</sup> Botella-Ordinas 2011. See also Martínez and García 2015.

<sup>407</sup> Flesher Fominaya (2007: 348).

<sup>408</sup> Lorenzo Vila and Martínez López 2005 [2001] (Assemblies and Meetings: Methodologies of Self-Management).

<sup>409</sup> Including research participants José Haro and P10.

<sup>410</sup> Sitrin 2006.

<sup>411</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2015; 2020a.

<sup>412</sup> Acampada Murcia 2011.

including the ability to block consensus, which should be used ‘responsibly’, only as a last resort.<sup>413</sup> Transversality here is used not (necessarily) in the identitarian sense of transversal ideological or demographic appeal and inclusivity, but in something more like the Guattarian sense of transversality as a constitutional principle. For Acampada Murcia, it means ‘the continual improvement of internal communication in order to speed up the coordination of the movement in a humane and spontaneous way.’<sup>414</sup> This seems to suggest a transversal or diagonal mode of coordination that seeks to ‘overcome both the impasse of pure verticality and that of mere horizontality,’ as where Guattari developed the idea of transversality as a principle for the constitution of ‘group-subjects’ (initially within the clinic, but with explicit wider political applicability).<sup>415</sup> This model of transversal ‘institutional psychotherapy’ mounted a simultaneous analysis of therapy, institutionality, power, leadership, revolutionary subjectivity and communication, focused on ‘the necessary splitting-up of the medical function into a number of different responsibilities, [and the] principle of questioning and re-defining roles.’<sup>416</sup> The key overlap with the Acampada Murcia principle is how in both cases it is ‘humane’ communication that grounds emergent forms of democratic ‘coordination’.<sup>417</sup> In Guattari’s words: ‘Transversality in the group is a dimension opposite and complementary to the structures that generate pyramidal hierarchization and sterile ways of transmitting messages.’<sup>418</sup> Or as Deleuze summarises, it is about the production of ‘subjective and singular positions capable of transversal communication.’<sup>419</sup> Not remotely explicit in the Acampada Murcia document, but more so in Ganemos, is the Guattarian link between transversal communication as democratic coordination and the transversal splintering and redistribution of leadership functions. Transversality as principle of distributed leadership.

### 2.2.2 Social Syndicalism, the Limits of Autonomy and the *Asalto Institucional*

The first major reaction to perceived limitations of the movement of the squares was a great influx of activity into new and existing issue-based social movements, such as the already active Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) and the host of issue-specific *mareas* (tides). Here the long process of listening and developing informal methodologies of mutual aid that developed in the squares, and especially in the smaller neighbourhood assemblies that constituted the second phase of 15M after the dispersal of the big encampments such as Acampadasol, merged with a new conception of *sindicalismo social* (social

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Guattari 2015: 113.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid: 117.

<sup>417</sup> Acampada Murcia 2011.

<sup>418</sup> Guattari 2015: 118.

<sup>419</sup> Deleuze 2015: 15.



syndicalism). The massive re-energisation of the PAH was a particular success story of this period, described by journalist Dan Hancox as ‘one of the most successful social movements in modern European history’.<sup>420</sup>

Contemporary *sindicalismo social* is a modern, *asambleario* revivification of the more organically social pre-war functions of the diverse trade unionisms, syndicalisms and mutualisms present in Europe, before these functions were squeezed out by welfare states and unions retreated into more paternalistic and managerial functions of coordination and negotiation:

The early 20th century unions took action in factories and businesses, but also had housing cooperatives, cooperative stores, cultural centres, friendly societies, etc. They combined direct action, the attainment and realisation of rights, and community building.<sup>421</sup>

In the current phase of capitalist exploitation uniquely characterised by precarity, debt, etc, new forms of social syndicalism become imaginable and necessary, as described by Ahora Madrid councillor Pablo Carmona (et al) when discussing the development of European social centres as ‘political machines for a new generation of movement institutions’:

*New forms of social syndicalism: social rights offices, precarious agencies and consultancy workshops try to articulate singular and shared forms of expression in precarised life. They deal with work, citizenship, home and life, with the multiple forms of contemporary exploitation. They express a mechanism for political formulation and struggle, which belongs to the general intellect period, creating networks of cooperation based on specific forms of knowledge. [Social centres] favour informal moments in which to share the singular form of precarity, where advice can circulate and conflict can be de-individualised, thus returning to the best tradition of workers’ taverns and informal class-education spaces. Thus, we find ourselves before a recombinant mechanism, a proletarian self-organisation of new subjects that come together for the purpose of obtaining new social rights – the right to education, to mobility, to income.*<sup>422</sup>

A crucial early example of this new social syndicalism was the spread of Oficinas de Derechos Sociales (ODS, Offices of Social Rights). The ODS at Patio Maravillas social centre in Madrid, for example, described itself as:

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<sup>420</sup> Hancox 2015c. See also Hancox 2015a: ‘A 2013 poll for El País found 89% support for PAH’s campaign of direct action, eviction-blocking and escraches (demos outside politicians’ houses).’

<sup>421</sup> Fundación de los Comunes 2016.

<sup>422</sup> Carmona et al 2008, emphasis theirs.

born in the face of the necessity to generate practical tools for the realisation of our rights. It is a self-organised space of information and advice by and for the precarious. The ODS tries to convert the problems of isolated people into processes of social self-organisation, of creating networks of mutual aid, and of concrete strategies against the abuses of landlords or employers, as well as against the failures of the systems of social protection. The ODS seeks to connect our daily problems and, above all, tries to find responses and collective solutions to the problems of housing, work or papers that affect us day by day.<sup>423</sup>

This new social syndicalism continued to spread, including such groups as *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal* (campaigning for universal healthcare),<sup>424</sup> various *despensas solidarias* (solidarity foodbanks),<sup>425</sup> *Territorio Doméstico*,<sup>426</sup> and of course the now famous PAH, born in February 2009 in Barcelona and building on the already strong housing movements that had erupted since the ‘Right to Decent Housing’ campaign that began 14 May 2006.<sup>427</sup>

The new social syndicalism, and the PAH especially, was crucial to the emergence of municipalism in that it drastically furthered the productive, transversal confluence of strategies for change that had been the basis of the best moments of the alterglobal and 15M movements. In the PAH for example, *asambleario* methodologies were applied to self-organising a loose national network of local groups, resulting in a panoply of outcomes from basic material and emotional mutual aid and support, to direct action (physically resisting evictions as well as rehousing families in squatted homes), to advice and support in engaging with the relevant legal and administrative structures; all while capturing the public and activist imaginaries with resonant, emotive slogans that perfectly summarised the hypocrisy of crisis-capitalism for the poor, socialism for the banks, and with a media-friendly spokesperson in Ada Colau.

This new social syndicalist strategy transcends a variety of political divisions by appealing to broad swathes of society and uniting them in opposition to concrete, immediate problems, in pursuit of achievable, immediate solutions, as well as a prefigurative vision of grander social change. For the un-politicised, *sindicalismo social* is simply self-defence, survival, and the emotional support of community. For some radicals it represents the construction of counterpower. For the Negrians and autonomists, it is part of the ‘subjective reconstruction of a biopolitics of class’,<sup>428</sup> and ‘a step

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<sup>423</sup> Patio Maravillas 2007. Note that Patio Maravillas was an early political home for research participant Guillermo Zapata, and a number of other Ganemos participants who would mostly follow each other into Madrid<sup>129</sup>.

<sup>424</sup> Which seems to have begun in 2012 (Fuente 2012).

<sup>425</sup> With strong growth in Madrid from 2012 (Tisera 2015).

<sup>426</sup> Horizontalist organising for the rights of (especially migrant) women, with roots going back at least to 2006 (Territorio Doméstico undated).

<sup>427</sup> López et al 2008.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

towards a practical definition of class as a multitudinous subject'.<sup>429</sup> No doubt many social democrats participated with the primary intent of pushing the state to realise existing rights (especially the Spanish Constitution's existing right to housing), or to change policy, such as one of the PAH's flagship campaigns, the Ley de Vivienda de la PAH (PAH Housing Law).

The first signs of what might be achievable should the strength of the social movements be led by a media-friendly household name came in February 2013, when Ada Colau, the PAH spokesperson already known as an accomplished orator, was invited to give evidence on Spain's housing crisis before the Congressional Commission of Economy. Also present as an expert witness was banker Javier Rodríguez, representing the Asociación Española de la Banca (Spanish Association of Private Banks). Visibly angered by Rodríguez defending the banks and the national legislation that allowed for the housing crisis, Colau took the opportunity to express (streamed live on national television) what so many in the country believed to be true:

How can you say that, when there are people who are ending their lives as a consequence of this criminal law? I assure you that I have not thrown a shoe at this man because I thought it important to remain here to tell you what I am telling you, but this man is a criminal and should be treated as such; he is not an expert. The representatives of the financial entities have caused this problem. These same people have ... ruined the entire economy of this country, and you treat these men as experts.<sup>430</sup>

Colau became an overnight sensation. Many remember where they were when they first saw the footage of this moment, such as watching the session in a bar, the entire room erupting in cheers and applause.<sup>431</sup>

Thus we have the foundation of a deeply pluralist and transversal movement logic, which had for several years been making incremental progress addressing concrete social problems using a wide range of methodologies and strategies. This lay the ground for the emergence of municipalism, but it would take a crisis to trigger the shift into serious and widespread consideration of participating directly in the electoral sphere. This crisis began to emerge in late 2012, coming to a head in autumn of 2013. Not a sudden, devastating crisis, but a steady frustration coming to the boil: 'After two years of hard struggle, there were no great changes'.<sup>432</sup> Mobilisation and energy were faltering, and the limits of social syndicalism and contentious politics under a bipartisan neoliberal regime were becoming ever clearer. The PAH were resisting evictions, temporarily rehoming families

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<sup>429</sup> Carmona et al 2008.

<sup>430</sup> A transcription of the entire session has been uploaded by Grueso (2013). For a video report including the key moment, see Vanguardia (2017).

<sup>431</sup> For more detail on the PAH and its relationship with 15M, see Monterde 2014.

<sup>432</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

in unused buildings, people were getting organised; but deeper, lasting, structural change still seemed impossibly distant. A particularly crucial moment was the government's rejection of PAH's 'Iniciativa Legislativa Popular por la Vivienda Digna' (Popular Legislative Initiative [ILP] for Decent Housing), the result of an epic organising effort that gathered 1,402,845 signatures of support. The fact that all that effort and all of those people could be so easily ignored was a powerful catalyst for rethinking movement strategy. What was the point of expressing indignation, of shouting at the institutions, if no one inside was listening? As José Haro portrays the mood of this period:

back then ... the analysis of social movements ... coincided in agreement that they were reaching a kind of end of the cycle of mobilisation, not caused by an inability of the movements to sustain this mobilisation, but by the lack of concrete outcomes in terms of objectives and sources of transformation, because we found ourselves with institutions that were completely closed to those demands, and that not only ignored what was proposed to them, but also repressed it with legal changes, such as the *Ley Mordaza* [Gag Law].<sup>433</sup>

Some of the 15M neighbourhood assemblies began at this time to seriously discuss, first, 'the necessity of creating a political tool beyond the social movements', which quickly led to the question of whether or not to participate directly in elections.<sup>434</sup> However, in the 15M assemblies, most requiring absolute consensus, anti-power held sway. These motions were blocked (mostly by anarchists and libertarians), and so those interested in taking the discussion further had to do so in a new space. La Asamblea de las Descalzas was formed, gathering diverse people from across the movements in Madrid who wanted to discuss the electoral question 'in the key of 15M'.<sup>435</sup>

Two of the most important groups at this foetal stage of municipalism, both within and outwith Madrid, were enRed (Networked) and Alternativas desde Abajo (Alternatives from Below; AdA). To give some rough sense of situating these groups within the immense plurality of 15M, below is a map of the movement drawn up by participants:

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<sup>433</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>434</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>435</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018. Note that similar debates were emerging in parallel at this time across Spain, not just in Madrid.

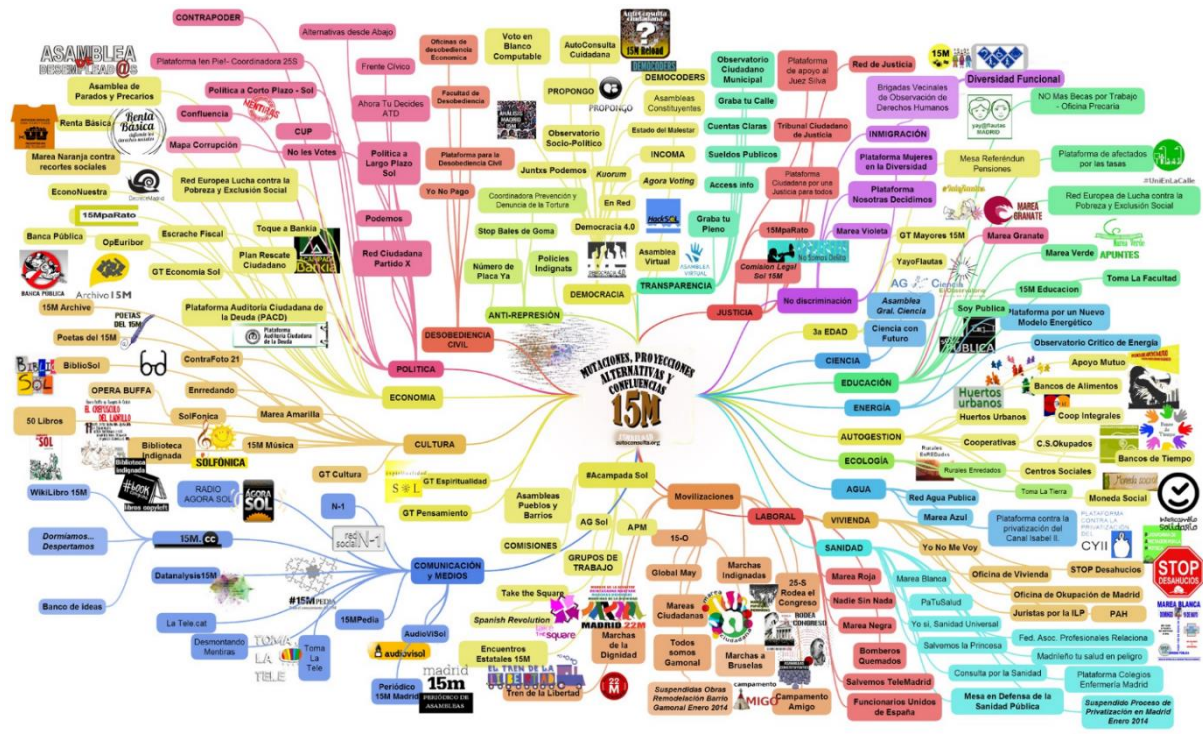


Figure 2, map of 15M.<sup>436</sup>

EnRed were, according to P1, comprised primarily of people associated with the Patio Maravillas social centre and Traficantes de Sueños. While, like the majority of social movements at this time, enRed explicitly considered themselves a continuation of 15M, existing ‘to advance in the democratic process that was opened on 15 May 2011’,<sup>437</sup> they also sought to propel an institutional self-critique of the movement. Their first online footprint, the first post on their website, appeared on 19 February 2013, during the build-up of the sense of movement crisis. The post shares a document – ‘the conclusion of the collective analysis realised during the last few months’ – that analyses the contemporary situation of the Spanish state as an ‘institutional block’ resulting from the combination of ‘systemic crisis’ and the ‘crisis of representation’.<sup>438</sup> This means, as they explain on their website, that the institutions are incapable of listening to and acting on the demands of the movements, even if they wanted to, which they evidently did not.<sup>439</sup> For enRed, this raises the questions of ‘democracy’ and ‘power’. However, the document points out that ‘difficulty in tackling the question of power ... produces the sensation of blockage [and] impotence’. Its solution is to ‘constitute a new institutionality, as much autonomous as normative ... a tool of coded destituent/constituent experimentation’. The destituent/constituent option reveals how early and

<sup>436</sup> Retrieved from Levi 2015. enRed are found in yellow linked to democracia; Alternativas Desde Abajo are found in pink at the top-left, emanating from política.  
<sup>437</sup> enRed undated.  
<sup>438</sup> enRed 2013a.  
<sup>439</sup> enRed 2013b.

open this process still remained. 'Institutional power / associations / parties', reads a bullet point that indicates both that parties were already part of the debate, but that they were still only one part of many. The immediate suggested tasks include such tentative steps as movement-mapping, 'support already existing processes', 'introduce the question of the constituent process', 'introduce the question of power', 'reinforce movement power', 'achieve concrete victories', 'propel the constituent process'.<sup>440</sup> However what is key is the logic of institutionality that, though here mostly conceived as autonomous, would soon come to see municipal government as a viable tool for its own development.

Alternativas desde Abajo (AdA) appeared around the same time as enRed, propelled primarily by Anticapitalistas, accompanied by a variety of movement participants. Anticapitalistas are a Trotskyist group that had stood in Spanish elections previously, without success, since splitting in 2007 from the major electoral coalition of the radical left, Izquierda Unida (IU). Anticapitalistas appear to have been particularly friendly towards the alterglobal movements, and strongly supported 15M. AdA followed a somewhat parallel path to enRed: created firmly in the tradition of 15M, with the intention to build new political dispositifs, new forms of collaboration and institutionality:

It is urgent that we create for ourselves a new political, social and economic model. ... In order to achieve it, it is necessary to begin a broad, horizontal, plural and participatory process of reflection and confluence.<sup>441</sup>

AdA seems to have been first to reach the conclusion of a municipalist candidature, firmly placing it among their objectives by October 2013.<sup>442</sup> For P1, who participated in AdA, the key reference point at this time was the radical left Catalan nationalist party Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP), although this would soon change.<sup>443</sup> AdA's municipalist plans almost came unstuck in late 2013 when the majority of its Anticapitalista-affiliated participants suddenly revealed that they were now part of plans for a new national party (whose name you can no doubt guess), and would be leaving AdA behind to focus on this national project. Remnants of AdA continued to believe that the municipal elections were either a more important or a more feasible project, or both. Feeling 'betrayed', they

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<sup>440</sup> enRed 2013a.

<sup>441</sup> Alternativas desde Abajo 2013a.

<sup>442</sup> See Vargas (2013), and Alternativas desde Abajo (2013b). Whereas enRed were still focusing primarily on their 'la Carta' project at the start of 2014 (enRed 2014).

<sup>443</sup> 'We were clear that we wanted to create a municipalist, *asambleario*, anticapitalist party, like the CUP' (P1 interview 6 February 2018). The CUP had, until 2012, chosen only to participate in municipal elections (rather than regional elections), making them municipalist in at least a literal sense; but they also organised under a highly anarchic model of *asamblearismo*, which was also an important part of their influence.

were left to pick up the pieces of Madrid's inchoate municipalist movement and move ahead.<sup>444</sup> By early 2014 the rump of AdA had encountered enRed and both groups realised they were each considering a municipal candidacy, and so, despite there not being 'much harmony' between them, people from both groups began weekly meetings in which to discuss their ideas further.<sup>445</sup> But where did this idea of 'municipalism' come from?

### 2.2.3 A Brief History of Municipalism

It is helpful to understand the antecedents to this 'new municipalism', in order to grasp the significance of the decision by the Spanish movements to adopt the municipalist moniker. There are two key points of crystallisation that serve as useful anchors for our attempt to define this diverse concept, and to isolate its meaning for the context of twenty-first century Madrid. First chronologically is Murray Bookchin's ideology of 'communalism' and its attendant constitutional form, 'libertarian municipalism', which was demonstrably influential on the development of Spanish municipalism. Second, the 2013-14 movement debates in Madrid and across Spain that, having developed a shared analysis of the political conjuncture (*el bloqueo institucional*), ultimately resulted in 'the municipalist wager' to contest municipal elections via participatory citizen platforms. Direct access to these debates is now limited; but there is one key source that summarises (an inevitably partial view of) those debates, and in turn served to popularise its particular view of municipalism across Spain: the 2014 book *La Apuesta Municipalista*, by the collective El Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid.<sup>446</sup> First, though, a brief history of an idea.

Although Bookchin is probably the most important theoretical common denominator of the 'new municipalism', he did not invent the term, and in fact the idea of municipalism has a long history. Early to mid-nineteenth century English usage refers mostly to *medieval municipalism*: municipal independence (and confederalisation), usually associated with values of liberty and democracy, posed in resistance to feudal centralisation. We see this understanding framed negatively in the conservative writing of Alfred H Louis, who contrasts 'vulgar municipalism' (which he associates with freedom of commerce) with England as 'central seat and metropolis of the

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<sup>444</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>445</sup> P3 was also discussing 15M-style electoral plans within a small group of friends and comrades from the end of 2012, illustrating that these debates were multiple and widespread at this time. As mentioned above, Podemos was also being constructed at this time; and even IU tried (and failed) to hone the energy of 15M into a new electoral project they called Suma, aimed at the 2014 European elections (P3 interview 8 June 2018). Indeed Partido X was the first attempt to express 15M in party form, especially channelling the technopolitical traditions fostered in social centres and then 15M; it was registered late in 2012 and was presented in early 2013 (on Spanish technopolitics, see for example Toret 2013, Monterde 2013, and Gutiérrez 2014). AdA and enRed were therefore far from being the only spaces where these electoral debates were occurring, but they were particularly influential on Ganemos Madrid specifically. For a rich ethnography of AdA, see García López 2020.

<sup>446</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014.

noblest empire the world ever saw', whose order is maintained by the virtues of aristocracy.<sup>447</sup> Whereas we see a similar fundamental understanding framed positively in Radical writing, of roughly the same period, by Antonio Gallenga.<sup>448</sup> Gallenga describes 'the spirit of ancient Roman municipalism' that 'lingered about the cities of Lyons, Geneva, Vienne, Grenoble; which not only resisted feudalism, but, as was the case in Italy, to a great extent subdued and absorbed it.'<sup>449</sup> He explicitly associates municipalism with 'democracy';<sup>450</sup> and elsewhere discusses 'the independent spirit of the Lombard municipalities which was slowly preparing a new era of Italian freedom', a model of 'municipalism' set in direct conflict 'against feudalism'.<sup>451</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw a tidal wave of European interest in *municipal socialism*, with a host of different expressions across the continent, but the most dominant model being the English Fabians' interest in municipalisation of services (known disparagingly as 'gas and water socialism').<sup>452</sup> Dogliani goes so far as to describe the gestation of an international 'municipalist movement' in the 1890s. The history here is, of course, immensely complex, but the most relevant aspect for our purposes is a rough dichotomy of positions on the question of municipal socialism that maps well onto Ahora Madrid's founding binary, Ganemos and Podemos. The coincidence in the late nineteenth century of the rise of 'mass people's parties' at the same time as 'the extension of voting rights at both national and local level' threw the municipal question into sharp relief.<sup>453</sup> Most socialists of the time saw the value of engaging in municipal elections, but ideological conceptions of the role of the municipality varied. Where socialists entered municipal government at this time, they had two primary overlapping concerns: to use the municipal government 'as experimental laboratories for the design of a future society,' while using 'municipal services as tools for meeting the immediate needs of the proletarian masses'.<sup>454</sup> These efforts led to the establishment of 'national and regional federations of town and provincial councillors in almost every country where [socialists] were contending for municipal control', forming one of the most concrete expressions of this early twentieth century 'municipalist movement'.<sup>455</sup> This rising tide of municipal socialist activity brought the question to the Fifth Congress of the Second International in Paris, 1900, where our dichotomy is expressed quite clearly. On the one hand, there were those who saw the municipality as *idiosyncratic*, as qualitatively distinct from the national scale. On the other,

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<sup>447</sup> Louis 1861: 372.

<sup>448</sup> 'Radical' here specifically meaning England's Benthamite 'Philosophical Radicals'. Gallenga, an Italian journalist and political refugee living in England for many years and publishing in English, was closely connected to this political tendency.

<sup>449</sup> Gallenga 1855: 174.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid*: 171.

<sup>451</sup> *Foreign Quarterly Review* 1842.

<sup>452</sup> (Re)municipalisation of services also happens to be an important policy platform of new municipalism in Spain.

<sup>453</sup> Dogliani 2002: 575.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*: 576.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid*: 577.



those who saw the municipality as more qualitatively homologous and strategically *subordinate* to the national state. Let us call these the *idiosyncratic* and *subordinate* positions on the municipal question. The subordinate model could also be thought of as the statist model (though the idiosyncratic model is not necessarily anti-statist, hence the choice of terminology). It was very much shaped by the ‘Marxist conviction that the primary goal was to take over the [national] state,’ and is typified in the ultimate resolution on the matter from the 1900 Paris Congress, which stated that “municipal socialism” should not be taken to mean a particular kind of socialism, but only the application of general socialist principles to a particular sphere of political activity’.<sup>456</sup> The same resolution, however, did also make what Dogliani describes as a concession ‘to supporters of a specifically “municipal” socialism’: ‘the encouragement to create public services which might become “embryos for a collectivist society”’.<sup>457</sup> This might suggest a powerful prefigurative vision for municipal socialism, but the compromise ultimately pleased no one and did not go far. The most radical socialists followed the orthodox Marxist thrust of the resolution: the subordination, or even the dismissal of the municipal in favour of the national, a position expressed in acerbic detail by Lenin, writing in 1907:

this is an *extremely opportunist* trend. Why did Engels, in his letters to Sorge describing this extreme intellectual opportunism of the English Fabians, emphasise the petty-bourgeois nature of their ‘municipalisation’ schemes? ... The fact that the bourgeoisie is in power is forgotten; so also is the fact that only in towns with a high percentage of *proletarian* population is it possible to obtain for the working people some crumbs of benefit from municipal government! But all this is by the way. The principal fallacy of the ‘municipal socialism’ idea ... lies in the following. The bourgeois intelligentsia of the West, like the English Fabians, elevate municipal socialism to a special ‘trend’ precisely because it dreams of social peace, of class conciliation, and seeks to divert public attention away from the fundamental questions of the economic system as a whole, and of the state *structure* as a whole, to minor questions of *local self-government*. In the sphere of questions in the first category, the class antagonisms stand out most sharply; that is the sphere which, as we have shown, affects the very foundations of the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Hence it is in that sphere that the philistine, reactionary utopia of bringing about socialism piecemeal is particularly hopeless. Attention is diverted to the sphere of minor local questions, being directed not to the question of the class rule of the bourgeoisie, nor to the question of the

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<sup>456</sup> Cited *ibid*: 578.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid*.

chief instruments of that rule, but to the question of distributing the *crumbs* thrown by the rich bourgeoisie for the '*needs of the population*'.<sup>458</sup>

Here Lenin explains the subordinate-idiosyncratic dichotomy quite clearly, if ungenerously. Derided by leading revolutionary figures, the idiosyncratic position came to be firmly associated with revisionist social democrats like Bernstein and, most especially, English Fabians (such as Beatrice and Sydney Webb).<sup>459</sup> This certainly was a kind of prefigurative strategy, with Bernstein seeing 'the municipality as a lever for social evolution until "all the demands of socialism have been met"'.<sup>460</sup> However, with the focus firmly on efficiently meeting basic needs more than creating 'embryos for a collectivist society', this was hardly a *radical* form of prefiguration; it would most closely fit with the *realist prefiguration* type described in Chapter 2.1.1, though a different sub-type to the version elaborated via Gramsci, that we might call *reformist prefiguration*. Some idiosyncratic thinkers associated municipalism with radical prefiguration, for example William Morris and E Belfort Bax, writing in 1886 about the grand implications of the Paris Commune's ultimate project of a great network of 'genuine federalization' among communes as 'an advanced municipalism'.<sup>461</sup> Yet the epithet 'advanced' hints towards the wider association that persisted between the word municipalism and a certain parochialism, as can also be seen in a 1905 letter to the English paper *The Socialist Standard*.<sup>462</sup>

This European tradition of municipal socialism would find particularly vibrant expression in Spain all the way up until the civil war.<sup>463</sup> Latin America would keep radical municipal politics alive within the Hispanosphere through the second half of the twentieth century, taking off especially in the 1980s and 1990s with inspiration from the experiences of 'Red Bologna' in the 1970s and the revival of municipal socialism by radical Labour Party councils in the UK during the 1980s.<sup>464</sup> However, Baiocchi argues that these Latin American experiences were not nearly as influential on the new municipalism in Europe as were local traditions, as well as thinkers like Bookchin.<sup>465</sup>

Bookchin's great innovation was to look at this municipalist history and see the potential for a marriage between the decentralised confederalism of medieval municipalism, the radical, collectivist, prefigurative potential of idiosyncratic municipal socialism, the direct democracy of

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<sup>458</sup> Lenin 1962: 358-59, emphasis Lenin's.

<sup>459</sup> Webb 1889: 56.

<sup>460</sup> Dogliani 2002: 578.

<sup>461</sup> Morris and Bax 1886.

<sup>462</sup> Allen 1905.

<sup>463</sup> See, for example, discussion of 1925's Congreso Nacional Municipalista in Dogliani (2002); as well as Rebollo (2006) and Tenas (2007).

<sup>464</sup> Baiocchi and Gies 2019: 313. On particular national experiences of radical municipal politics in Latin America in this period, see for example Ayo (2003) and Omonte Bartos (1995) on Bolivia; Brewer-Carias (2001) on Venezuela; Annino von Dusek (1995) on Mexico; and Pérez (2003) on the Dominican Republic.

<sup>465</sup> Baiocchi 2020.

anarchist self-management, as well as the value of engagement in local electoral politics (the same paradoxical strategy of using the state to build dual power favoured by parts of Ganemos Madrid). Bookchin's model of libertarian municipalism emerges from a complex history of philosophical and historical research as well as practical organising that, while interesting enough, does not demand more than the briefest of overviews here. His young Trotskyism quickly gave way to the passionate adoption of anarchism and the development of a rich theory of social ecology that itself is still profoundly influential today.<sup>466</sup> His anarchist critique of representation and hierarchy was grounded both in social ecology,<sup>467</sup> and in his historical research. Bookchin traced a grand 'legacy of freedom' (connecting, for example, Athenian democracy to medieval municipalism and the anarchists of the Spanish Civil War) in contrast to the 'legacy of domination' (from the supposed 'emergence of hierarchy' at the Neolithic advent of civilization,<sup>468</sup> to the modern state, by way of Roman republicanism, the archetype of representative government and what Bookchin derisively calls 'statecraft'). For Bookchin, representation divests 'personality of its most integral traits; it denies the very notion that the individual is *competent* to deal not only with the management of his or her personal life but with its most important context: the *social* context.'<sup>469</sup> The idea that the individual and the community are indeed capable of democratic self-management finds reinforcement throughout Bookchin's 'legacy of freedom'. Athenian democracy, for example, represents the practicability of 'the direct management of the *polis* by its citizenry in popular assemblies'.<sup>470</sup> Not an ideal 'model' to be replicated, but the beginning of 'an evolving tradition of institutional structures', the base of a grand genealogy of direct democracy.<sup>471</sup> While the contrast between Athenian and Roman democracy is hardly ground-breaking, its power lies in the subsequent genealogy rooted in that genetic dichotomy, which grounds Bookchin's general critique of representation in the practical *and historical* alternative of direct democracy, so often suppressed and so easily overlooked. This genealogy is crucial to Bookchin's argument that libertarian municipalist direct democracy is not only desirable but eminently *feasible*.<sup>472</sup> Thus when he studies medieval municipalism he does so not only focusing on local autonomy as a kind of radical constituent power, always in conflict with hierarchical, centralising statism; he also uses the analysis to draw out practical, constitutional

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<sup>466</sup> Bookchin 1962; 1965. His Institute for Social Ecology is still active (found online at [social-ecology.org](http://social-ecology.org)).

<sup>467</sup> As Bookchin sees 'the domination of nature' inextricably linked with 'the domination of human by human' (1986: 42).

<sup>468</sup> Bookchin 1982: 62-88.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid 129, emphasis Bookchin's.

<sup>470</sup> 'Which is not', as Bookchin so often takes pains to emphasise, 'to downplay the fact that Athenian democracy was scarred by patriarchy, slavery, class rule and the restriction of citizenship to males of putative Athenian birth' (Bookchin 1995b).

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Bookchin's final publications present the most encyclopaedic version of this democratic genealogy: volumes one through four of *The Third Revolution* (Bookchin 1996; 1998; 2004; 2005).

lessons: in the case of medieval municipalism, primarily the feasibility of democratic confederalism as decentralised alternative to the scalability of the centralised state.<sup>473</sup>

In this sense, though few (including Bookchin himself) tend to think of him as such, he is primarily for our purposes a constitutional theorist, a thinker of prefigurative constitutionality. Bookchin develops his ultimate prefigurative-constitutional project, libertarian municipalism, around the same time as he begins to reject contemporary US anarchism, presenting libertarian municipalism as the constitutional expression of a novel ideology he calls communalism.<sup>474</sup> Libertarian municipalism is inherently prefigurative in working ‘from latent or incipient democratic possibilities toward a radically new configuration of society itself.’<sup>475</sup> It seeks to implement a non-statist ecology of largely self-sufficient, directly democratic municipalities, which achieve coordination at scale through confederalisation, which would counteract ‘the tendency of decentralized communities to drift toward exclusivity and parochialism’ by facilitating decentralised interdependence through ‘a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies,’ and who ‘are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves.’<sup>476</sup> Two elements of Bookchin’s thinking around libertarian municipalism are particularly important for our purposes: his insistence on the need for organisation, leadership and (constitutional) law; and his innovative and paradoxical strategy for achieving full libertarian municipalism: participation in local elections, and using the resources of the municipal government to build dual power.

Bookchin’s approach to the need for a constitutional approach to organisation is worth quoting at some length:

A serious libertarian approach to leadership would indeed acknowledge the reality and crucial importance of leaders – all the more to establish the greatly needed formal structures and regulations that can effectively control and modify the activities of leaders and recall them when the membership decides their respect is being misused or when leadership becomes an exercise in the abuse of power. A libertarian municipalist movement should [have] a formal constitution and appropriate bylaws. Without a democratically formulated and approved institutional framework whose members and leaders can be held accountable, clearly articulated standards of responsibility cease to exist. Indeed, it is

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<sup>473</sup> Bookchin (1992: 123-174) discusses in this light, for example, the Hanseatic, First and Second Rhenish, Swabian and Lombard Leagues.

<sup>474</sup> Bookchin 1995b.

<sup>475</sup> Bookchin 2015: 85.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid: 75.

precisely when a membership is no longer responsible to its constitutional and regulatory provisions that authoritarianism develops and eventually leads to the movement's immolation. Freedom from authoritarianism can best be assured only by the clear, concise, and detailed allocation of power, not by pretensions that power and leadership are forms of 'rule' or by libertarian metaphors that conceal their reality. It has been precisely when an organization fails to articulate these regulatory details that the conditions emerge for its degeneration and decay. Ironically, no stratum has been more insistent in demanding its freedom to exercise its will against regulation than chiefs, monarchs, nobles, and the bourgeoisie.<sup>477</sup>

Bookchin continues the latter idea elsewhere:

For centuries, oppressed peoples demanded written founding constitutional provisions to protect them from the arbitrary oppression of the nobility. With the emergence of a libertarian communist society, this problem does not disappear. For us, I believe, the question can never be whether law and constitutions are inherently anti-anarchistic, but whether they are rational, mutable, secular, and restrictive only in the sense that they prohibit the abuse of power.<sup>478</sup>

This is a powerful defence of the necessity of constitutionalisation. My own route to the same conclusion came rather through Foucault's lucid analysis of the multiple dimensions of power, but it produced the same realisation that an anarchic politics that positions itself against power as such (including Holloway's theory of anti-power) is simply condemning itself to have only limited capacity to both conceive of and organisationally account for the actual 'multiplicity of force relations'.<sup>479</sup> Politics must be constituted. To be democratic, radical democracy must do so consciously and deliberately and avoid the 'tyranny of structurelessness'.<sup>480</sup>

The idea that anarchists might participate in elections enters Bookchin's thinking via the mutual influence between Bookchin and Dutch anarchist Roel van Duijn. Van Duijn's anarcho-surrealist Provo movement concocted a range of spectacular interventions in Amsterdam in the 1960s.<sup>481</sup> This culminated in the election of a Provo activist to municipal government, an unexpected repercussion of what was intended to be another surreal 'happening'. Dismayed at their own success, the Provos staged their own funeral in May 1967 and disbanded. Between the demise of the

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid: 26-27.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid: 62.

<sup>479</sup> Foucault 1978: 92.

<sup>480</sup> Freeman 1972-73.

<sup>481</sup> Ranging from surreal, situationist 'happenings' to the proposal of a full set of municipal policies (some surreal, some utterly practical, even prescient), known as the White Plans. See de Jong 1971; Gallagher 2015; Britton 2017.

Provos and the formation of his next group, the Kabouters, van Duijn read Bookchin's *Crisis in Our Cities*,<sup>482</sup> which inspired him to set his Kabouter movement to work on a plan for a 'Kabouter city' of popular neighbourhood councils federated to a municipal citizen assembly that would 'solve local problems of housing, social problems, and also ecological problems.'<sup>483</sup> Perhaps most innovative of all, for an anarchist, was that the central plank of this strategy was to stand in local elections and to use the power and resources of municipal government to develop these neighbourhood councils. The profound influence of this experiment on Bookchin's thinking is demonstrated in a 1979 interview,<sup>484</sup> but can be inferred earlier from the 1972 editorial 'Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations', which Bookchin regularly points to as not only his first proper statement on libertarian municipalism (if not yet under that name), but also his first advocacy for anarchist engagement in municipal elections. This paradoxical form of dual power strategy seeks to win municipal elections and use that institutional power to 'create legislatively potent neighborhood assemblies.' These assemblies should make 'every effort to delegitimize and depose the statist organs that currently control their villages, towns, or cities and hereafter act as the real engines in the exercise of power':

Once a number of municipalities are democratized along Communalist lines, they would methodically confederate into municipal leagues and challenge the role of the nation-state and, through popular assemblies and confederal councils, try to acquire control over economic and political life.<sup>485</sup>

Bookchin offers a rich constitutional vision for the realisation of his libertarian and ecological principles; but he does not appreciate, let alone provide tools for grappling with, the rich philosophical difficulties presented by prefiguration (difficulties that Negri is much more able to grasp), nor the exponentially greater complexity that arises from the introduction of electoralism into the municipalist strategy, nor the intricate interactions that arise within the electoral sphere between prefiguration and hegemony.

*La Apuesta Municipalista* (The Municipalist Wager) shares Bookchin's historical analysis rooted in Athenian democracy,<sup>486</sup> the experiences of the American and French revolutions, the direct democracy of medieval guilds, municipalities and communes,<sup>487</sup> as well as the Dutch Provo and Kabouter movements. *La Apuesta* adds to the history of municipalism a more detailed study of nineteenth and twentieth century Spain, from the First Spanish Republic, to the Spanish

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<sup>482</sup> Bookchin 1965. Biehl (2015: 178) claims it is cited in Duijn (1969).

<sup>483</sup> Tasman cited by Biehl (2015: 178).

<sup>484</sup> Riggerbach 1979.

<sup>485</sup> Bookchin 2015: 25.

<sup>486</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 17.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

‘neighbourhood movement’ of the 1970s (especially in Madrid),<sup>488</sup> popular and indigenous struggles in Latin America, the Latin American movement-parties and constituent processes that emerged from those popular struggles, the various European Green Parties as important attempts ‘to combine social movement and political representation,’<sup>489</sup> and most recently the Candidaturas de Unitat Popular en Catalunya (CUP).<sup>490</sup> *La Apuesta* also shares a critique of representation, seen as a ‘principle of limited democracy,’<sup>491</sup> and a constant valorisation of direct democracy. In short, *La Apuesta* is clearly deeply Bookchinian, even if it only discusses Bookchin explicitly for two pages.<sup>492</sup>

*La Apuesta* identifies a key challenge for municipalism in ‘the apparent incompatibility between local, grassroots movement processes, and more organised structures at the general political level, that require certain centralised functions of coordination.’<sup>493</sup> While European examples like the green parties have seen ‘the movement-party tension break in favour of the political institution’,<sup>494</sup> *La Apuesta* looks more optimistically to Latin America for inspiration. There, in an analysis similar to Hardt and Negri’s,<sup>495</sup> the Observatorio sees in examples such as the Bolivian Water Wars, the Argentinian Piqueteros, the Brazilian Movimiento Sin Tierra, and the Zapatistas, a potential model for ‘the articulation between autonomy and dependency with respect to power, between the local and the global, or between grassroots democracy and institutional change.’<sup>496</sup> In seeking to apply such principles and lessons to Spain, the municipalist wager is nothing less ‘than a call for democratic revolution.’<sup>497</sup> It must first ‘tackle the strategic dimension [and] the problem of organisation,’ producing something ‘very different to the conventional political party’; secondly, develop ‘a rebellious and disobedient institutional and political model’ that disrupts the ‘political alliances that allow the continual regeneration of the regime’; and thirdly, commit to ‘an exercise of political imagination able to be articulated through institutional disobedience and democratisation’, reflecting the demands of 15M.<sup>498</sup>

One key lesson from history is that of method: the new municipalism must be more movement than party, and be ‘democratically controlled by the citizens.’<sup>499</sup> The second key lesson is the need for transparency. Municipalism should lead by example, with ‘maximum transparency of

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid: 115-120.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid: 54.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid: 18.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid: 64-65.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid: 68.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid: 68.

<sup>495</sup> Hardt and Negri 2012: 70-73.

<sup>496</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 69.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid: 70.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid: 70-71.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid: 143-44.

finances and decisions, ... control of profligacy, reduction of representatives' salaries, [and] the direct decision of the citizens'. This 'new style of government' would introduce 'amateurism' as 'constitutive element of democratic politics,' reducing the role of experts to only what is 'strictly necessary.'<sup>500</sup> *La Apuesta* also displays great foresight of the challenges that await, identifying the institutional inertia of the city council as a foreseeable 'limit to local democracy'. Both the Spanish economy and political system are in crisis. Municipalities are laden with debt. Services are contracted out inefficiently, and sometimes corruptly, to private businesses. Corruption and inefficiency are in many cases baked into the legal and regulatory system. Municipalism thus requires a total institutional transformation.<sup>501</sup> *La Apuesta* also avoids romanticising the local.<sup>502</sup> Municipal democracy is not as simple as identifying the municipality as the most local scale, therefore the basic unit of community, and therefore a site of easy harmony and democratic cooperation. The municipality itself is subject to 'uneven development', is unequal and diverse, and today increasingly 'fragmented and atomised'. Yet it is also increasingly mobile and interconnected, blurring the hard boundaries between neighbourhoods and districts. Communities of interest and identity are largely replacing territorial communities. Therefore, 'the municipalist wager will have to be conceived as a project of the construction of political communities.'<sup>503</sup> A plurality of municipalist communities is also crucial: municipalism depends on becoming a broad '(counter)institutional movement' able to federate 'municipalist experiences in a political and institutional subject with offensive capacity' to collectively push for things like 'negotiation of debt, strengthening of municipal autonomy, recovery of local democracy.'<sup>504</sup> Municipalism will 'require intermunicipal alliances, ... collaboration with other institutional government frameworks,' as well as a broad municipalist social movement if it is to survive.<sup>505</sup> As the Observatorio summarises: 'Federalism or death.'<sup>506</sup> This understanding of federalism has powerfully Bookchinian overtones in its core 'principle of subsidiarity': 'that administrative levels above the municipality are subordinate to the decision of those municipalities, such that the line of command ... is constructed from below, not from above.'<sup>507</sup> More concrete demands of the new municipalism include a municipal debt audit, remunicipalisation,<sup>508</sup> 'strict control of elected representatives,'<sup>509</sup> mechanisms of direct citizen

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid: 144.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid: 146-47.

<sup>502</sup> Or as Russell (2019) puts it in his analysis of the new municipalism, avoiding the 'local trap'.

<sup>503</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 147-49

<sup>504</sup> Ibid: 159.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid: 150-54.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid: 159.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid: 160.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid: 156-57.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid: 158.



decision-making and meaningful participation with the power of mandate,<sup>510</sup> and a ‘democratic grassroots municipal economy’ that protects and expands the enjoyment of ‘public-common goods’ through more ‘municipal or cooperative management’ of the commons as ‘inalienable and non-transferable’.<sup>511</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Plenary: Assembling the Confluence

Ganemos Madrid is a participatory citizen initiative of people, collectives, parties and movements, built from below, horizontal and *asambleario*. There will be no agreement of quotas between parties, no back-room deals. It is not a sum of parts, but a process of confluence.<sup>512</sup>

The municipal lists cannot define themselves as mere political parties; they place the classic concept of party in crisis. ... The confluence, in turn, does not constitute itself as a new party that gobbles up everything prior, but rather is born like a common shelter in which the old party discipline cannot impose itself.<sup>513</sup>

As highlighted by Ganemos itself, and by Ahora Madrid councillor Montserrat Galcerán, the logic of confluence was a crucial starting point for the constitution of municipalism in Madrid.<sup>514</sup> The earlier meetings organised by enRed, Alternativas desde Abajo, and others, resulted in a series of assemblies under the name Municipalia. The first was held on 24 May 2014, hosting ‘some 60 people’, attending ‘as individuals’ but hailing from a wide range of organisations.<sup>515</sup> The fundamental aim, as conceived by the organisers, was summarised online in staunchly radical terms:

Beyond the simple aim of renovating the existing system of representation, the ‘storming of the institutions’ that we are considering would be directed at deepening the crisis of representation that the 15M movement has opened, in terms of constituent and democratic rupture.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid: 158.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid: 161.

<sup>512</sup> Ganemos Madrid undated.

<sup>513</sup> Galcerán 2016b.

<sup>514</sup> And throughout Spain as well (Rubio-Pueyo 2017).

<sup>515</sup> ‘People from different assemblies (Tetuán, Moncloa, Malasaña, Lavapiés, Móstoles, Alcorcón y Ciempozuelos) and collectives (feminists, ecologists, social economy, housing, Alternativas desde Abajo, enRed y Movimiento por la Democracia, Traficantes de Sueños, Observatorio Metropolitano, Oficina Precaria, Auditoría Ciudadana de la Deuda, Tabacalera, Patio Maravillas, some Podemos circles...), as well as some already constituted municipal and citizen candidatures (like Aúpa Alcorcón and Unión Vecinal Asamblearia de Móstoles)’ (Municipalia 2014).

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

This fidelity to the spirit of 15M was much more than mere rhetoric. In contrast, for example, to 2012's Suma project, whereby IU tried and failed to harness that spirit for a new electoral project,<sup>517</sup> and even in contrast to (P3's perception of) AdA, which P3 had briefly attended but felt was too rigidly controlled by Anticapitalistas, Municipalia felt more authentically true to the spirit of 15M, more genuinely open to participation, more thoroughly constituent: 'we realised that we could participate, that we could help define this process.'<sup>518</sup> In P3's case, the attraction was not the municipal politics; it was precisely the logic of confluence that meant this was the branch of the wider *asalto institucional* to which they would now dedicate themselves.<sup>519</sup> The logic of confluence was fundamental to translating the transversal spirit of 15M into an electoral project. It is a multitudinous logic, rather than the more dialectical logics of coalition and popular unity. It means participation as individuals, not as representatives of exogenous organisations. This is the foundation of *15Mayista asamblearismo* as constituent assembly of citizens, which became the foundation of *la nueva política* (the new politics): not the old politics of parties but a politics of 'citizen platforms' defined first and foremost by their diversity and horizontality, a multitudinous political ontology of singularities that tries to sift out the ontological lumps of parties, factions and hegemony.<sup>520</sup> For others, like P6, the local scale is inseparable from the foundational democratic impulse that grounds the municipalist wager, the logic of confluence, and the importance of the commons. Charting the trajectory of their involvement in the Observatorio Metropolitano collective, there was an indelible link between *La Apuesta Municipalista* and their earlier work on the city and the commons:<sup>521</sup>

We said the local scale is the where you actually could start thinking about developing the government [and] these ideas of the commons. And this, you don't do it on a national scale. ... there are fundamental characteristics of the state that have to be challenged, and it's very difficult to challenge an institutional frame from within that institutional frame. So the same way that we say in municipalism that we need social movements [to] help us push forward

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<sup>517</sup> P3 describes how Suma 'was a classic IU initiative. ... IU was a really stagnant organisation, incapable of taking on the new scenario; and that was demonstrated in Suma. ... You realized that half of the assembly were organisations parallel to IU or IU satellites. You know, they're there filling up the space and making a racket, to make it look like there was social support for the candidacy. Incorporate one or two outsiders and that's it. ... In the end, when you see what's going on, you say "no!".' P3 also speaks of Suma as 'Izquierda Unida up to its usual bullshit', which speaks particularly well to how they were widely perceived among the 15Mayista movements (P3 interview 8 June 2018).

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> 'It was not due to a special preoccupation with the local' (ibid).

<sup>520</sup> Note that even Podemos was initially presented as a citizen platform. Gutiérrez (2015) further conceives of the logic of confluence as a network logic, and specifically a cooperative network logic, in contrast to the competitive network logic of the old politics.

<sup>521</sup> Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2007; 2009; 2011.

the structural changes that municipalism wants to do in the local scale – you need the local scale to push the national, ... to transform the structures of the national state.<sup>522</sup>

The Municipalia assemblies led to the (far bigger) #GanarMadrid assembly on 28 June. By early July the name had changed to Ganemos Madrid and several working groups had begun to hold regular meetings. The name was changed to synchronise with Guanyem Barcelona which had been officially presentation on 26 June.<sup>523</sup> The Ganemos name change appears to have happened shortly after the 28 June Municipalia assembly.<sup>524</sup> Below is a map of Ahora Madrid’s process of confluence, beginning with Municipalia and ending with the primary elections, which will help to guide our way from here (though it is not exhaustive).



Figure 3, map of the confluence from Municipalia to Ahora Madrid primaries, drawn up by members of the Toma Madrid primary list.<sup>525</sup>

Interview data converges on the perception of Municipalia and early Ganemos as highly successful spaces of confluence, incorporating a vast range of activists, both affiliated and unaffiliated, including members of IU, Podemos, Equo and more, participating as individuals, without external groups seen to be dominating the process. P1 distinguishes this early, most authentically *asambleario* phase of Ganemos from a second phase, after Ganemos’ public presentation on 4

<sup>522</sup> P6 interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>523</sup> Guanyem Barcelona is Catalan for ‘Let’s Win Barcelona’. They would later change their name to Barcelona en Comú.

<sup>524</sup> P1 (interview 6 February 2018) did not recall it ever being agreed at an assembly, believing it to be among the first major examples of important decisions being made outside of assemblies by informal centres of leadership.

<sup>525</sup> <<https://web.archive.org/web/20161003161740/https://tomamadrid.wordpress.com/2015/03/25/quien-es-quien-en-ahora-madrid>> accessed 21 May 2021.

November 2014 and lasting until January 2015's electoral agreement with Podemos to form Ahora Madrid, during which 'Ganemos becomes an important political actor,' but internally it is now 'a highly conflictive political space'.<sup>526</sup> Ganemos evolved and mutated rapidly – it had to – but accumulating enough political power to be taken seriously as a political actor (especially by Podemos, as it became ever clearer that their official support, in whatever form, would be essential) came at the cost of some of its *15Mayista* principles: Ganemos' 'grassroots democracy' was increasingly subordinated to more 'pragmatic' concerns over the 'articulation of the candidature.'<sup>527</sup> One of the clearest expressions of mutation is that of the concept of confluence. While the above multitudinous conception emerges very clearly as the original formulation, the vast majority of uses of the words confluence or *confluencia* in interview data refer to the negotiations between Ganemos and Podemos. This makes perfect sense in terms of the original idea: Ganemos was the space of confluence, and Podemos would be invited to join, as individuals, if with official support from the party leadership. But the final negotiations had little in common with the multitudinous logic of confluence. They looked much more like the formation of a traditional coalition, a project of popular unity, which indeed ended up forming part of the full title of Ahora Madrid's *Marco Común*: 'Common Framework of Understanding and Roadmap for the Promotion of a Popular Unity Citizen Candidature in the City of Madrid.'<sup>528</sup> In between these two poles – the multitudinous logic of confluence of early Ganemos, and the binary negotiations of Ahora Madrid – lies a gradual slippage, in which the necessity of support from established organisations (like Podemos, IU, Equo, etc) became an increasingly dominant concern, and so the logic of a confluence of individuals steadily mutated into the logic of a coalition of forces.<sup>529</sup> Ultimately, for P1 at least, Ganemos post-*Marco Común* 'was broken as a space of cooperation, unity and alliance.'<sup>530</sup> This mutation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, we return to the definition of early Ganemos' *asambleario* prefigurative constitutionality.

Ganemos progressed through its first two months via thematic working groups: Municipalist Movement; Program and Contents; Tools and Methodology; and Candidacies. In late August a new Coordinator group was created (the Spanish name will be used: *Coordinadora*); in September Communications and Feminisms, and in October Culture and Digital Participation groups were

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<sup>526</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015.

<sup>529</sup> A key site of this process of mutation from a logic of confluence to a logic of coalition was the debate within the Candidatures Working Group over the primary elections. An early idea was that there would be no lists, only individual candidates – an electoral system that would seem to much better express the logic of confluence, despite clearly being rather unwieldy. This idea was soon dropped, however, in no small part because lists seemed essential, in P3's memory at least, to encouraging and maintaining the involvement of important parties like Podemos, IU and Equo (P3 interview 8 June 2018).

<sup>530</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

added.<sup>531</sup> A large team of spokespeople was elected. The quarterly plenary assemblies were the supreme decision-making spaces, the working groups worked autonomously, within the scope of plenary agreements, on proposals to bring to the plenaries. The *Coordinadora's* weekly meetings were, in theory, responsible for nothing more than coordination, rather than holding any special executive decision-making power. In practice, the *Coordinadora* held a lot of power, and the outcomes of the plenaries were at times significantly shaped by organisers.<sup>532</sup> The plenary assembly of 27 September 2014 produced three agreements of varying constitutional significance: the Ganemos manifesto,<sup>533</sup> and two images, a chronogram establishing the timeline of work until the elections (below figure 4), and a more thoroughly constitutional image, an organigram that formalised the various organisational organs and their relationships (below figure 5).

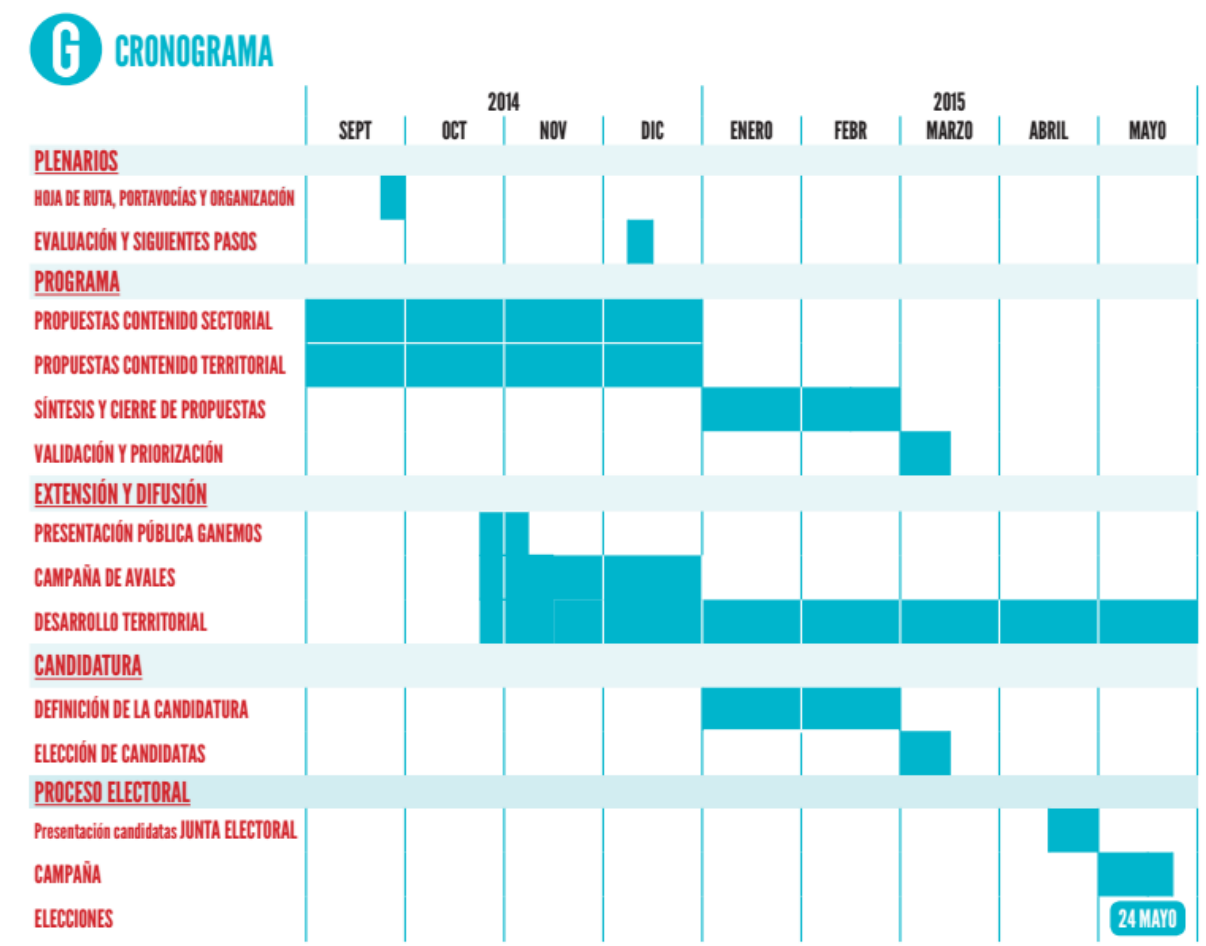


Figure 4, chronogram agreed at Ganemos Madrid plenary 27 September 2014.<sup>534</sup>

<sup>531</sup> There was also a Finance group, though it did not post public minutes so it is difficult to pinpoint when it started.

<sup>532</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>533</sup> Ganemos Madrid 1 October 2014 [27 September 2014]. Not in the sense of a policy manifesto, but of a self-defining political declaration. The cited document was present on Ganemos' website from its agreement in 2014 until the end of life of the website.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

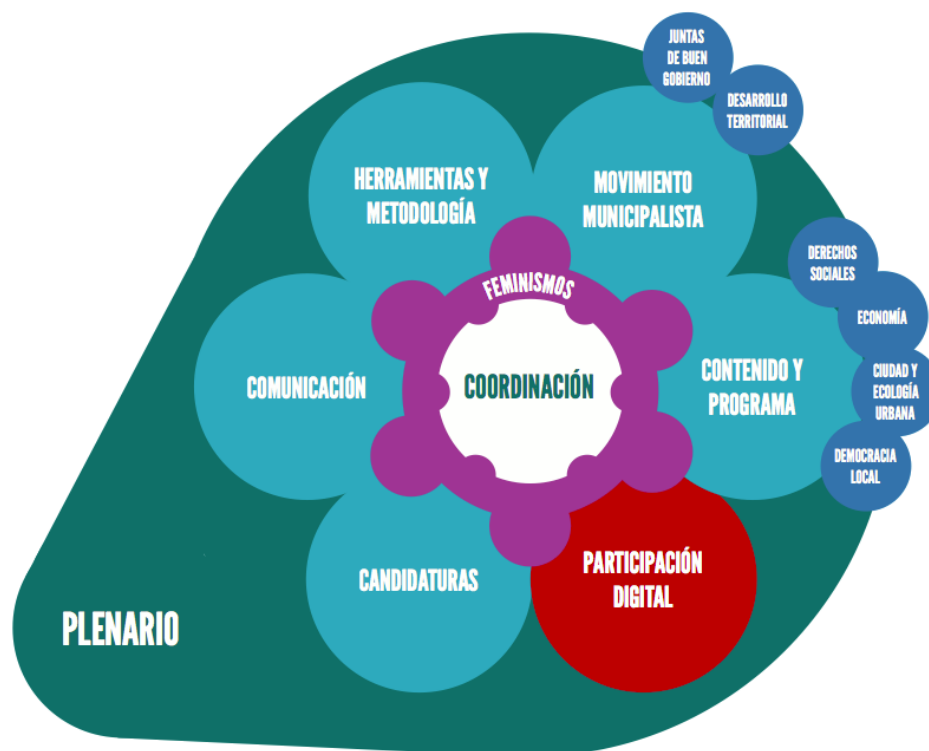


Figure 5, organigram agreed at Ganemos Madrid plenary 27 September 2014.<sup>535</sup>

It was not until the plenary of 20 December 2014 that a (relatively) finalised assembly procedure was agreed, in the form of the document drafted by the Tools and Methodology Working Group, the ‘Protocol of Dynamisation and Decision-making in Ganemos Madrid’.<sup>536</sup> The December Protocol, while being Ganemos’ most developed procedural-constitutional document, is not in fact our primary concern, for two reasons. First, I was repeatedly told that by the time this document was agreed it was already becoming obsolete, surpassed by the rapidly changing political situation and the priorities it demanded (primarily the ‘confluence’ with Podemos). No research participants placed any great significance on the December Protocol. Second, while the rich detail of its provisions is impressive and fascinating on its own terms, the thesis’ constitutional-theoretical approach is interested in constitutional mechanisms primarily insofar as they support the extrapolation of constitutional *principles*. In the case of Ganemos, little extrapolation is necessary as the primary task of the working groups during the first months of Ganemos was precisely the production (in the working groups) and ratification (at the plenary) of core guiding principles. Our primary moment of constitutional crystallisation is therefore the plenary of 26 July 2014, which

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Ganemos Madrid 20 December 2014. Hereafter the ‘December Protocol’.

agreed the constitutional principles proposed by the following working groups: Municipalist Movement, Tools and Methodology and Candidatures.<sup>537</sup>

### *Embedding Feminisms*

First a word on feminism, and Ganemos' Feminisms Working Group. This group developed slightly slower than the others, not presenting its founding document until September 2014. Its document emphasises the group's diversity and inclusivity (as also expressed in the group's titular plurality), and commits to a new model of the city based on accessibility, 'equality, solidarity, cooperation and fair treatment.'<sup>538</sup> It is a thoroughly transversal document, in something like the Guattarian sense, cutting a communicative line of feminist intervention across the organisational and policy concerns of the entire project.<sup>539</sup> Constitutionally, then, the Feminisms Working Group asserts one core, fundamental principle: feminism itself, or rather feminisms themselves, which should infuse every one of Ganemos' tasks, strategies and policies. This is clearly visualised in the September organigram (above figure 5) where *Feminismos* percolates throughout the organisational matrix. The closest thing to a concrete constitutional mechanism proposed here concerns a call for 'collective leaderships', which should be expressed in the multitudinous diffusion of leadership through a large number of elected spokespersons:

We are committed to collective leaderships that value different knowledges and experiences, that give voice to all those feminisms that make up Ganemos Feminismos. ... The position of spokesperson is a form of citizen empowerment: it gives a voice to those traditionally denied one in public space. ... The spokespersons must be a reflection of this new way of positioning ourselves in the public sphere.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Choosing the 26 July plenary does pose a methodological hurdle: it is, ironically, one of very few Ganemos meetings for which minutes are not available. This hurdle can be overcome, however. The working group documents are available, having been published before the plenary; but were they agreed unamended? It seems so, yes; or at least largely so. By October 2014, each working group had its own page on the Ganemos website. The pages for Candidatures, Tools and Methodology, Municipalist Movement and Programme and Contents all link to their 'introductory document', implying that document to have some constitutional validity; and those links all lead to the original documents presented to the plenary. So it seems the texts were agreed without any or without any significant amendments. Even if some unknown amendments were agreed (and then for some reason ignored when the documents were linked on the working group web pages), these texts can still be read as expressing the early constitutional visions of the working groups, which were themselves open to anyone, expressing their own constituent power. Note that the Programme and Contents working groups also produced a document at this time (Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014b). It sought to apply Ganemos' *asambleario* principles to the task of building a participatory electoral programme, and it set out some 'general lines' of issues that demand policy development. It does not require detailed discussion here. The working group documents agreed at the July plenary will be referred to as the 'July documents'.

<sup>538</sup> Ganemos Madrid 29 September 2014.

<sup>539</sup> The transversality of feminism within Ganemos is stated explicitly a number of times, e.g. in the Tools and Methodology July document: 'gender as transversal element. ... we consider the issue of gender to be transversal' (Ganemos Madrid 24 July 2014); and in minutes of the first meeting of the Coordinadora, which twice describes the Feminisms Working Group as 'the transversal gender group' (Ganemos Madrid 29 August 2014 [27 August 2014]).

<sup>540</sup> Ganemos Madrid 29 September 2014.

### *Fostering Movement*

The July document of the Municipalist Movement Working Group (MMWG) presents a range of principles to guide Ganemos' role inside the institutions as a dispositif of a wider municipalist movement, seeking to maintain contiguity and prevent the separation of movement and institution that in fact came to be much bemoaned after Ahora Madrid's victory. It defines the *asalto institucional* as not about the 'pure taking of power' but as 'a way to remove power from the institutions and return it to the movements'.<sup>541</sup> The key overarching principle for storming the institutions is encapsulated in the document's title: 'Take the City, Lead by Obeying (and Disobeying)'. This is of course inspired by the famous Zapatista slogan (lead by obeying), but adapted to the circumstance of entering existing institutions of constituted power rather than (solely) creating completely new, completely autonomous institutions (and so there is much overlap between these movement principles and the principles of representation produced by the Candidatures working group, which follow below). To 'take the city' means to confront the challenge of 'democratically articulating concrete mechanisms of decision-making' that tie representatives in the institutions to the will of the city's citizens. Taking the *city* means going beyond merely taking the *institutions*, ensuring that the movement's representatives 'lead by obeying (and disobeying)'. This is defined as 'the chain of responsibilities to which any representative must be tied', such that they respond to and maintain constant dialogue with 'citizen power', both within the existing institutional frameworks and, if necessary, through 'processes of institutional disobedience when regulations, interests and hierarchies of power collide with the democratising mandate of the movements'.<sup>542</sup>

The document imagines the taking of the city as the construction of 'a new institutional architecture' of participation and direct democracy. Concretely:

new democratic institutions [with] the capacity to elevate policy proposals in the form of a mandate, and ... the capacity to self-manage parcels of public life (Committees and offices of participation, *Juntas de buen gobierno*,<sup>543</sup> citizen assemblies, would be some useful ideas).<sup>544</sup>

The new institutions of this new architecture may or may not exist as public institutions; if not, they will 'have at least a dual power'. An interesting turn of phrase, implying that the creation of autonomous institutions of dual power may have been seen as somehow easier than the opening up of public institutions themselves to citizen participation and mandatory control. The reality would be

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<sup>541</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Literally 'good government councils', another Zapatista invention.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.



the reverse. Dual power comes to form a core part of the Ganemos strategy, also in the foreground of the Organisation document agreed in 2016 and present on the Ganemos website until the end.<sup>545</sup> The *juntas de buen gobierno* were long proposed, but never implemented. However a great deal of citizen participation has been injected into the municipal state via the *Foros Locales* and the *Decide Madrid* participatory budgeting platform, and to a lesser degree through the dynamisation of the *vocalías vecinales* (neighbourhood spokescouncils). *Decide Madrid* even expresses the Ganemos desire to ‘elevate policy proposals in the form of a mandate’, if within strict limits. What was never realised was the MMWG’s early vision for ‘the capacity to self-manage parcels of public life’ through fully or semi-autonomous institutions that would constitute a form of dual power and a broader citizen-led ‘constituent process from below’.

The MMWG document ends with a set of principles for fostering municipalism as a living, vibrant, organic and embedded movement, such that ‘multiple forms of connection between the citizenry and the institutions’ can blossom and fruit:

*No supplantation*: to not set in motion any initiative that others are already developing in the territory. Cooperate with them. *Confluence*: not to try to generate a new structure, but to favour the coordination and collaboration of what already exists. *Promotion*: favour the development of tools and spaces of cooperation in those places where they do not already exist. *Sustainability*: to think mechanisms of participation such that they are sustainable, not only for activists, but for the citizenry in general. *Inclusivity*: that the initiatives launched seek always the participation of the citizenry in general and not only the internal composition of the movement. *Co-organisation*: not to understand the citizenry as a space for consultation or validation, but to favour tools that allow those who wish to self-organise, participate and take binding decisions.<sup>546</sup>

Broadly this implies an anti-vanguardist, multitudinous logic. Particularly crucial are the pluralist principles of inclusivity and confluence that permeate everywhere in Ganemos politics. *Horizontalising Representation*

The Candidatures Working Group (CWG) was responsible for developing the primary elections procedure, drafting the Code of Ethics to which candidates would have to adhere, and, in this early

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<sup>545</sup> ‘Promoting democratic municipalism means going beyond institutional initiatives, ... requiring strong, democratic, horizontal, inclusive and participatory territorial structures, which can ensure the dual power of which we spoke in the constitution of Ganemos Madrid: the first would be the ability to raise policy proposals in the form of a mandate, and second the ability to self-manage parcels of public life’ (Ganemos Madrid 23 January 2016). Note mention of ‘the constitution of Ganemos Madrid’ – no one I spoke to knew what exactly this refers to! A sign of how constantly and rapidly the political situation was changing, with Ganemos’ constitutional architecture always struggling (and often failing) to keep up, as was the case with the December Protocol.

<sup>546</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

phase especially, developing broader principles that would express a *15Mayista* horizontalisation of democratic representation, diluting as much as possible the representative logic of the general will. Here in the document presented to the 26 July plenary this appears in much more subtle forms than the more radically delegative principle ‘take the city, lead by obeying (and disobeying)’, presenting principles that might more subtly serve to weaken representative power and redistribute it to the movement.<sup>547</sup>

*Limited terms* is such a principle, fundamental to even mainstream liberal concerns for limiting the power of representatives. *Transparency*, too, is foregrounded as central to citizen-led municipal governance; another basic prerequisite for a functioning democracy, but one poorly adhered to by Spain’s political establishment.<sup>548</sup> The principle of *gender parity* expresses the transversal infusion of feminism throughout the project. The principle that comes closest to expressing some measure of constituent power is that of *recall*:

Candidates will agree to be recallable. This may be exercised automatically where there is a loss of confidence or through a more precise procedure. The criteria and the protocol will be defined as a means of democratic control even when it has no legal effects.<sup>549</sup>

Recall of representatives (or delegates) is fundamental to any scalable organisation that seeks to express even a modicum of constituent power. The principle of recall was indeed further developed and refined, and would form part of Ahora Madrid’s *Marco Común*, although it would never be used – indeed, in the context of Ahora Madrid’s weak and ambiguous constitution it probably could never have been used. Clearly the working group was aware of the constitutional awkwardness of such a principle that could be defined within the movement but could not, unless its correlative was formally legislated through the city council, have any ‘legal effects’ on representatives that election had endowed with the legal powers of councillor or mayor. This highlights the profound difficulty of (radically) democratising state institutions. A councillor or mayor recalled by their municipalist platform would be under no legal obligation to step down. They could stay in power if they were willing to simply endure the assault on their public image of being disowned by their movement/party. Even if they did step down, Ganemos or Ahora Madrid could not simply replace them with someone of their choosing. The institutional procedure would need to be followed, a by-election would be held, an extreme electoral risk to take for the sake of one’s democratic principles.

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<sup>547</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014c.

<sup>548</sup> Concretely: ‘all candidates will have to present a declaration of property, income and assets, including participation in businesses or financial companies’ (ibid).

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, a risk that no one in Ahora Madrid would take, no matter how dissatisfied with the movement-party's leadership.

The Candidatures Working Group also sets out in its July document some guiding principles for the forthcoming primary elections, though ultimately of course the primaries were not for Ganemos but for Ahora Madrid, and would be regulated by the *Marco Común* and the later Primary Regulations.<sup>550</sup> The core Ganemos principles for a horizontalised electoral process, while not explicitly named as such here, can be extrapolated as *inclusivity, pluralism and consensus*. *Inclusivity* appears in the demand for the primaries to be as open as possible, only limited by residence in Madrid and some level of identifiability to avoid fraud. To ensure *pluralism* through proportionality, the voting system should be 'multiple and preferential', such that 'no organised majority can monopolise all positions of the list'. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, the Dowdall voting system was the ultimate choice, a radically proportional system that also could be said to express the principle of *consensus* in that it tends to select candidates with the broadest appeal (the least disliked) rather than guaranteeing the selection of (potentially polarising) candidates with a majority of first preference votes. Use of the Dowdall system in the primary elections was consistently among the proudest achievements of Ganemos activists.<sup>551</sup>

### *Constituting the Assembly*

From the Tools and Methodology Working Group (TMWG) comes Ganemos' procedural constitution, emerging piece by piece from its 'Opening Text',<sup>552</sup> to the document presented to the 26 July plenary,<sup>553</sup> which is the primary focus here, to the December Protocol,<sup>554</sup> which along with some other documents here and there will be referred to where it helpfully elaborates in greater detail ideas that are only vaguely presented in the July document. Of relatively minor importance for present purposes are the principles of *transparency*, again (here in terms of the need to publish minutes of internal plenary and working group meetings); *solidarity*, an interesting idea for a constitutional principle, that appears now and again in Ganemos documents but is never highly developed; and 'financial and economic *autonomy*', a necessary consequence of the movement critique of a corrupt establishment, and an important aspect of the wider autonomism of Ganemos politics, but not one that requires further exploration here.

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<sup>550</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015; Ahora Madrid 9 March 2015a.

<sup>551</sup> For example, a public eulogy to Dowdall appeared in a 2017 open letter, signed by a host of municipalist 'councillors, activists, militants and sympathisers', calling for 'the birth of Ahora Madrid' at an open assembly early the following year (implying, of course, that what had been created by 2015's Marco Común was not yet really alive): 'we held primaries open to the citizenry, using a method that respects and includes minorities, that has shown the greatest capacity to accommodate the diversity we represent, the Dowdall system' (Various Authors 2017).

<sup>552</sup> Ganemos Madrid 6 July 2014.

<sup>553</sup> Ganemos Madrid 24 July 2014.

<sup>554</sup> Ganemos Madrid 20 December 2014.

The core procedural-constitutional principles of the July document fall under the heading ‘Democracy in a horizontal and *asambleario* context.’ The key question here is whether this understanding of horizontal assembly democracy confronts us with a form of *sovereignty of the plenary*, or something else, something more thoroughly multitudinous. We will return to this question at the end of the section. First, *consensus* as guiding principle for the function of the assembly (whether the plenary assembly or the sub-assemblies of the working groups and *Coordinadora*). Not always pure consensus, however. Consensus is the ideal aspiration of the deliberative process that the TMWG calls *collective thought*: a process of ‘building together’ new ideas through active listening and constructive response.<sup>555</sup> The precise structure of this consensual process of collective thought evolved over time. In the July document, it is grounded in ‘the maximum respect for all opinions’:

It is not about one opinion versus another, but that all opinions are necessary to create a new product that we did not know in advance. Active listening is essential to the practice of collective thinking. ... When it comes to making decisions, we always try to achieve consensus. That is, that the decision adopted is the result of the contribution of all opinions, not of their confrontation.<sup>556</sup>

However, even at this early stage the principle of consensus comes with qualification: ‘we do not preclude the recourse of qualified majority voting, in the event that a block persistently paralyses us, thus avoiding the dictatorship of the minority over the majority.’<sup>557</sup> On 23 September the TMWG met to plan the 27 September plenary, which would debate the aforementioned manifesto, chronogram and organigram, as well as elect official spokespersons. Here the above vision of collective thought as qualified consensus is further developed. The documents will be presented by someone chosen by the relevant working group, followed by a round of clarificatory questions (but not full debate). Then a break during which participants can develop amendments. Upon reconvening, the plenary will work through sections of the images and paragraphs of the manifesto document, seeking consensus through hand gestures. Where an amendment arises, it is tested for consensus. If there is consensus, it is included. If there is clearly very low support, it is discarded (no precise level of support is specified). If there is no consensus for an amendment but it has ‘a significant level of support’ then further debate follows (a maximum of two further arguments in favour and two against), and the amendment is tested once again for consensus. If there is still no consensus, a small group of those for and against the amendment should splinter from the main

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<sup>555</sup> Ganemos Madrid 24 July 2014.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

assembly and attempt to draft a compromise amendment, while the plenary continues to work through the rest of the documents (if no one volunteers for such a splinter group, the amendment is rejected). If a compromise amendment can be reached it is presented to the plenary and tested for consensus. At this point the procedure diverges. For the chronogram and organigram, any parts that cannot be agreed are sent back to the working group to be redeveloped outside the plenary, with input from those who sought to amend it (and again if those who sought the amendment do not participate in this process their amendment can then be disregarded). The manifesto would be treated with more urgency (for reasons unclear): any parts that could not be agreed by consensus would go to a 'vote' (whether this would be simple majority or some level of super-majority is not specified). The December Protocol would further refine this flexible approach to qualified consensus. The Protocol specifies four rounds of voting: 1) absolute consensus is sought, involving several sub-rounds of discussion, amendment, and resubmission for consensus; 2) if no consensus can be reached, the proposal goes to a 75% supermajority vote; 3) failing that, a 66% supermajority vote; 4) failing that, a simple majority vote.<sup>558</sup> This system was implemented (or at least, it was codified; its implementation was somewhat fraught) in Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación*, but it is unclear whether it was fully implemented in Ganemos plenaries. What matters is the underlying ethos of collective thought as qualified consensus, which seeks to strike a balance between the *15Mayista* inclusivity of consensus and the need for an electoral project to meet the demanding pace set by electoral time-as-measure, and to not be paralysed by a 'dictatorship of the minority'. The December Protocol system would also mean that any decision passed without full consensus would have its level of support documented, allowing for a long term approach to constitutional amendment that could incorporate something like 'escalating amendment thresholds';<sup>559</sup> though neither Ganemos nor Ahora Madrid ever became sufficiently constitutionalised for this to really matter.

Another concrete expression of the meta-principle of inclusivity is a kind of *democratic pedagogy*. In planning the September plenary the TMWG made an interesting distinction between new and established participants:

The plenary is made up of those who are part of the working groups. ... Those who join Ganemos Madrid through a plenary session (that is, their first contact with the process is in the plenary) must take into account their lack of information about the process and about the path that has already been travelled, such that they do not slow down or hinder the

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<sup>558</sup> Ganemos Madrid 20 December 2014.

<sup>559</sup> Albert 2015.

decision-making. (This is specified in the Welcome Space for new people and in the presentation of the methodology).<sup>560</sup>

On the one hand, new members are under a duty to learn about the process so far and to not unduly impede the process out of ignorance; but the group is also under a duty to welcome and educate new members. Not a constitutional distinction between tiers of membership, but a subjective, pedagogical distinction, a duty of care that works in both directions.

Returning now to the question of the nature of the plenary (sovereign or otherwise), and the attempt to characterise the overall nature of Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality, the July document provides the following initial clues:

Each space will be autonomous and sovereign in its particular area of work, however the plenary will be the only executive space acting in the name of the initiative, which will always be attended as an individual. The decisions adopted in the plenaries will always be binding for all spaces, unless expressly indicated otherwise in the decision adopted.<sup>561</sup>

Confusingly, sovereignty is here ascribed to working groups, the plenary described not as a sovereign but as an 'executive space.' Yet it is the plenary that makes the binding decisions, the working groups merely draft proposals for the plenary. The terminology seems to be deeply confused, from a constitutional perspective. Really we have the plenary as a kind of multitudinous legislature along the lines described by Hardt and Negri (see Chapter 2.1.2), that also incorporates certain executive functions but leaves everyday coordinative functions to the *Coordinadora*, which should meet once per week (the plenary ordinarily meeting quarterly), in order to:

coordinate and systematise the work of the working groups, ... manage the communicative dimension of the process, ... make contact and prepare meetings with the various social and political forces to initiate the necessary processes of recognition of the initiative, prepare the ... plenaries, [and] fulfil the functions mandated in the plenaries.<sup>562</sup>

As the *Coordinadora* further self-defined at its first meeting, it is itself 'a working group, that works in horizontality with the rest of the working groups ... it will not be a space of decision, beyond the tasks assigned to it.'<sup>563</sup> The working groups may be 'autonomous' to develop whatever proposals they like, but only within the remit set out by binding plenary decisions, and only in order to present those proposals before the plenary to be decided upon. So the plenary is much more sovereign than

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<sup>560</sup> Ganemos Madrid 26 September 2014 [23 September 2014].

<sup>561</sup> Ganemos Madrid 24 July 2014.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ganemos Madrid 29 August 2014 [27 August 2014].

the working groups; but is sovereignty really the best concept to describe the system? The plenary is, as the TMWG refined its definition in September, ‘the space of greatest legitimacy for decision-making in Ganemos Madrid.’<sup>564</sup> Which perhaps suggests not an absolute conception of the sovereignty of the plenary, but rather a sovereignty gradient? A recognition that all of the spaces of Ganemos Madrid, being open spaces (except the *Coordinadora*), each express facets of the underlying sovereignty of the group? None of this is satisfying. The key fact to bear in mind here is that the plenary is the precise sum total, the coterminous entirety of the group itself.<sup>565</sup> The power it expresses is the absolute, direct, literal power of the entire group, not the figurative, symbolic power of sovereignty. It would appear that the best-fit concept for the nature of the power of the plenary, in its non-representative direct democracy, its function as absolute procedure, is *constituent power*. The plenary would seem to be some variation of the *permanent constituent assembly*. The binding power the plenary holds over the subgroups (the working groups and the *Coordinadora*) might function in a similar manner to the liberal idea of popular sovereignty – constituted power as the self-limitation of consenting legal persons – but without the symbolic mediation of popular sovereignty and the division of democratic labour that is representation. An infinitely more literal method of self-governance. It is so multitudinous as to be difficult to describe as a model of power. Certainly not pyramidal (at this local level at least; the federation of radical municipalities might begin to resemble Bookchin’s inverted pyramid), it is more of a spoked wheel, with the *Coordinadora* at the centre coordinating and mediating (but not in the representative sense). Yet the spoked wheel metaphor cannot account for the plenary, which is both the closest thing to a ‘centre’ of power and yet also the very fabric of the organisation, the fluid in which it is suspended. An organic metaphor is more appealing: cells and organs circulating within the plenary as organisational body, but it is a ghostly, ephemeral body that only fully constitutes itself once per quarter, before dissipating again. The sheer complexity of the system and its emergent properties (collective intelligence etc) might be captured by the image of a murmuration of starlings (or else, a commotion of coots, a conspiracy of ravens, a parliament of rooks... each with their own interesting organisational connotations) as it forms and deforms into complex shapes, order and disorder; but this underemphasises the ordering functions of the plenary’s binding decisions, its organigram, the working group documents, the December Protocol, the *Marco Común*. Better yet, then: ‘the torus formations of fish (i.e. where a school rotates around an empty core).’<sup>566</sup> All of this metaphorical flailing serves to underline that there seems to be no better concept to describe the core of the

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<sup>564</sup> Ganemos Madrid 26 September 2014 [23 September 2014].

<sup>565</sup> It would be helpful at this point to recall the September organigram, figure 5 above.

<sup>566</sup> Gronn 2011: 440.

Ganemos constitutionality than *constituent power* and the *permanent constituent assembly* as expression of the will of all over the general will.

In Ganemos' prioritisation of the meta-principles of inclusivity and plurality, in the wider municipalist acknowledgement of the need for a (con)federalisation of municipalisms,<sup>567</sup> in the delegative principles of mandatory citizen control of representatives, in the assembly's constituent prefiguration of direct democracy, and in the permanent constituent assembly's constitution of becoming, Ganemos appears to be, if not a fully Negrian project, at least to have reached many of the same conclusions as Negri regarding what is necessitated by municipalism as 'constituent process "from below"'.<sup>568</sup> Reading Ganemos' constituent principles in light of our previous discussion of Negri also serves to underline the radically prefigurative nature of the project, constituting profound ruptures with logics of representation, asserting its autonomy, and minimising the calcifying functions of constituted power. But for Ganemos to be a purely Negrian constituent process it would have to express no constituted power at all, and this cannot be said to be the case. The constitutive function of the plenary, in documenting its decisions and thereby constituting defined limits for the functions of the working groups, cannot be fully understood as an expression of pure constituent power or absolute procedure. The prefigurative constituent process of assembly democracy's becoming-absolute requires constituted power (documented consensus decisions, protocol documents, the clear constitutional distribution of leadership functions) to define the progress that has been made along prefigurative democracy's asymptotic curve, and to limit and control precisely the power-over that Negri attributes solely to constituted power. Democracy is really inconceivable without constituted power, but constituted power is inconceivable within Negri's theory, whether we see it as a reductive Marxist binary that sees only messianic constituent power versus demonic constituted power, or as an even more reductive Spinozan monism.<sup>569</sup> Even a return to Loughlin's dialectical approach might be preferable, in some ways, but really Ganemos' experience demands a more thoroughly complex and more properly multitudinous conception of power, for the constituted power of the open, consensual, directly democratic assembly is a different beast entirely to either the constituted power of the state or the pure constituent power of Negri's disutopia. Ganemos poses clearly the necessary challenge of finding a Negri beyond Negri that escapes reductive binaries and takes more seriously the Foucauldian and Deleuzian multiplicities that Negri claims to incorporate. Such a project could proceed in a number of interesting directions, and a final, definitive answer to this challenge is beyond the scope of this

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<sup>567</sup> 'Federalism or death' (Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014: 159).

<sup>568</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>569</sup> Which in the hands of Deleuze achieves a more productive sense of multiplicity. Something Negri claims but fails to fully to incorporate into his theory of constituent power.



thesis, but the conclusion of the thesis will explore the beginnings of one possible path, in terms of what Negri could learn from Laclau and other theorists of hegemony.

### 3 Podemos' Populist Constitutionality

From the beginning 15M was characterised by a discourse centred upon terms of great value to the entire political spectrum: ... “citizenship”, “democracy”, “dignity”, “justice”. These floating signifiers, until now successfully inscribed in the dominant discourse, ... were successfully connected, in the *indignado* narrative, with evident social needs, in an alternative political common sense. [15M] postulated an axis of conflict ... not marked by the division “right versus left”, but by that of the top and versus the bottom, that allowed it to overflow ideological identifications.<sup>570</sup>

For Íñigo Errejón, the counter-hegemonic genius of 15M was that it managed to ‘generate a political identity abruptly “exterior” to the constituted political order, but “interior” to the fundamental social consensus from which political actors derive their legitimacy.’<sup>571</sup> This ‘new transversal identity’ allowed for the accumulation of ‘different demands that do not share any substantial content’ in a process of counter-hegemonic ‘articulation’,<sup>572</sup> via ‘their common frustration with the established powers.’<sup>573</sup> Errejón’s Laclauian reading of 15M as a distinctly populist moment identified *democracy* as the dividing line between the *indignados*, as *truly* democratic popular subject, and the *false* democracy of the establishment, a dichotomy able to unify economic and democratic discourse around critique of precisely the corrupt ties *between* political and economic elites (*la casta*). By contesting the meaning of democracy as ‘tendentially empty signifier’, 15M marked a ‘frontier’, a dichotomisation of the ‘political space that deepens the crisis of legitimacy of the elites and pushes it towards a general organic crisis of the Spanish state.’<sup>574</sup> Reflecting on this profound event with great urgency mere months from its initial eruption, Errejón saw in 15M’s slogans ‘the emergence of the *people* ... as the principal name of the “we”’, marking ‘a reclamation of popular sovereignty.’<sup>575</sup> The term that emerges most clearly from 15M to define the adversary: ‘regime’.<sup>576</sup>

What next for 15M? It faced huge challenges: the immense power of the European Union at the wider ‘Troika’ that had already shown itself willing to discipline and punish in the case of Greece;

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<sup>570</sup> Errejón 2011: 131-32.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid: 133.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid: 134.

<sup>573</sup> Laclau, cited *ibid*: 135.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid: 136-37.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid: 137. The more populist slogans cited are: ‘the voice of the people is not illegal’, and ‘the people united will never be defeated’, words that ‘mean practically nothing in the abstract, but that in a specific situation constitute a powerful reclamation of sovereignty against those who want to “defeat” it.’ Note also that here Errejón is using the Spanish word *pueblo*, the more traditionally populist word for ‘the People’, as opposed to *gente* or *personas*, which are better translated as simply ‘people’. 15M discourse alternated quite evenly between *pueblo* and *gente*, and one of the key strategic debates among academics and activists at this time was over which of the two was the most appropriate name for the new collective subject being constructed.

<sup>576</sup> Though Errejón hints at what would become Podemos’ preferred antagonistic appellation: ‘*una casta egoísta*’ (the selfish caste) (*ibid*: 138).

and the hegemonic strength of the existing ‘historic bloc’ – the PP, PSOE, and the entire institutional settlement of the ‘regime of 78’. The challenge for 15M, as Errejón saw it, was to further ‘define itself without closing itself’: to remain only loosely defined would ‘impede the concentration of forces around attainable objectives,’ tending towards ‘dissolution’ and reduction to ‘cyclical protest’; yet greater specification of its identity could mean losing 15M’s transversal ‘capacity of articulation,’ and could ‘condemn 15M to the sectarianism and impotence of the extraparliamentary left.’<sup>577</sup> Future investigations, Errejón concludes, must focus on possible forms of ‘crystallisation: symbolic, electoral, organisational, programmatic.’<sup>578</sup>

Errejón’s populist reading of 15M is convincingly grounded in the movement’s practices and rhetoric. We cannot speak of Podemos as less *15Mayista* and Ganemos as more *15Mayista*. Rather both have waged their own miniature wars of position over the definition and inheritance of 15M. The openness of 15M to such different interpretations reflects its radical transversality. Much research has revealed the detail and extent of the astonishingly broad ‘cross-sectional support for the 15-M among the general population in Spain, affecting people of different ages, genders, employment situations and levels of urbanization.’<sup>579</sup> In its immense transversality, therefore, 15M represents something of an apogee in the kind of pluralism of political struggle that Laclau and Mouffe began describing in terms of the ‘new social movements’, which formed the empirical context for their arguments in the 1980s and seemed to empirically justify their ontological claims that there is no a priori site or privileged agent of struggle, and that therefore the new social movements can neither be understood as ‘a revolutionary substitute for a working class which has been integrated into the system’,<sup>580</sup> nor as having an ‘a priori ... progressive nature’.<sup>581</sup> For Errejón, Iglesias, their circle of colleagues at Madrid’s Complutense University, as well as those working with Iglesias on the *La Tuerka* political television show, the populist reading of 15M necessarily led to the ‘symbolic, electoral, organisational, programmatic’ questions of how to further advance the ‘crystallisation’ of this popular subject around ‘attainable objectives’.<sup>582</sup> For Errejón in particular, this was the thoroughly Laclauian question of building a “‘collective will’ ... constructed from a number of dissimilar points’, that is, a ‘chain of equivalence’.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid: 140.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid: 141. Note that Errejón was far from the only one with a populist or counter-hegemonic reading of 15M. Iglesias (2015 [2014]) was another important example, who had a more Gramscian reading of the period. See also Gerbaudo (2017), for an analysis of the confluence of populist, neo-anarchist and ‘citizenist’ tendencies across the global cycle of struggles of 2010-16.

<sup>579</sup> Sampedro and Lobera 2014. See also, for example, Díez García 2015.

<sup>580</sup> A position they attribute to Marcuse.

<sup>581</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 87.

<sup>582</sup> Errejón 2011.

<sup>583</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 87.

To anchor such a diverse chain of distinct demands requires a powerful empty signifier. This would be the role of the ‘mediatic’ hyperleader, whose full significance would dawn on Errejón and Iglesias in the post-15M malaise of 2012-13.<sup>584</sup> This chapter focuses on the crucial prerequisite for the mediatic hyperleader: the party, and how Errejón’s Laclauian understanding of the conjuncture (shared at this point, if with reservations, by Iglesias) informed how Podemos would be constituted. This requires, first, a brief genealogy of the party form itself (with all its contradictions), and of counter-hegemonic theory and practice more generally; then a detailed analysis of Laclau’s (and Errejón’s) understanding of antagonism, hegemony and equivalence; before the final section of the chapter can embark upon its close reading of early Podemos’ populist constitutionality, where we find a complex confluence of both instrumentalism, in the subordination of internal democracy to the strategic priorities of the leadership, as well as prefiguration, in the ontological critique of an instrumentalist road to radical democracy, but also in a seemingly radical constitution of becoming in the Jeffersonian form of a constitutionalised right to revolution (discussed in Chapter 2.1.2), as well as the prefiguration pre-constitution of the People of popular sovereignty.

## 3.1 Hegemony

### 3.1.1 The Party Form

As we will see, Podemos inherits all of the tensions and contradictions of both 15M and the party form, and those tensions are not easily resolved simply in being combined. The party form is, most abstractly, an organisational tool for taking political power. This could include everything from the ‘media party’ of the neoliberal era to, at a stretch, looser elite factions like the Roman *Populares* and *Optimates*. The modern political party emerges from the specific context of nation-states, capitalism, parliamentary democracy and, eventually, universal suffrage. They are ‘the children of democracy, of mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organize the masses’.<sup>585</sup> The top-level meta division in the modern party form is between, on the one hand, the constitutional or reformist party, which seeks to take power within the established constitutional rules, while not fundamentally questioning that constitutional order; and, on the other, the revolutionary party, which exists primarily to overthrow the established constitutional order, and may or may not incorporate electoralism and constitutional governance in that strategy at any given time. Already we can see how the typical party categories apply to Podemos in tense and complex ways. Podemos’ populist majoritarian aspirations mean that it cannot afford to estrange the electorate by appearing *too* radical. Yet its genesis in the insurgent, ruptural event that was 15M, which bears prefigurative

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<sup>584</sup> Which will be the focus of Chapter 4.2, as it helps to explain the role of hyperleadership in both Podemos and Ahora Madrid, the latter’s constitution being the focus of Chapter 4.1.

<sup>585</sup> Weber 1946: 102.

and even revolutionary readings as well as the populist reading of Podemos, and its founding partnership between Iglesias and his Complutense colleagues with the Trotskyist party Anticapitalistas, mean that the reformist-revolutionary dichotomy exists as an internal tension within Podemos. Meanwhile the very populist hypothesis at the heart of the Podemos project sets it against the establishment which is itself synonymous with the Spanish Constitution and the so-called 'regime of 78'. Thus populism sets Podemos against the constitution and in favour of a new constituent process (even if it is, usually, proposed as a constituent process to be triggered from within existing constitutional mechanisms, rather than the autonomous, prefigurative, revolutionary constituent process of Negri), further unsettling the stability of Podemos' party form.

Stereotypically, parties are instrumentalist rather than prefigurative in terms of their internal constitution. The priority tends to be tactical and strategic effectiveness, with internal organisation serving that goal rather than internal democracy being an end in itself or a deliberate means of prefiguring a wider radical democracy. Hence a wide variety of different types of party can be grouped together as instrumentalist: from Leninist democratic centralism, where party organisation may be less democratic (in at least some ways) than the parliamentary democracy the party seeks to overthrow; to modern cadre and media parties, and even mass parties like (to some extent) the UK Labour Party, which is clearly more directly-democratic than the British state (though of course the extent oscillates over time), but whose internal democracy primarily serves the purpose of maintaining satisfaction, loyalty and legitimacy among the broad swathe of social forces (and formally distinct affiliated organisations) that constitute Labour's 'broad church', rather than serving as a prefigurative laboratory for national-scale democratisation (at least, any who see Labour's internal democracy that way are generally a miniscule minority). What constitutes party-political effectiveness at any given moment of course changes with the wind, and this may imply a more or less classically populist approach, though for Laclau there is always a populist element to any (successful) democratic politics, and the capacity for a full-fledged populist strategy to exaggerate this instrumentalist tendency of the party form is obvious. Recall our discussion of prefiguration in Chapter 2, which reminds us that what can be read in one sense as Leninist instrumentalism (the means are not designed to emulate the ultimate ends of full communism) can also be read as a form of *intermediary prefiguration*, in that the strong discipline of democratic centralism seeks to prefigure aspects of the transitional socialist workers' state.

Party instrumentalism is most likely to shape the organisation in the image of the institutional system it seeks to enter. As described by Weber, for example, where he advanced his definition of the party to include the idea that 'The end to which its activity is devoted is to secure

power within an organization *for its leaders*'.<sup>586</sup> Here we see strong resonances with *La Apuesta Municipalista* and my interview data, where more horizontalist participants were very conscious of the limiting factor of the institutional regime Ahora Madrid was contesting. Specifically, standing a candidate in a mayoral election, for a position of extremely concentrated power centralised heavily upon the singular mayoral role, makes it orders of magnitude harder to reimagine old models of leadership and escape the antagonism between democracy and charismatic leadership that we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4.

Ideally, of course, the party form might bring many benefits beyond electoral success, but short of a radically prefigurative strategy. Michels identified one broad function of the party as follows: 'Organization, based as it is on the principle of least effort, that is to say, upon the greatest possible economy of energy, is the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong'.<sup>587</sup> Parties are also a key mechanism of political education, or, for the revolutionary party, the raising of class consciousness. Lenin's vanguard party would furthermore model itself not on the 'trade union secretary' but on the 'tribune of the people, ... able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; ... able to group all these manifestations into a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation'.<sup>588</sup> Here we begin to see counter-hegemony at play, and an image that strongly foreshadows what Laclau and Mouffe would later label the 'chain of equivalence'. Bernstein was even more explicit about this counter-hegemonic function of the party, speaking of the 'necessity of an organ of the class struggle which holds the entire class together in spite of its fragmentation through different employment.' That organ, Bernstein argued, was 'Social Democracy as a political party,' wherein 'the special interest of the economic group is submerged in favour of the general interest of those who depend on income for their labour, of all the under-privileged'.<sup>589</sup> For Bernstein the party is the primary centripetal unifying force for the working class, which he saw tending more naturally towards unity only in the face of tyranny, and more towards fragmentation under the dispersive freedoms of parliamentary democracy. Jodi Dean provides one of the most passionate and focused defences of the (revolutionary, communist) party in recent times, arguing

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<sup>586</sup> Weber 1978: 284, emphasis added.

<sup>587</sup> Michels 1915: 21.

<sup>588</sup> Lenin 1978: 80.

<sup>589</sup> Bernstein cited in Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 32.

inter alia for the party's functions of collective memory,<sup>590</sup> which in turn holds open a place for collective, anti-capitalist subjectivation, building a bastion against capitalist individuation.<sup>591</sup>

Of course the party also comes with many negative connotations. We will touch upon the contemporary crisis of the party later, but cynicism towards the party began long ago. Weber was not entirely positive about the bureaucratisation of society, including the modern bureaucratic party, though he saw little alternative. Michels sets the classical standard for cynical readings of party democracy with his 'iron law of oligarchy' thesis: that not just parties (though they were his research focus while developing the wider thesis) but *any* organisation ultimately tends towards elite-dominated oligarchy. The iron law can therefore be restated as a paradox, for while 'Organization ... is the weapon of the weak against the strong',<sup>592</sup> organisation is simultaneously that 'which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy'.<sup>593</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Gegemoniya*: From Russia with Love

The concept of hegemony emerges from debates among early Russian social democrats, and eventually, in Laclau's hands, becomes essential to explaining the logic of populism, and arguably politics as such. As revolutionaries such as Plekhanov, Axelrod and Lenin grappled with their situation, in which the proletarian 'universal class' was in fact still a small social minority, it became clear that the proletariat must participate in a broader revolutionary coalition of social forces, including the peasantry and/or the bourgeoisie, but still *led* by the industrial proletariat, led in turn by the communist party. In this way hegemony came to describe the production and maintenance of 'social leadership', to borrow Gilbert's proposed synonym.<sup>594</sup> As Anderson described in his classic study of Gramsci (while seeking to correct the 'widespread illusion' that the mature concept of hegemony was almost entirely of Gramsci's own creation), 'The term *gegemoniya* (hegemony) was one of the most central political slogans in the Russian Social-Democratic movement, from the late 1890s to 1917.'<sup>595</sup> Plekhanov began using it, around 1884, to refer to the necessity of not only waging economic struggle between workers and employers, but waging a mass political struggle against Tsarism, with the working class participating in the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution.'<sup>596</sup> By

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<sup>590</sup> 'Without the party, there is no body capable of remembering, learning, and responding' to the crimes of capitalism and the needs of the people (Dean 2016: 161).

<sup>591</sup> Enabling 'the crowd to endure as a rupture with capitalism' (ibid). Interestingly Dean sometimes opts to frame these ideas via a classically populist use of 'the people'; as in, 'The party occupies the place of division opened up by the crowd. It mends the breach, maintaining it as the gap of desire of the people as a collective political subject' (ibid: 160-61).

<sup>592</sup> Michels 1915: 21.

<sup>593</sup> Michels 1915: 401.

<sup>594</sup> Gilbert 2008: 37.

<sup>595</sup> Anderson 1976: 14.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid: 15, discussing Plekhanov's *Izbrannye Filosofskie Proizvedeniya*.

1901, Axelrod spoke confidently of how, 'By virtue of the historical position of our proletariat, Russian Social-Democracy can acquire hegemony in the struggle against absolutism,' now referring not to vague participation but to an objective primacy at the centre of the bourgeois revolution.<sup>597</sup> From here, the term became common currency among the Russian revolutionary left, but according to Anderson it did not leave Russia until after the revolution, when it spread beyond the borders of the USSR through the documents of the Comintern.

Gramsci must have encountered this modern idea of hegemony through the publications of the Comintern (or so Anderson reasons, 'with reasonable certainty'),<sup>598</sup> whereupon he applies it to his very different, more fragmented context of industrial, Fordist Italy during the rise of fascism, with a growing mass media, further expanded suffrage, and a more porous and responsive capitalist state better able to offer ameliorative concessions. In this context, the old orthodox models of base and superstructure seemed to break down, leading Gramsci to forcefully reject economic determinism:

The claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx.<sup>599</sup>

Gramsci agreed with the orthodoxy that the mode of production was key to explaining ideological stability as well as slow, tendential change, arguing that politics is indeed 'at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure'. Crucially, however, 'it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realised.' Thus hegemony can only be 'concretely studied and analysed' in hindsight, and only 'hypothetically' in the present, 'during the process itself'; neither base nor ideological superstructure can be identified 'statically (like an instantaneous photographic image)'.<sup>600</sup> As Boggs emphasises, this not only means that a new theory is necessary for understanding and explaining the 'rich interplay of diverse forces during "conjunctural" periods of social transformation'; it also implies that base, superstructure and the theory of hegemony must all be conceived as a process, in a relationship that is 'constantly changing and reciprocal in its historical complexity'.<sup>601</sup> Thus, where the precise temporal relationship between past, present and future is not always explicitly and thoroughly worked out in theories of prefiguration, the theory of hegemony (at least since Gramsci) is precisely constructed, at least in part, to help explain those

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid: 15-16, quoting Perekpiska, Plekhanov and Axelrod.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid: 18.

<sup>599</sup> Gramsci 1971: 407.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid: 407-08.

<sup>601</sup> Boggs 1976: 36.



temporal connections. An important prefigurative-hegemonic link that we will return to in Chapter 4.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony thus opens Marxism like never before to a robust theory of culture, ideology, and some degree of the autonomy of the political. Crucially, hegemonic social leadership is not mere 'domination', a distinction clear from Gramsci's writings,<sup>602</sup> but nevertheless sometimes misunderstood.<sup>603</sup> As Gilbert deftly explains, hegemony is therefore 'not at all a static condition of transcendent sovereignty, but a position from which the *direction of travel* of a wider ensemble can be selected.'<sup>604</sup> From here it is clear enough that the construction and manipulation of both active and passive consent must become crucial, alongside the classic Gramscian concept of 'common-sense'; though, again, these are not relations of domination but rather of socio-political influence, and hence Gramscian hegemony is never unidirectional, deterministic or static, but rather 'inherently complex, precarious, contingent and temporary, even while it must always work for a stabilisation of relations of power.'<sup>605</sup>

### 3.1.3 Laclau: Antagonism and Equivalence

#### *Hegemony's Antagonistic Foundations*

Laclau and Mouffe trace the roots of the concept of hegemony through more or less the same history described above (Ch3.1.2 'Hegemony'), but applying their own analytical lens in order to explain the genealogy not just of Gramsci's conception of hegemony, but of their own postmarxist version. The core of their genealogy is the path away from essentialist logics of historical necessity, via intermediary logics such as Luxemburg's logic of spontaneism and Bernstein's logic of evolution, towards logics of contingency; and away from the economism of deterministic base-superstructure models and towards the autonomy of the political. In Gramsci's hands, hegemony 'becomes the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation',<sup>606</sup> on Laclau and Mouffe's reading Gramsci unwittingly created 'something more than a type of political relation complementary to the basic categories of Marxist theory,' but rather 'a logic of the social which is incompatible with those categories'.<sup>607</sup> This is because, 'For Gramsci, political subjects are not – strictly speaking – classes, but complex "collective wills"', which are themselves 'a result of the politico-ideological articulation of dispersed and fragmented historical forces'.<sup>608</sup> This is what

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<sup>602</sup> Hoare and Nowell Smith, 'Preface' in Gramsci 1971: xiv.

<sup>603</sup> This is a point Jeremy Gilbert is fond of making, citing Day (2005) and Lash (2007) as examples of mistaking Gramscian hegemony for domination.

<sup>604</sup> Gilbert undated: 6, emphasis Gilbert's.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 7.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid: 3.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid: 67.

allowed Gramsci to speak of the 'historical bloc', which Laclau and Mouffe identify as a fusion of Leninist hegemony and Sorel's 'bloc', and which allows for a conception of hegemony as a 'discontinuous series' of contingent, plural, democratic formations that 'accepts social complexity as the very condition of political struggle'.<sup>609</sup> Laclau and Mouffe fold this profound contribution into the core concept of *articulation*: the political production of a hegemonic 'unity' that is 'not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle'.<sup>610</sup> Hegemonic articulation is what allowed Gramsci to theorise for the first time that the 'progressive character' of political struggle can no longer be 'assured in advance', providing a much more subtle materialist theory of ideology, and a much more robust theory of revolution when the complexities of the 'war of position' are worked out. However, this also removes the class-essentialist rug out from under Gramsci's own feet:

If the working class, as a hegemonic agent, manages to articulate around itself a number of democratic demands and struggles, this is due not to any a priori structural privilege, but to a political initiative on the part of the class. Thus, the hegemonic subject is a class subject only in the sense that, on the basis of class positions, a certain hegemonic formation is *practically* articulated; but, in that case we are dealing with concrete workers and not with the entelechy constituted by their 'historical interests'.<sup>611</sup>

This establishes Gramsci as occupying a fundamentally 'contradictory position':

On the one hand, the political centrality of the working class has a historical, contingent character: it requires the class to come out of itself, to transform its own identity by articulating to it a plurality of struggles and democratic demands. On the other hand, it would seem that this articulatory role is assigned to it by the economic base – hence, that the centrality has a necessary character.<sup>612</sup>

Gramsci's limitation is his class essentialism and logic of historical necessity which, though he has created the tools for its demise, lingers on in his belief that although 'The economic base may not assure the ultimate victory of the working class, since this depends upon its capacity for hegemonic leadership,' ultimately 'there must always be a single unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class.' Therefore, 'a failure in the hegemony of the working class can only be followed by a reconstitution of bourgeois hegemony, so that in the end, political struggle is still a zero-sum game among classes,' and class essentialism is ultimately

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid: 71.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid: 65.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid, emphasis Laclau and Mouffe's.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid: 70.

maintained. For Laclau and Mouffe, however, there is no going back from this point. ‘The logic of hegemony, as a logic of articulation and contingency,’ has now ‘come to determine the very identity of the hegemonic subjects’; the only way is forward, towards a fully anti-essentialist theory of hegemony (and socialist strategy).<sup>613</sup>

The crucial next step for Laclau and Mouffe, in this anti-essentialist project of ‘radicalizing the Gramscian intuition’,<sup>614</sup> is their theorisation of antagonism. Ignoring for the time being the perhaps more obvious sense of antagonism – the attempt to construct a simple binary antagonism ‘capable of dichotomizing the political space’;<sup>615</sup> *la casta*, for example – we must begin with Laclau and Mouffe’s analysis of the fundamentally multitudinous nature of social antagonism that exists prior to and sets the limits of hegemony.

Neither Kant’s ‘real oppositions’ nor ‘dialectical contradiction’, social ‘antagonisms are not objective relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity’.<sup>616</sup> Which is to say, explanations of social antagonism as either contradiction or real opposition fail precisely in seeking a description of the social as ‘objective and intelligible pattern’ or ‘rational totality’,<sup>617</sup> by trying to identify ‘objective relations’ between conceptual or real objects, wherein ‘it is something that the objects *already are* which makes the relation intelligible’.

in both cases we are concerned with full identities. In the case of contradiction, it is because *A is fully A* that being-not-A is a contradiction – and therefore an impossibility. In the case of real opposition, it is because *A is also fully A* that its relation with B produces an objectively determinable effect.<sup>618</sup>

The sense that such conceptions cannot form the basis of satisfying accounts of social antagonism should already be clear to any good anti-essentialist. To construct a positive account of their anti-essentialist conception of social antagonism, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (H&SS)* draws heavily on Lacan:

in the case of antagonism, we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution. The presence of the Other is not a logical impossibility: it exists; so it is not a contradiction. But neither is it subsumable as a positive differential moment in a causal chain, for in that case the relation would be given by what

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid: 85.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid: xiii.

<sup>615</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014]: 104.

<sup>616</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: xiv.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid: 126.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid: 124-25, emphasis Laclau and Mouffe’s.

each force is and there would be no negation of this being. (It is because a physical force is a physical force that another identical and countervailing force leads to rest; in contrast, it is because a peasant cannot be a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land.) Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity.<sup>619</sup>

One need not be entirely convinced that the Lacanian framing is the *best* framing for an anti-essentialist account of antagonism in order to broadly agree that such an account is necessary, and that such an account must necessarily entail that the real existence of things is unknowable except through the discourse that defines it, that therefore identities are always incomplete and overdetermined, and therefore social antagonism cannot exist on an objective basis (be that of a predetermined class or otherwise), but must rather be plural, contingent and subject to something like Laclau and Mouffe's logic of hegemony. Laclau admits clearly, in the essay 'Ideology and Post-Marxism', that his logic of hegemony is 'ultimately identical' to 'the Lacanian notion of the object  $a$ ';<sup>620</sup> and Laclau and Mouffe also admit in *H&SS*, less directly but directly enough, that their logic of hegemony is also virtually identical in function to Lacan's concept of 'suture'.<sup>621</sup>

However, these admissions do not mean, as it might seem if they were read in isolation, that the logic of hegemony can therefore *only* be understood in these Lacanian terms. Rather the opposite: the ease with which Laclau and Mouffe admit identity between Lacanian and hegemonic terminology reflects a wider transposability of their ideas, and the manner in which similar basic arguments can be made on a variety of anti-essentialist grounds. Elsewhere in *H&SS*, for example, Laclau and Mouffe mention that their analysis of 'the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings ... meets up with a number of contemporary currents of thought ... from Heidegger to Wittgenstein'.<sup>622</sup> Wittgenstein is then taken up explicitly as the core basis for defending the discursive arguments of *H&SS* in the essay 'Post-Marxism without Apologies' (with a little help from Derrida).<sup>623</sup> Meanwhile in 'Ideology and Post-Marxism' Laclau is able to explain an anti-essentialist conception of social antagonism in a relatively straightforward logical format, with no explicit framing within the thought of any particular philosopher, put simply as the argument that 'both contradiction and real opposition are objective relations ... To conceive of antagonisms as objective would require the

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid: 125.

<sup>620</sup> Laclau 2015 [2007]: 99.

<sup>621</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 88 n1.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid: 111.

<sup>623</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 1987.

viewpoint of an objective observer, who would see in them an expression of a deeper objectivity escaping the consciousness of the two forces in conflict'.<sup>624</sup>

Defending the fundamental demand for an anti-essentialist concept of antagonism, or of anti-essentialism in general, is beyond the scope of the thesis, but suffice it to say that it is a commitment I share with Laclau and Mouffe, and I find their own defence of anti-essentialism to be a perfectly adequate one.<sup>625</sup> For a relatively simple summary we can turn to Howarth, who reduces all of the above to the following: 'Social antagonisms occur when the presence of "an Other" is discursively constructed as blocking or impeding the attainment of identity by a subject'. Howarth also provides some helpful examples to add to Laclau and Mouffe's example of the peasant and the landowner: Thatcher's section 28, and the pit closures that led to the miners' strikes.<sup>626</sup> Where Negri sees only one monstrous antagonism between constituted and constituent power, Laclau and Mouffe see a plurality of social antagonism interminably circulating throughout society. They refuse any 'a priori surfaces of emergence of antagonisms, as there is no surface which is not constantly subverted by the over-determining effects of others, and because there is, in consequence, a constant displacement of the social logics characteristic of certain spheres towards other spheres'.<sup>627</sup> Thus, 'social division is inherent in the possibility of politics';<sup>628</sup> there is no ontological social unity to ground politics, be it that of the proletariat as universal class, or even, say, the 'becoming common, which ... is the biopolitical condition of the multitude'.<sup>629</sup>

Establishing antagonism as the limit of objectivity 'forecloses any possibility of a final reconciliation, of any kind of rational consensus, of a fully inclusive "we"'.<sup>630</sup> This leads Laclau and Mouffe, 'radicalizing the Gramscian intuition in several respects', to their conception of hegemony as that relation 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it', wherein the second form of (popular) antagonism enters, as a key structuring force behind the 'chain of equivalence'.<sup>631</sup>

### *The Articulation of Hegemonic Universality*

Evolving out of Gramsci's concept of the historic bloc – that alliance of social forces capable of exerting revolutionary force, derived in turn from Leninist 'hegemony' and Sorel's concept of the 'bloc' – Laclau and Mouffe develop the concept of the 'chain of equivalence': that hegemonic

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<sup>624</sup> Laclau 2015 [2007]: 97.

<sup>625</sup> The clearest such defence of anti-essentialism per se can be found in 'Post-Marxism without Apologies' (Laclau and Mouffe 1987).

<sup>626</sup> Howarth 2015: 10-11.

<sup>627</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: 180.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid: xiv.

<sup>629</sup> Hardt and Negri 2004: 114.

<sup>630</sup> Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985]: xvii.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid: xiii.

construction out of particular demands that allows for the appearance of universality, and so the construction of socio-political majorities.

Laclau and Mouffe first develop their logic of equivalence in *H&SS*,<sup>632</sup> positioning it as developing out of, or in parallel with, the problematics presented through social antagonism and the logic of contingency. To summarise, while attempting to simplify away the Lacanian framing, the basic point is that as antagonism sets the limits of objectivity and identity, therefore no objective, intelligible, universalising totality can exist. Yet political articulation (hegemony) does still seem to function, i.e. to create the appearance, from time to time, of universality. Laclau and Mouffe argue that this means that hegemony's 'very condition is that a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it. Such a form of "hegemonic universality"', Laclau and Mouffe conclude, 'is the only one that a political community can reach'; and it is reached by building a 'chain of equivalence' between various social particularities and the demands that emerge from their constitutive antagonisms.<sup>633</sup>

The nature of this chain, and the possibility of cohering it around a powerful gravitational centre, is explained through the concepts of the floating signifier, popular identity and, later, the empty signifier. In *H&SS* 'every discursive (i.e. social) identity' is said to have the function of a floating signifier. 'Since all identity is relational', and 'all discourse is subverted by a field of discursivity which overflows it,' therefore each discursive/social 'element' is 'incapable of being wholly articulated to a discursive chain'; i.e. every signifier, every social antagonism, every political demand is inherently precarious and malleable.<sup>634</sup> The precise relationship between the floating signifier and hegemony (via the 'articulation' of those floating signifiers into a chain of the equivalence), is summarised with relative concision:

The general field of the emergence of hegemony is that of articulatory practices, that is, a field where the 'elements' have not crystallized into 'moments'. In a closed system of relational identities, in which the meaning of each moment is absolutely fixed, there is no place whatsoever for a hegemonic practice. A fully successful system of differences, which excluded any floating signifier, would not make possible any articulation; the principle of repetition would dominate every practice within this system and there would be nothing to hegemonize. It is because hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social, that it can take place only in a field dominated by articulatory practices.<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Section 'Equivalence and Difference', *Ibid*: 127-34.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid*: x.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid*: 113.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid*: 134.

What we see here perhaps more clearly than we have so far in our analysis is the extent to which hegemonic articulation is virtually synonymous with the very possibility of politics. Theoretically, attempts to generate a 'closed system of relational identities', fixing 'elements' into 'moments', removes any possibility for politics to occur within that model. In reality, we can infer that every social community must entail hegemonic and articulatory practices to varying degrees, with more democratic systems expanding the scope for the 'articulatory practices' of politics, and less democratic regimes narrowing them, tending closer towards that theoretical 'closed system of relational identities' as what we might call the Rancièrian 'police' orders the parts of society through a combination of hegemonic influence and coercive force.

However, the nature of social conflict as a collection of floating signifiers means that there are always 'multiple hegemonic articulations shaping a given space'.<sup>636</sup> With Laclau and Mouffe denying any ontological centrality or determinative role to the working class (or to any predetermined agent) as primary subject of the democratic revolution, and with the new social movements displaying an empirical 'proliferation of points of antagonism', the production of political frontiers tends towards multiplication and dispersion.<sup>637</sup> Yet the dichotomous division of the political space into two grand antagonistic camps assumed by Gramsci is still necessary in order to cohere the hegemonic chain of equivalence and form a new social majority. This is the goal of equivalence. The key political question is therefore how to articulate a hegemonic chain of equivalence that can achieve such a dichotomisation between friend and adversary, or how to construct a 'people'.

Thus cohering the chain of equivalence becomes synonymous with constructing a 'popular identity' or 'popular subject position': 'If one is to build a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles, one needs to establish a frontier and define an adversary'.<sup>638</sup> We might call this *popular antagonism*, in contrast to Laclau and Mouffe's multitudinous *social antagonism*. Popular antagonism introduces a subtle but important strategic difference with Gramsci's own political praxis, through which we can better understand why early Podemos is indeed more properly a Laclauian than a Gramscian party.<sup>639</sup> Despite the theoretical progress he made, for Gramsci 'the ultimate core of a hegemonic force' still consisted 'of a fundamental class. The difference between hegemonic and hegemonized forces is posed as an ontological difference between the planes of constitution of each of them'.<sup>640</sup> So while an orthodox Gramscian politics has more flexibility than its

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid: 144.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid: 131.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid: xix.

<sup>639</sup> By early Podemos I mean Podemos up to and shortly after Vistalegre I.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid: 134.

Marxist forebears in establishing frontiers between plural 'collective wills', that process is still fundamentally structured by 'objective' class relations. When this class essentialism is rejected we have a (potentially) very different politics, ruled completely by empty and floating signifiers.

Laclau and Mouffe explain, explicitly and implicitly to varying degrees, why such an adversarial politics is still necessary under the condition of actually multiform social antagonisms. For one thing, though immensely fragile and precarious, hegemony is immensely difficult to displace once firmly established. Pure plural multiplicity is not enough, in their view. Hegemony can only be replaced with a new hegemony. But there will always be an outside to any hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe reject as utopian any claims to actual universality. So rather than deny that outside, that constitutive Other, Laclau and Mouffe seek to put it to work as the negative side of hegemonic identity formation; and every little helps when it comes to discursive scaffolding to support this structurally unsound counter-hegemonic tower built on the quicksand of social antagonism and floating signifiers. They also imply, in an almost subterranean argument that emerges out of their preface to the second edition of *H&SS*, that the key problem with the alternative approach of a neoliberal, radical centrism that denies or obfuscates social antagonism, is that it ignores entrenched power relations. Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy is a counter-hegemonic project because it is not 'taking place within a neutral terrain, whose topology would not be affected, but as a profound transformation of the existing relations of power. For us, the objective was the establishment of a new hegemony, which requires the creation of new political frontiers, not their disappearance'.<sup>641</sup> It 'requires drawing new political frontiers and acknowledging that there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary. That is to say, it requires the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism'.<sup>642</sup> In fact they argue that, ultimately, democracy would be impossible without antagonism. Without antagonism, 'pluralist democracy becomes a "self-refuting ideal", because the very moment of its realization would coincide with its disintegration. This is why we stress that it is vital for democratic politics to acknowledge that any form of consensus is the result of a hegemonic articulation, and that it always has an "outside" that impedes its full realization.' This is the 'very condition of possibility' of 'the democratic project'.<sup>643</sup>

*H&SS* does not discuss in any technical detail the nature of the central link in the chain of equivalence, only hinting that it must form around an emergent 'people', and that radical democracy is, in their view, the most appropriate ideological content for constituting a new radical people. Proper analysis of that central link does not emerge until Laclau's 1994 essay, 'Why do Empty

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid: xv.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid: xvii.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid: xviii.



Signifiers Matter to Politics?', before becoming particularly central to the argument in 2005's *On Populist Reason*. An empty signifier is, 'strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified'.<sup>644</sup> With floating signifiers defined as the social identities and antagonisms that need to be brought together, always imperfectly and incompletely, into the chain of equivalence, it is an empty signifier that can best perform the symbolic leadership function of the central link in that chain (or, more practically speaking, the emptier it is the better it can perform that task). The empty signifier can of course be purely symbolic – an idea, a slogan, an icon, a name, etc – but Laclau is clear that the very best empty signifiers are individuals (unsurprisingly perhaps if we think of the empty signifier's hegemonic function as one of *leadership*). And so we will return to the empty signifier in Chapter 4.2.

## 3.2 Podemos: Prefiguring the People

### 3.2.1 The Populist Wager

The core of Podemos' initial wager is summarised by the party's first, and so far only leader, Pablo Iglesias:<sup>645</sup> 'economic meltdown' in the Eurozone, and the austerity policies imposed by the PSOE in response, led to what Iglesias saw as a Gramscian 'organic crisis' in the '78 regime'.<sup>646</sup> 'The principal social expression of this regime crisis was the 15M movement', and 'The fact that it found no [immediate] electoral expression demonstrated that the hegemonic crisis ... was also a crisis of the existing Spanish left'.<sup>647</sup> Iglesias seems to be more of a Gramscian himself, a reference that appears much more frequently than Laclau in his book, underlined by his assertions on TV since 2013 that 'I am a communist', and confirmed again in the interview that accompanies the English translation of his book *Politics in a Time of Crisis*, where, in response to a question about Laclau and Mouffe's lack of attention to 'the economic field', Iglesias states:

I acknowledge that Laclau is very honest in recognizing a problem that Gramscians, and especially neo-Gramscians, have in explaining or tackling the relations between structure and superstructure. *On Populist Reason* solves that problem by departing clearly from Marxism, let's say, bypassing the whole problem. *I wouldn't identify theoretically with that,*

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<sup>644</sup> Laclau 2015 [1994]: 66.

<sup>645</sup> The statement 'so far only' will no longer be true as of 13 June 2021, when Iglesias' successor as Secretary General will be elected.

<sup>646</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014]: 27-28. The most intense concentration of both domestic austerity, and the sense of a loss of sovereignty (/democracy) to Europe, being an amendment to the Spanish Constitution's Article 135, agreed by PP and PSOE in September 2011 under pressure from the Troika, that legally mandated caps on national, regional and municipal budget deficits. The 78 regime is the name given, after the Constitution of that year, to Spain's post-Franco democratic settlement, heavily compromised as it was by a lack of any truth and reconciliation, nor de-Francoisation of the institutions or economy, and so the persistence of both extreme corruption, and hospitality for the far right in the bosom of the political system via the Partido Popular.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid: 102-03.

but I would acknowledge that in *On Populist Reason*, Laclau proposes a very useful tool, or a very useful theoretical mechanism, for a practical interpretation of the autonomy of politics.<sup>648</sup>

In *Politics in a Time of Crisis* we see a number of further examples of Iglesias' transition from his own Gramscianism to a Laclauianism inspired by Íñigo Errejón. For example:

politics does not pertain only to the state; ... both inside and outside the state it may sometimes be a matter of chess (the war of positions); and that the game must be played on the board of culture and its institutions so as to get into the best possible position prior to action (the war of movements). ... one should never assimilate the opponent's language, but instead contest the lexical terrain. When our adversaries use terms like caste, revolving door, the 'Berlusconization' of politics, eviction, precarity, etc, they're acknowledging the displacement of the fight onto a terrain that favours us. ... The great medium of our time, and the most important for ascertaining and dictating what people think (even more than education, the family or the Church), is television.<sup>649</sup>

So it would seem that Iglesias' Gramscianism was already taking him beyond simple class reductionism and onto the heavily discursive terrain of focusing on media and language, and that Laclau, despite Iglesias' misgivings, seemed to offer useful tools for thinking hegemony in the 21st century. The most firmly Laclauian figure in the early life of Podemos, however, was Íñigo Errejón, Iglesias' long-time friend and co-author, colleague on *La Tuerka*, then Podemos' Secretary of Policy, Strategy and Campaigns throughout 2014-17, and later Iglesias' political rival. Errejón's doctoral thesis was a Laclauian hegemonic discourse analysis of the Movement for Socialism in Bolivia.<sup>650</sup> His Laclauian influence is clear from the widespread discussion of Laclau on the *La Tuerka* television shows,<sup>651</sup> and from the epilogue to *Politics in a Time of Crisis* (which was written after the formation of Podemos, while the main part of the book was written before). Here Iglesias describes how 15M created the germs of a new 'popular identity', which could be 'discursively' moulded and 'politicized along electoral lines.'

The task, then, was to aggregate the new demands generated by the crisis around a mediatic leadership, capable of dichotomizing the political space. ... In Spain, the spectre of an organic crisis was generating the conditions for the articulation of a dichotomizing discourse,

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid: 113-14; emphasis added.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid: 27-28.

<sup>650</sup> Errejón 2012.

<sup>651</sup> *La Tuerka* is the first of several TV shows (terrestrial and online) produced by Iglesias alongside colleagues from Complutense University and social movements, often presented by him, and which crucially informed the focus of their strategy on media presence, face recognition, and rhetoric.

capable of building the 15M's new ideological constructs into a popular subject, in opposition to the elites.<sup>652</sup>

To read the above as the archetypical practical expression of a Laclauian politics requires no stretch of the imagination. Clearly here Iglesias is describing the construction of a chain of equivalence around a popular antagonism that is not fundamentally structured by class. The focus on discourse and 'mediatic leadership' begins to reveal the Laclauianism that would come to define the Podemos of Vistalegre I (its first constituent 'citizen assembly').<sup>653</sup> A quote from Errejón illustrates his radical Laclauian discursive ontology well, extending the implications of this radically discursive approach to a counter-hegemonic strategy.

the key is the performative dimension of discourse, which is not only what subjects say about themselves, it is about a construction carried out by the subject themselves that, simultaneously, constructs them. That is to say, the subject does not precede discourse, rather both are constructed in the same process. This reflection covers discourse, the media, ideology ... and defines a concrete form of power through the possibility to generate explanations of the world. ... There exist possibilities of articulation for a good part of those social sectors that are discontented, there exist possibilities of articulation in a sense of political transformation, provided that we are capable of presenting political dispute in different terms to those in which the elites maintain hegemony. I think the possibilities of Podemos come through presenting a dispute that has one foot in the common sense of the time and the other in the possibilities for extracting what Gramsci called 'nuclei of good sense', that is to say, a transformative possibility from which to perform a political intervention that changes the rules of the game, that does not aspire to locate itself in the arrangements that the elites control but that alters them, that cuts them in half. I believe that this can be done based on a discursive practice and through the construction of a mediatic leadership.<sup>654</sup>

This rhetorical aspect is the positive half to constructing a counter-hegemonic people. The negative half is, returning one last time, the popular antagonism of defining an adversary. For Podemos this was *la casta*: 'the caste', 'the elite' or 'the establishment'; counterposed not with the working class but with the people, framed in synergy with 15M slogans such as 'we are the ones at

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<sup>652</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014]: 104-05.

<sup>653</sup> Translation note: here the Spanish word *mediático* has been translated as 'mediatic'. In English, 'mediatic' simply means 'of or relating to the media', so the intended meaning of 'mediatic leadership' is implied, but it must be added that the Spanish *mediático* carries both that meaning as well as commonly serving as an adjective for 'high-profile', and as a noun for 'celebrity'. So the Spanish is a bit more emphatic than the English translation might appear. Not just media-friendly, but seeking to function to some extent at the level of celebrity.

<sup>654</sup> Errejón 2014a.

the bottom, going for the ones at the top', the kind of rhetoric found in Occupy in the form of the 99% versus the 1%. Another key strategic element in the populist strategy of early Podemos is the 'beyond left and right' rhetoric, as Podemos tried to position itself as more of an empty signifier. Dolan describes this as a rejection of many of 'the traditional metaphors of left and right in favour of a populist discourse of democracy, the citizen and the people versus the establishment'.<sup>655</sup>

### 3.2.2 Podemos as Digital Movement-Party

Here we return briefly to party theory in order to provide a broad-strokes description the kind of party that Podemos became. I argue that early Podemos specifically can best be understood as a 'digital movement-party', combining the well-established category of movement-party with Gerbaudo's proposal of the 'digital party'.<sup>656</sup> Katz and Mair, prominent contemporary political scientists working on political parties, incisively (if inadvertently) sum up one of the key difficulties of the Podemos wager. On the one hand, today political parties are inseparable from dominant conceptions of politics as such, and certainly from any conception of a functioning liberal-democratic system of governance.

Parties ... provide the coordination within representative assemblies, and across different branches or agencies of government, that is required for the efficient conduct of business. As a result, effective democracy is not just competition among individuals, but competition among individuals organized into political parties. ... democracy is what results when people are free to form political parties, those parties compete in periodic free and fair elections, and the winners of those elections take effective control of the government until the next elections.<sup>657</sup>

This myopic arena conception of politics might be inadequate if taken as an absolute definition, but if taken as a point of emphasis, as the claim that parties, elections and the state are still highly privileged sites that determine not only socio-economic outcomes but also hegemonic directions of travel, then this could be said to have been validated by the experience of the 15M, as it reached the critical 2012 period of malaise and realised the need for responsive representatives in seats of institutional power. Podemos, then, had to recuperate the party form in the face of the much-discussed disintegration of trust in party politics:

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<sup>655</sup> Dolan 2015. See also Iglesias writing, before the formal birth of Podemos, about 'leftism' as the modern version of Lenin's 'Infantile Disorder' (Iglesias 2015 [2014]: 16-18).

<sup>656</sup> Gerbaudo 2019.

<sup>657</sup> Katz and Mair 2018: 1.

parties have become one of the *least* trusted political institutions; politicians are almost everywhere the *least* trusted professionals; with a few upward blips, turnout in elections is declining markedly, as is membership in political parties and identification with them.<sup>658</sup>

Indeed, across the movements of the squares, a particularly visceral anti-party sentiment took hold, usually equally as critical of centre-right/centre-left neoliberal duopolies as of the proselytising Trotskyist paper sellers. In many square occupations (as in many of the social forums before them, as in various social centre projects of the period, as well as on many protests) political parties of any stripe were discouraged or even expressly banned from recruitment or promotion or having any explicit presence.<sup>659</sup> So it was both through strategic necessity as well as political will that Podemos could not be a political party in too recognisable a form; and yet its self-conscious existence as an 'electoral war machine' has demanded much in the way of continuity with the traditional party form, in its ever increasing centralisation, verticality and homogeneity.

With the label 'movement-party' we can effectively summarise some of the many tensions and contradictions of Podemos' wager that the party form would be an appropriate vessel for moulding the energy, symbolic capital, as well as the horizontalist democratic expectations of 15M into a more organisationally scalable, institutionally powerful, and hegemonically universalisable project. An alternative category is Gerbaudo's 'digital party'. Whereas movement-parties appear as a kind of aberration of the party form, Gerbaudo's digital party is, he claims, quite the opposite: it is emerging as the new hegemonic party form. Spreading first from European pirate parties to populist movement-parties like Podemos and Italy's Five Star Movement, Gerbaudo sees their mechanisms and rhetoric of mass digital participation now spreading even to the old guard such as the UK Labour Party. The 'digital party' is characterised by the democratic promise of online plebiscitary participation, and the contradictory reality of what Gerbaudo calls 'distributed centralisation', with participation in fact tightly managed by an indispensable, charismatic 'hyperleadership'.<sup>660</sup> The digital party is arguably taking over from the neoliberal 'media party', just as that overtook the 'caucus party', which overtook the 'mass party', etc, as the dominant, most competitive party model. The digital party thesis, at one point, seemed to prematurely perceive Podemos as an already finished product, as an already coherent whole, ignoring some of the persistent autonomist-horizontalist elements that made early Podemos so interesting, reifying the digital party model as a

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid, emphasis theirs.

<sup>659</sup> Gerbaudo 2019: 25 (on the social fora). Flesher Fominaya highlights the 'no acronyms, no flags' slogan popular among the Spanish housing movements of the 2000s (2015: 157), and the 'refusal of participation of institutional left actors (as representatives of organizations, not as individuals) in 15-M movement assemblies' (ibid: 145). This sentiment was further reflected in the Ganemos principle of confluence, that participants participate as individuals not as representatives of other parties or organisations, and in Carmena's repeated emphasis that Ahora Madrid is not a party and that she has nothing to do with Podemos.

<sup>660</sup> Gerbaudo 2019.

project in itself, rather than as emergent characteristics of the attempt to solve the intractable, interminable task of reconciling the diverse membership ranks and their diverse democratic expectations. However, history seems to have proven Gerbaudo correct in identifying the dominant trends of centralisation, homogenisation and demobilisation of the base that have indeed accompanied the steady entrenchment of Iglesias' hyperleadership. Our focus on early Podemos, however, makes it worthwhile to incorporate an analysis of the 'movement-party' category, which helps to capture some of the tensions of Podemos' more vibrant and dynamic early years, its uncertain potential as confluence of such a diverse range of *15Mayistas*.

Podemos does bear only limited compliance with the core features of the archetypical movement-party, as described, for example, by Herbert Kitschelt; but the limitations of the category's applicability are also instructive. The criterion of making 'little investment in a formal organizational party structure' applies partially to Podemos' earliest days, before its first constituent Citizen Assembly (Vistalegre I), though there was the impressive if haphazard rush of formation of local Circles.<sup>661</sup> Podemos quickly formalised (free) membership through online signup, a central innovation of the digital party form, contrasting with Kitschelt's criterion that a movement-party has 'no formal definition of the membership role'.<sup>662</sup> If Podemos ever lacked 'a staff of paid professionals and a physical infrastructure of communication (offices, vehicles, etc.),' then it was not for very long. In terms of the classical movement-party's lack of 'an institutionalized system of aggregating interests through designated organs and officers with authority to formulate binding decisions and commitments on behalf of the party', again this applies somewhat pre-Vistalegre I, but not at all post- Vistalegre I; and clearly such an institutionalisation was always the intention.<sup>663</sup>

If we continue our reading of Kitschelt, we begin to find where his conception of the movement-party meets up with Podemos. Podemos has indeed attempted a 'dual track' political practice, to some extent combining 'formal democratic competition with extra-institutional mobilization'; again, with more emphasis so far on the former than the latter, but certainly the balance is a constant, explicit concern of both the leadership and membership. Podemos also finds itself balanced simultaneously between what Kitschelt describes as two different possible organisational models:

At one extreme, movement parties may be led by a charismatic leader with a patrimonial staff and personal following over which s/he exercises unconditional and unquestioned control. At the other extreme, movement parties may attempt to realize a grassroots

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<sup>661</sup> Kitschelt 2006: 280.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

democratic, participatory coordination among activists. ... Both charismatic patrimonialism and grassroots democracy lead to a capricious, volatile and incomplete collective preference schedule.<sup>664</sup>

This latter criterion captures Podemos with almost uncomfortable accuracy, in fact overflowing the definition by spanning across the proposed dichotomy, capturing very effectively one of the key tensions within early Podemos, as between the centralising impulse of the electoral war machine under Iglesias' charismatic hyperleadership, and the *15Mayista* common-sense of decentralisation and participation. Brais Fernández, at the time a member of both Podemos and Anticapitalistas,<sup>665</sup> summarised this tension well in describing Podemos as torn between two distinct political models. One model, 'recognising the politicising potential of the electoral route and the importance of conquering spaces in the institutions, opts to build a project rooted in the daily life of the working social majority, ... based on community self-organisation from below;' the other 'sees that such building should not necessarily be done in parallel, but should subordinate itself to an immediate electoral victory in the general elections ..., and that the reconstruction of social relations in a post-neoliberal order' should begin once the state institutions are conquered, and be centred on those institutions.<sup>666</sup> We could further understand this tension as existing between a predominantly populist-instrumental politics and a predominantly *asambleario*-prefigurative politics.

So 'movement-party' is not completely inaccurate, but neither is it sufficient; and the same can be said of Gerbaudo's 'digital party'. The combined category of the 'digital movement-party' better captures the tensions in play during the early phase we are concerned with here, better grasping how Podemos tried to reconcile multiple strategic, organisational and ideological identities: the various movementisms of the *15Mayistas*, from radical autonomist horizontalism to citizenism, social syndicalism, and the idea of the 'popular movement'; alongside the manifold conceptions of the party, from Anticapitalistas' (modern version of) Trotskyism, to the social democratic identity that Podemos at times seemed to be seeking to revitalise,<sup>667</sup> to the technopolitical sources of much of the digital infrastructure of the new digital politics, which come with their own heterodox positionalities between movement and party. Podemos figures have discussed a distinction between Podemos as 'electoral war machine' and Podemos as 'popular movement'. Of course, the problem for the popular movement, and for the *asamblearistas* in Podemos, is that the electoral cycle never stops. After the June 2016 general election, assuming a period of relative calm under Rajoy's

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<sup>664</sup> Ibid: 280-81.

<sup>665</sup> Anticapitalistas officially left Podemos in May 2020, so Fernández may no longer be a member of both organisations.

<sup>666</sup> Fernández cited in Stobart 2014b. Recall here Chapter 2.2.3, 'A Brief History of Municipalism', and its distinction between idiosyncratic and subordinate municipalisms.

<sup>667</sup> See for example Iglesias responding, sometime around 2018, to an interviewer reminding him of his past 'I am a communist' claim: 'I would like to apply a social democratic programme ... socialist, like Allende' (La Sexta 2016).

minority government, Podemos began to speak of this turn from ‘electoral war machine’ to ‘popular movement’, implying a more prefigurative understanding of the party. And then Rajoy’s government fell and Podemos entered into a confidence and supply arrangement with a minority PSOE government, followed by new national elections in 2019, and eventually Podemos entering into the current governing coalition with PSOE; and so existence as electoral war machine has been virtually permanent so far. This pattern tells us where Podemos’ priorities lie between populism and *asamblearismo*, between party and movement; and the consistent trumping of the latter by the former is a core part of the Podemos story so far, and of the difficulties of maintaining any radically prefigurative internal democracy alongside a populist strategy. While both Ganemos and Podemos strategies arguably express both populist and *asambleario* elements, we can think of Ganemos Madrid as an attempt to *represent asamblearismo*, and Podemos as an attempt to *horizontalise representation*. That is, Ganemos envisioned a vibrant, organised base, forming the beginnings of a dual power situation, with its own representatives in the institutions, but with strong powers of control over those representatives; while Podemos has directed some of the *asambleario* ethos towards a more responsive, more accountable, more participatory model of representation. What this means concretely for the organisation of Podemos circa Vistalegre I follows below.

### 3.2.3 Vistalegre I: Constituting the Digital Movement-Party

Nearly a year after legally registering as a party, after already seeing breakout success in the European elections of May 2014, and already with over a thousand active Circles (local, ‘horizontally organised’ Podemos assemblies),<sup>668</sup> Podemos finally fully constituted itself as an organisation at the end of 2014. Its inaugural Citizen Assembly encompassed a two month process, mostly online, but centred around a two day physical assembly on 18-19 October, held at the Palacio Vistalegre in Madrid, from which the constituent process takes its nickname: Vistalegre I. As Podemos had no formal structure at all going into Vistalegre I, selection of candidates could not take place until the structure itself was agreed, and so the process had to be divided into a number of phases: in September members could submit drafts for what would, if selected, become Podemos’ constitution: the organisational, ethical and political documents. Until 15 October these drafts would be debated in Plaza Podemos, a dedicated subreddit, with drafters encouraged to converge where possible to reduce the final number of proposals. The physical assembly was the opportunity for the final documents to be presented and debated live, with audience members, both in person at Palacio Vistalegre and at home, able to vote on questions for speakers via the Appgree smartphone

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<sup>668</sup> Podemos London 2014.



application.<sup>669</sup> As can be seen below (figure 6), at least five proposals were presented for each of the three categories of constitutional document. Only two groups proposed three of their own documents: Equipo Enfermeras, and Claro que Podemos, the latter unsobly declaring in its subtitle that it had the support of Podemos figurehead Pablo Iglesias. Iglesias had already been placed top of the electoral list in the European elections, he was the party's primary spokesperson in the media, and his face had even been used, controversially, but very successfully, as the party logo on the European election ballot paper. 'Claro que Podemos – Equipo Pablo Iglesias' achieved a resounding victory, to no one's surprise.

**TOTAL VOTOS: 112070**

### **DOCUMENTO ÉTICO**

1. CLARO QUE PODEMOS – EQUIPO PABLO IGLESIAS (90451 VOTOS, 80.71%)
2. PODEMOS: PARTICIPACIÓN, TRANSPARENCIA Y DEMOCRACIA (3108 VOTOS, 2.77%)
3. ÉTICA Y TRANSPARENCIA (2626 VOTOS, 2.34%)
4. EQUIPO ENFERMERAS (2261 VOTOS, 2.02%)
5. EQUIPO 10 CÍRCULOS (1069 VOTOS, 0.95%)

### **DOCUMENTO POLÍTICO**

1. CLARO QUE PODEMOS – EQUIPO PABLO IGLESIAS (90451 VOTOS, 80.71%)
2. CONSTRUYENDO PUEBLO (3269 VOTOS, 2.92%)
3. EQUIPO ENFERMERAS (2022 VOTOS, 1.80%)
4. DEMOCRACIA RADICAL (1611 VOTOS, 1.44%)
5. DEMOCRACIA Y JUSTICIA SOCIAL (874 VOTOS, 0.78%)

### **DOCUMENTO ORGANIZATIVO**

1. CLARO QUE PODEMOS – EQUIPO PABLO IGLESIAS (90451 VOTOS, 80.71%)
2. SUMANDO PODEMOS (13864 VOTOS, 12.37%)
3. EQUIPO ENFERMERAS (867 VOTOS, 0.77%)
4. JURISTAS MADRID (515 VOTOS, 0.46%)
5. DECIDE LA CIUDADANÍA (416 VOTOS, 0.37%)

Figure 6, voting results for constitutional documents at Vistalegre I.<sup>670</sup>

The only document not endorsed by Iglesias to win more than 3% of the vote was the organisational document labelled Sumando Podemos, backed by Anticapitalistas. The differences between this and the winning Claro que Podemos organisation document are subtle but important, and some brief comparative work will be useful as the direction of travel marked by their differences

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<sup>669</sup> They would return to Vistalegre once more on 15 November to announce the results of the election of candidates to fill the positions established by the constitutional documents chosen in October (Podemos 2014b).

<sup>670</sup> <[https://asambleaciudadana.podemos.info/resultados\\_completos](https://asambleaciudadana.podemos.info/resultados_completos)> accessed 26 May 2021.

is the same direction in which Podemos continued to travel after Vistalegre I: broadly speaking, away from *asamblearismo* and ever more towards presidentialism and hyperleadership. The Sumando Podemos document can be summarised in the slogan, much used at the time (though it does not appear in the document itself): ‘all power to the Circles’.<sup>671</sup> Here Podemos is imagined ‘as a platform of popular citizen empowerment,’<sup>672</sup> which should be ‘organised democratically, encouraging debate and the open, respectful and direct participation of all members in decision-making.’<sup>673</sup> Participation must be ‘inclusive and accessible’, and thus take place both online and offline.<sup>674</sup> Particular emphasis is placed on ‘ensuring that the digital divide does not impede people’s direct participation’, pointing towards the general differentiator that is Anticapitalistas’ valorisation of face to face deliberation and decision-making (primarily in the Circles, with decisions and initiatives delegated upwards), over the dominance of online plebiscites that would in fact come to characterise Podemos (although they do acknowledge the need for a great deal of online participation, the emphasis is clearly different to that of Claro que Podemos).<sup>675</sup> This relatively more delegative model of internal party democracy is made more explicit in the document’s fifth core organisational principle:

The organs of representation and organisation of Podemos and its Circles will have the sole task of channelling the will of the people. They will never decide on issues of great political importance. On the contrary, these decisions must always revert to the totality of participants in the corresponding territorial or thematic area.<sup>676</sup>

The seventh core principle further establishes that:

Podemos’ basic organisational unit is the Circle. The heterogeneity and vitality of the Circles must be cultivated and protected by an organisational schema that respects their political and financial autonomy. The Circle is the tool with which Podemos promotes participation, debate and an active relationship with society.<sup>677</sup>

An even greater sense of Anticapitalistas’ relative *asamblearismo* becomes clearer still under the tenth core principle:

Participation in Podemos must be as frequent and continuous as possible if we want the movement to be controlled by the people, adequately representing their opinions and desires. The dichotomy between horizontality and efficiency constitutes a false debate: we

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<sup>671</sup> See for example Urbán 2014.

<sup>672</sup> Sumando Podemos 2014: 4.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid: 5.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid: 6.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

must and WE CAN achieve both. Therefore, Podemos promotes the direct participation of all its members, including the capacity to make proposals.<sup>678</sup>

Once again, particular emphasis is placed on the need for ‘physical spaces’ of deliberation alongside online processes, ‘especially the Circles.’ The capacity of members to make proposals, ‘or initiate processes of debate and decision,’ is described as a fundamental expression of ‘popular sovereignty’.<sup>679</sup> Great importance is placed on the power of recall, as is ‘the aspiration to consensus. That is, the construction of unity starting from plurality. We must strive to integrate, since inclusivity is fundamental to democracy.’<sup>680</sup> Appeals to popular sovereignty imply that Anticapitalistas accepted at least something of the populist framework that already clearly defined Podemos, but it is a greatly horizontalised, delegatised, *asambleario* vision of left populism.<sup>681</sup> Crucially, the document would not create a Secretary General. There would be a Citizen Council, which would have intermediary executive and coordinative functions at the national level, with a smaller Coordination Team nested within the Citizen Council as ultimate day-to-day ‘executive organ of Podemos’;<sup>682</sup> and three Spokespersons. These Spokespersons would have the role of ‘representing Podemos,’ making ‘proposals directly to the Citizen Council,’ and would have the power to convene the Citizen Council.<sup>683</sup> All elections would be by preferential vote: Single Transferable Vote (STV) for multi-winner elections (such as Spokespersons, Citizen Council, as well as the Coordination Team), and a system ‘similar’ to Alternative Vote (AV), also known as Instant-Runoff Vote (IRV), for single-winner elections (such as some plebiscites). Importantly, the Citizen Council (as well as the Commission of Rights and Guarantees, the party’s constitutional committee) would be primarily (60 seats out of 99, for the Citizen Council) chosen from ‘individual candidacies’, that is, there would be no lists. A further 20 seats on the Citizen Council would be chosen by sortition (as would 6 of 14 seats on the Commission).

The victorious *Claro que Podemos* ‘Organisational Principles’ document expresses similar rhetoric and calls for many of the same organisational organs as *Sumando Podemos*, but with some instructive differences. It established the structure visualised below (figure 7): the *Asamblea Ciudadana* (Citizen Assembly) describing the entirety of the membership, which elects an individual

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid: 7.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid: 8.

<sup>681</sup> Anticapitalistas do subtly counter the party’s populist image when discussing the ‘relation with the social movements’: ‘With their help, it will be easier to resist pressure from the media when they opt for a “strategy of fear” and present the program of the social majorities as “unfeasible” or “populist”. For this, the existence of autonomous social movements with their own independent agenda is essential’ (ibid: 33-34). Subtle indeed, but the scare quotes clearly imply that they did not wish to be seen as ‘populist’.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid: 16.

<sup>683</sup> The Citizen Council could also be convened on the petition of 10% of Podemos member, 10% of valid Circles, or 25% of the Citizen Council itself (ibid: 14).

Secretario General (General Secretary), an 81 member Consejo Ciudadano (Citizen Council), and a Comité de Garantías Democráticas (Committee of Democratic Guarantees, the constitutional arbitration committee).

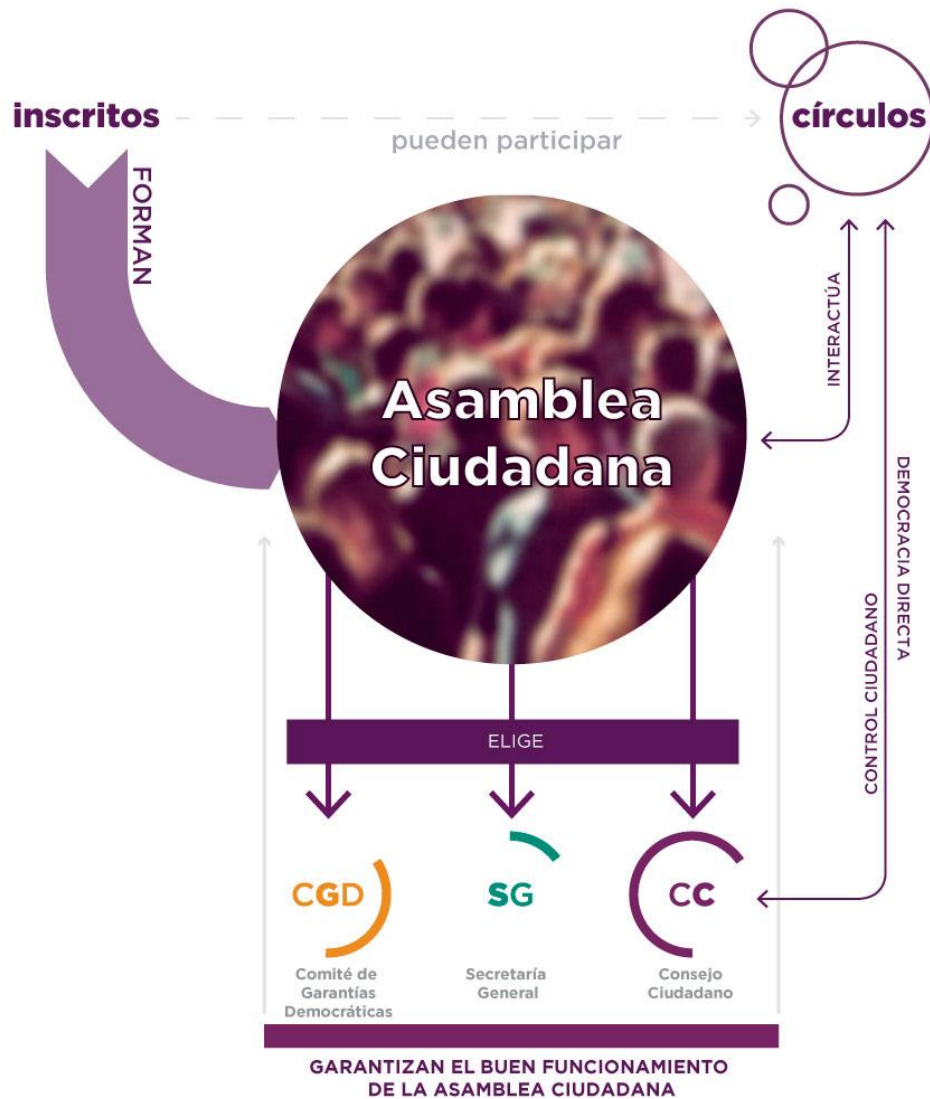


Figure 7, organigram of Podemos as constituted at Vistalegre I, as found in the final version of the agreed Organisational Principles document.<sup>684</sup>

Much like the Sumando Podemos document, Claro que Podemos speak of a ‘commitment to citizen participation, ... transparency, ... and the requirement of democratic control,’<sup>685</sup> a balance between online and offline participation, and bridging the ‘digital divide’, but with relatively more emphasis and detail when it comes to digital participation (specifying tools such as Plaza Podemos, Appgree and Loomio). The third section of the preamble, ‘Democratic Control’, does not mention the Circles or any power of members to initiate decision-making processes (as was a key focus for

<sup>684</sup> Claro que Podemos 2014a: 14.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid: 7.

Anticapitalistas; they are mentioned elsewhere, but it is perhaps instructive that they are not foregrounded to the same degree), but rather focuses on accountability of elected representatives through mechanisms of transparency and open access to information; though it does mention the power of recall.<sup>686</sup>

The Claro que Podemos document shares with Sumando Podemos the definition of the Circles as ‘basic unit of the organisation of Podemos’.<sup>687</sup> They can be territorial or sectoral/thematic (the latter having a particularly important role in policy development); both have the power to call a party-wide plebiscite, with support of 20% of members or 20% of valid Circles, though Sectoral Circles can also call a plebiscite with just 60% support of the Circle itself, giving them much more constitutional power than the Territorial Circles.<sup>688</sup> Circles can also mandate debates within the Citizen Council, though no mandatory power is stipulated beyond mere debate. Sectoral Circles can also ‘move their initiatives’ to the thematic areas of the Citizen Council, though again this is left vague and without any mandate beyond being taken into consideration. These processes are visualised below, figure 8.

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<sup>686</sup> Ibid: 9.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid: 11.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid: 32.

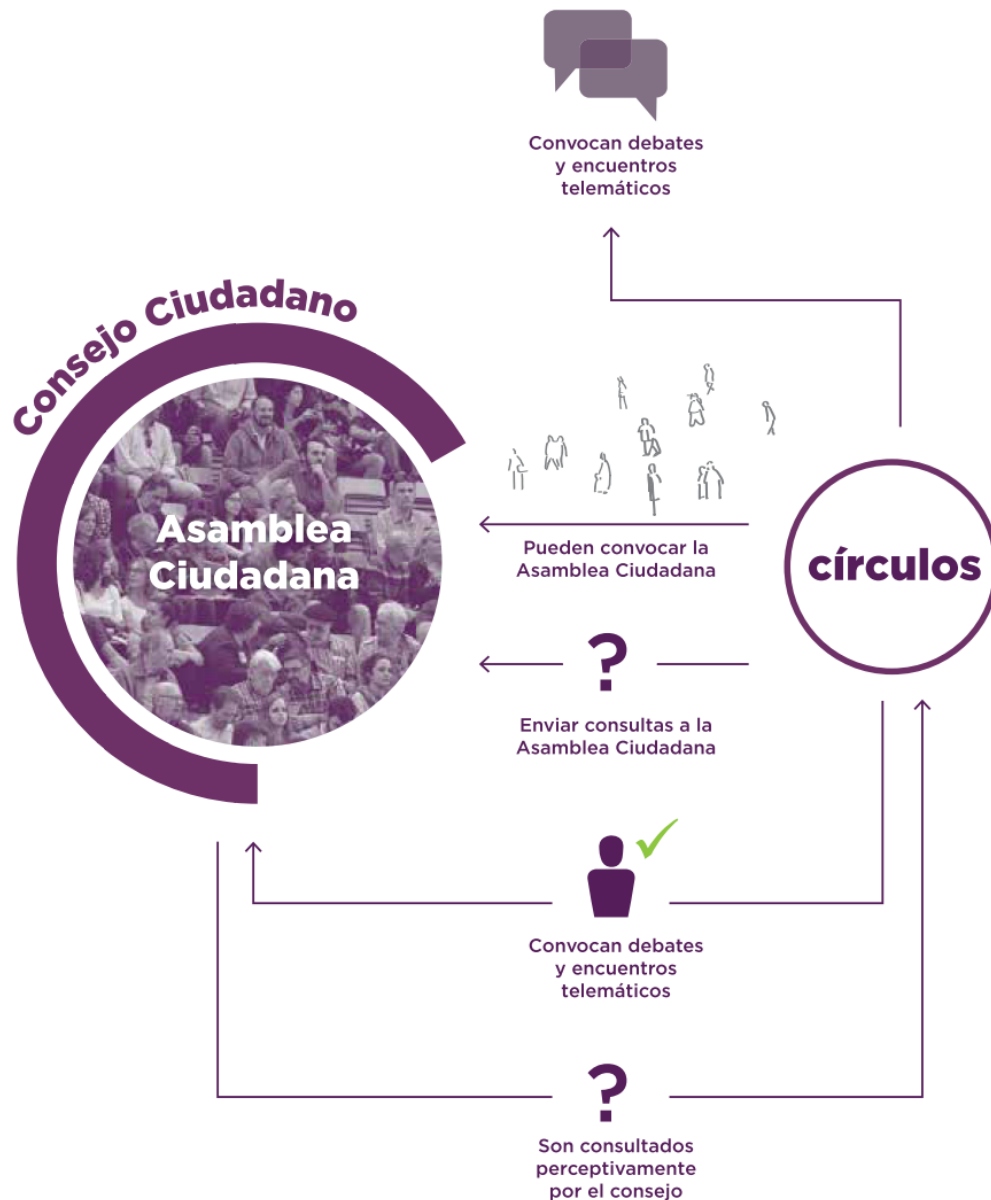


Figure 8, organigram of the powers of the Podemos Circles.<sup>689</sup>

The Citizen Council imagined by Claro que Podemos is similar to that of Sumando Podemos, serving intermediary and sporadic executive, organisational and sectoral functions in between full Citizen Assemblies, and with a smaller Coordination Council serving as the day-to-day executive body. A crucial difference is how members of these two groups are chosen. Whereas the Sumando Podemos Coordination Team was to be directly elected by the Citizen Assembly using STV, the Claro que Podemos Coordination Council will be ‘named, *on the proposal of the Secretary General,*’ by the Citizen Council.<sup>690</sup> The Citizen Council itself is to be elected preferentially, with open lists (as opposed

<sup>689</sup> Ibid: 34.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid: 19, emphasis added.

to individual candidacies), counted using the Borda system, with no sortition.<sup>691</sup> For multi-winner elections, although there are even less proportional systems, Borda is still much more majoritarian than, for example, Dowdall (a more proportional modified version of Borda, used by Ahora Madrid; see Chapter 4.1.2). It is difficult to compare Borda directly to STV in terms of proportionality, but the key difference lies in Claro que Podemos stipulating lists where Sumando Podemos called for individual candidacies. Clearly the former benefits the majority faction over minorities. The direction of travel here is more clearly illustrated by a brief diversion to Podemos' second National Citizen Assembly of 2017. There three main factions battled over the Citizen Council's electoral system: the Pablistas, Anticapitalistas, and now also the Errejionistas. The broad character of the different proposals was predictable enough. All three now acknowledged the need for lists. Anticapitalistas, the smallest of the three factions, had the most proportional proposal: Dowdall. Errejón, whose faction was clearly smaller than that of Iglesias, proposed a middle-ground solution. Iglesias' platform proposed 'Desborda', a version of Borda modified to be even more majoritarian, which ultimately and only barely secured him an absolute majority on the Citizen Council, a majority that would have been lost if any of the other systems were used.<sup>692</sup>

The position of Secretary General holds all of the powers of Anticapitalistas' three Spokespersons, but also much more besides. The fundamental difference is of course that of singularity versus plurality (of great significance to the discussion of leadership in Chapter 4.2). As mentioned, the Secretary General also has the profound power of choosing their own Coordination Council (as opposed to Anticapitalistas' proposal for a directly elected Coordination Team). A further crucial difference, and one that would greatly shape the constitutional experience of Podemos going forward, is that Anticapitalistas' proposed Spokespersons would not have the power to call plebiscites; that right would be reserved for the Citizen Council (by simple majority) and the membership (5% of members, 20% of Circles, or 1% of members plus one third of the Citizen Council; with similar rules for recall plebiscites, but with slightly higher thresholds). The Claro que Podemos document created similar processes, with slightly higher thresholds again for the membership, but with the hugely significant addition that the Secretary General may call a plebiscite purely on their own authority.<sup>693</sup>

The primary theme so far is, of course, centralisation. Early Podemos may have been more internally democratic than many traditional parties (though even this comparison has come increasingly under question over time), but compared to Ganemos' radical *asamblearismo* or

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid: 20.

<sup>692</sup> García de Blas 2017.

<sup>693</sup> The history of the plebiscites will be further explored in Chapter 4.2.

Anticapitalistas' relative *asamblearismo*, Podemos' actually existing Pablista constitutionality can be described as relatively *instrumentalist* rather than radically *prefigurative*.<sup>694</sup> Which is to say that the democratic aspirations of its most radical members have been consistently subordinated to the perceived need for a 'strong leadership', as Jesús Montero (Podemos Madrid General Secretary) often put it, in order to strategically manage the Laclauian discursive strategy.<sup>695</sup> In summary, the key differences between the more instrumentalist Pablista constitutionality and the more *asambleario* constitutionality proposed by Anticapitalistas are: a single Secretary General, who can chose their own executive inner circle and call plebiscites, rather than three Spokespersons with no power to call plebiscites, and an elected executive; a more majoritarian voting system to ensure the Secretary General has a majority of allies on the Citizen Council (with no sortition); a less clearly defined and less constitutionally powerful role for the Circles (especially in terms of the difference between centrally-defined plebiscites and grassroots initiatives); as well as less frequent Citizen Assemblies (convened at least every three years, versus at least every two; and called by 25% of members or 30% of valid Circles, versus 10% of members or 20% of Circles).

Montero's perspective on this is particularly important, as he was the leader of Podemos Madrid (also a relatively centralised, vertical organisation) during the formation of Ahora Madrid; i.e. his was objectively – constitutionally – the most important view of how to apply Podemos' priorities and organisational philosophy to the Ahora Madrid project. In our interview, Montero defended the balance struck within Podemos between representation and *asamblearismo*, between horizontality and verticality (somewhat echoing the Anticapitalista false dichotomy rhetoric cited earlier):

Podemos is an *asambleario* and representative party, horizontal *and* vertical; but it cannot be only an *asambleario*, horizontal party, nor can it be only a representative, vertical party. If Podemos were only a vertical, centralised, representative party, we would be an old party. We would not have seen such success. If Podemos were only an *asambleario*, horizontal party, we would be 15M, but we would not have entered the institutions, we would not have begun to change our country. So Podemos has to be A and B, it has to be *asambleario* and representative, it has to have assembly logics and representative logics, it has to have vertical logics and horizontal logics.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>694</sup> A further example of instrumentalism, particularly Machiavellian if Stobart's interpretation is to be believed, lies in the Claro que Podemos Ethical Document, which excluded members of 'political organisations' from positions of leadership. Stobart (2014b) argues that this was 'clearly aimed at further marginalising Anticapitalistas, and in particular the popular MEP Teresa Rodríguez.'

<sup>695</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.



Montero sees an important role for the Circles, as not a 'vanguard, but a space of participation where people can come, learn, participate, participate learning, learn participating'.<sup>697</sup> He values how online voting can help avoid the antagonisms that he believes are more likely to emerge in face to face debates, and how bureaucracy can serve a Weberian 'rational function' in helping to create 'innovative, democratic processes'.<sup>698</sup> His overriding concern, however, is always 'strong leadership'. The party is the engineer of the chain of equivalence:

Political parties are that historic laboratory where the demands of organised civil society are gathered, but transformed, because the political proposal cannot be the sum of the demands of every one of the interest groups.<sup>699</sup>

Strong leadership is essential to the effective, strategic management of that aggregative function, and Montero believes that its efficacy had at that point (in 2018) been proven, both by Podemos and by municipalism:

Without those strong leaderships, we would not be here. The Trotskyists complained that the ballot slips in the European election had the logo of Pablo Iglesias. Nevertheless, its electoral efficacy has been demonstrated. ... Ada Colau repeated it. ... Without Manuela there is no mayoralty.<sup>700</sup>

Going further still, Montero seemed to channel Laclau and Freud (whose theories of leadership will be discussed further in Chapter 4.2) in describing the fundamental role of leadership in mediating the chain of equivalence, and grounding it in the leader themselves as empty signifier:

In capitalist, individualist societies leaderships are always going to be a fundamental factor. Leaderships are not bad, what is bad is lack of control over leaderships. ... The leadership is an attractor, that place exterior to each of us that neutralises the self-destruction of narcissism. The leader is they who loves everyone and no one in particular ... it is a libidinal transference of narcissism in order not to self-destruct.<sup>701</sup>

Leadership is the deciding factor for Podemos' instrumentalist, populist constitutionality. While incorporating elements of *asamblearismo*, Podemos' populism has consistently sought to resolve the prefigurative tension in favour of leadership, efficiency, centralisation and public image.

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

However, in line with Chapter 2's analysis of a diversity of types and functions of prefiguration, this is not to say that Podemos is not prefigurative in any sense at all. For one, following the prefigurative-ontological claims of path dependency, one could argue that Podemos is prefiguring an instrumentalist approach to constitutional democracy that risks being reflected in its governance of state organs, and that seems to present a populist strategy for radical democracy in a counter-productive, contradictory light. In terms of counter-hegemonic subjectivation, it is tending towards the production of a relatively passive democratic subjectivity, one that expresses its popular sovereignty by clicking yes or no in a centrally determined plebiscite rather than directing party strategy from below through rich and powerful spaces of deliberation and self-management. One aspect of its constituent prefiguration is interesting: the constitution of becoming.

Podemos' is constituted through its organisational, political and ethical documents (plus a fourth, since 2017's second National Citizen Assembly: the feminism document). A more traditional model might be for the Assembly to convene to elect party representatives, vote on policy motions and political declarations, and debate amendments to the existing constitution. Rather, every one of Podemos' National Citizen Assemblies so far has closely mirrored the model of the first.<sup>702</sup> Although in subsequent Assemblies lists and documents are elected simultaneously, at each Assembly each list presents a brand new set of documents. This is a clear expression of the Jeffersonian principle of radical constitutional change discussed in Chapter 2 as the constitutionalisation of the right to revolution. What is perhaps most fascinating about this is not so much that Podemos has instituted such a radical constitution of becoming, such a seemingly radical expression of constituent power, but rather the fact that this has resulted in such profound stability and continuity. This apparent paradox will be explained in Chapter 4.2's discussion of (hyper)leadership.

A final prefigurative aspect of Podemos' constitutionality is what Chapter 2 defined as *intermediary prefiguration*: not the prefiguration of the ultimate end but of an intermediary end, or rather the prefiguration of further means. In the case of Podemos, I argue that the populist framing of the Citizen Assembly amounts to the prefiguration within the party of the very People of popular sovereignty that Podemos is seeking to construct across the country. As Errejón said in 2018:

Europe is in the midst of a "populist moment." Across Europe people are demanding security and belonging and, where progressive forces cannot provide this, they are turning to reactionary ones. The only question is whether it is we who will construct an idea of "the people" as a civic community standing for popular sovereignty and social justice or whether the reactionaries will articulate one based on race, ethnicity, and essentialism. They want to

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<sup>702</sup> The first in 2014, the second in 2017, the third in 2020, and a fourth currently in its early online stages following Iglesias' recent retirement from politics.

construct “the people” against the weakest members of society, persuading people to concentrate on those below them and looking towards the past, whereas we want to construct a popular front against the most powerful.<sup>703</sup>

Or as the Claro que Podemos ‘Political Principles’ document put it: ‘We do not have before us a task of reconstructing one part, but of constructing a sovereign people, and for that we need everybody.’<sup>704</sup> The primary terrain for this popular construction is, of course, the media and the interventions of the leadership and the campaign team (the latter directed in this period by Errejón himself). However the Citizen Assembly itself can be read as a prefigurative part of the construction of a sovereign people. The Assembly is repeatedly described as itself ‘sovereign’, but as opposed to Ganemos’ *asambleario* conception of a multitudinous form of ‘sovereignty’ that ultimately was not really sovereignty at all but rather a radical expression of constituent power (see Chapter 2.2.4), the sovereignty of Podemos’ Citizen Assembly is a much more traditional form. Mediated via online plebiscites, the weakening of the constituent power of the Circles, and most fundamentally by the overriding factor of hyperleadership, the construction of the Citizen Assembly as sovereign (but relatively passive) People in miniature forms an intermediary prefigurative crucible for the national project of cohering a new hegemonic social majority, a People united in equivalence; but this is a particularly fragile chain of equivalence. Outside the atrophying Circles, and with 15M’s *asambleario* energy absorbed into the *asalto institucional*, Podemos’ national war of position has been conducted top-down. For Errejón this is an explicit part of the strategy: to rejuvenate the movements from the top-down via the mediatory powers of hyperleadership. In its passive, plebiscitary relationship to the increasingly ‘presidentialist’ party leadership,<sup>705</sup> the Citizen Assembly prefigures that national project of constructing a new sovereign People from the top-down.

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<sup>703</sup> Íñigo Errejón interviewed in Gilmartin and Greene 2018.

<sup>704</sup> Claro que Podemos 2014b: 13.

<sup>705</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2020a.

## 4 Ahora Madrid: The Constitution of Becoming Nothingness

### 4.1 'Ahora Madrid Does Not Exist': Movement-Party without a Movement, or a Party<sup>706</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Confluence or Coalition

The infamous quote from Mayor Manuela Carmena, 'Ahora Madrid does not exist', does not appear until 2016, but it radiates back through time, expressing a range of constitutional failures present at the core of Ahora Madrid from inception. Or rather, a failure to constitute, which is something subtly different, and perhaps worse. We now chart the history that led to that moment, from the introduction of Podemos into the municipalist confluence. The concept of *confluence* has been present in Spain's municipalist story from the start, as discussed in Chapter 2. It was a core part of municipalism's fidelity to 15M, that participation should be in an individual basis, not as representatives of other parties or established groups, that the municipalist confluence should constitute the 'dissolution of historic identity and the construction of a new identity.'<sup>707</sup> However, this understanding of Ganemos as confluence of singularities always existed in extreme tension with the concrete fact that many participants *were* members of other groups and other parties, and that the influence of those external organisations was inevitably reflected in the formation of internal groupings (always referred to euphemistically by participants not as factions but as *familias*, 'families'). Nevertheless, everyone I spoke to, from whatever political family, understood the original intention clearly: Ganemos was the space of confluence (whatever one took that word to mean exactly); Ganemos *was the candidature*. The plan was that IU, Equo, Podemos, and any other compatible party that could be persuaded, would agree not to contest the municipal elections of 2015, publicly back Ganemos, and allow if not encourage its members to join the confluence on an individual basis.

Yet Ganemos did not end up being the candidature. Guillermo Zapata discussed the persistence of these tensions around the logic of confluence. They only grew as the project evolved, and they reached an apogee in the negotiations with Podemos. Zapata described to me a 'double tension'. The first was that between Ganemos as open space of confluence and Ganemos as itself a unitary political subject:

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<sup>706</sup> 'Ahora Madrid does not exist' are Carmena's words, discussed below. 'Movement-party without a movement, nor a party' was a phrase I used in an interview with José Haro, while reflecting upon his description of the Ahora Madrid narrative. Haro responded first with laughter, and then affirmation: 'you could summarise it that way' (José Haro interview 20 June 2018).

<sup>707</sup> Gil and Jurado Gilabert 2015.

Whether Ganemos is the space of confluence ... where what exists is a multiplicity of subjects that are constituted together to tackle an objective; or whether Ganemos is a subject itself, a political subject, that constitutes its own direction, its worldview, its strategy, its tactics, ... and so on. I think that functioned powerfully from almost the beginning, and it only grows as time progresses. ... At least until the elections, because after the elections I would say that this tension is already declining, it is already resolved. It is resolved in favour of the constitution of Ganemos as subject, not as a space of confluence. This tension persists during that whole period because IU, Equo, sectors of Podemos are all participating together.<sup>708</sup>

The core of the matter here is that these established political parties had much more interest in defining Ganemos as a political subject because that is how they could best define it in their own image, or at least carve out their own internal centres of power and influence, according to their own political priorities and strategic analyses, or else in a way that least interfered with their own priorities. That Podemos would be the political subject that disrupted the *asambleario* model of confluence most dramatically can be explained very simply, at least in part, by voter intention polling data. The question of Podemos' involvement had been simmering throughout, but until Podemos' founding National Citizens Assembly (Vistalegre I) there was no formal structure that could ratify any commitment one way or another.<sup>709</sup> By the end of July 2014, Podemos's national leadership was saying publicly that they did not want to stand their own candidates in 2015's local elections, and that they would 'support citizen candidacies in those places where they offer sufficient guarantees'.<sup>710</sup> Officially, this was because the young party did not yet have the capacity to vet all potential candidates, and so it would be extremely vulnerable to embarrassment of its carefully crafted public image caused by eccentric or controversial candidates; i.e. not necessarily out of respect for the emerging citizen platforms.<sup>711</sup> However, with Podemos now committing to back at least some citizen platforms, it suddenly became particularly crucial that Ganemos not be rejected by that source of legitimisation; and powerful legitimisation it would be, as this is precisely the

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<sup>708</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>709</sup> 'In that moment, the people from Podemos told us, "no, no, we cannot, right now we cannot tell you anything. We are in another process at the level of the state"' (P3 interview 8 June 2018).

<sup>710</sup> Cortizo 2014. This position was formally confirmed at Vistalegre I (which concluded November 2014).

<sup>711</sup> As Montero put it, the concern was 'not to stain ourselves', because there was 'a distrust, or a fear that people could infiltrate who would pervert the origin of Podemos, and that it could hinder the general strategy of storming heaven, so to speak'. Which is, ultimately, something Montero regrets, as it did not help place the municipalist confluence on solid foundations of trust (Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018). However the message to municipalists was still dominated by this sense of suspicion and protectionism, something Montero regrets.

moment when Podemos were at the all-time peak of their polling performance.<sup>712</sup> As P3 describes it, the polling was a powerful deciding factor in the formation of Ahora Madrid:

[The polling had] an important weight, very important. ... Podemos was an electoral giant, almost. They had capital. In fact it was the first thing they told us: 'We come here to contribute political capital.'<sup>713</sup>

And so the lingering tension described by Zapata above, between Ganemos as confluence and Ganemos as political subject, became a 'double tension' when Podemos Madrid refused to simply allow its members to participate in Ganemos as per the original understanding of the confluence. Podemos would not subsume itself into Ganemos. Podemos would need to be 'actors' in any confluence, not 'subalterns'.<sup>714</sup> Which raises the question, as Zapata puts it, 'if Ganemos is the space of confluence, why must we converge with Podemos?'<sup>715</sup>

Before formal negotiations even began, this 'double tension' had important (if not entirely easy to define) effects within Ganemos. P1 describes, in their experience, majority support for the confluence among the grassroots of the main parties (Podemos, IU and Equo), but they perceived more scepticism, factionalism and cynicism in the leaderships. P1 repeatedly emphasises how the Podemos Madrid leadership in particular did not initially recognise Ganemos as an 'interlocutor', as a 'political actor' or an equal force, and that therefore, as it became ever clearer that Podemos' involvement in whatever form was all but essential, an important focus for Ganemos throughout late 2014 was to build political strength until Podemos Madrid would be forced to recognise them as a political subject.

By the public presentation on 4 November 2014, Ganemos was now more organised, it had spokespeople appearing in the media, it was a recognised 'political actor in tension and in conflict with Podemos', a status confirmed and strengthened by achieving the aim it set itself at the public presentation, to gather 30,000 signatures of support, which it achieved in December 2014.<sup>716</sup> In this new phase the formal and informal family leaderships made greater efforts to organise their forces within Ganemos to their advantage. Political identities entrenched as the prize of victory and power

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<sup>712</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, Podemos reached a peak of 31.1% in two different polls in November and December 2014, and a great number of polls during this time showed them in first place.

<sup>713</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>714</sup> Jesús Montero (interview 13 July 2018). This was, however, a debate within Podemos Madrid, resolved during their own municipal primaries in which the Pablista 'Claro que Podemos' list, headed by Montero, defeated the Anticapitalistas list, which did argue for joining Ganemos as the space of confluence.

<sup>715</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>716</sup> Europa Press 2014. P3 describes this process coming down to the wire. P3 also argues that an important element of this process was the support of the newspaper *El Diario*, and especially the journalist Ignacio Escolar. 'He was very supportive of the Ganemos process. ... There was a sense of support, and a sense that Jesús Montero, well, had to go along with it even if he didn't like it, that the idea was already constructed that in Madrid, in the world of activism, ... there was already an option, which was Ganemos. And he couldn't ignore it' (interview P3 8 June 2018).

(or, at least, some council seats, in opposition, which is the best anyone reasonably expected) became an ever more realistic possibility. The problem of decisions being ‘cooked’ outside of assemblies and manipulated inside worsened considerably.<sup>717</sup>

Ganemos’ core principles remained the same on paper, but in P1’s view they were weakened by the atrophy of good faith, even instrumentally interpreted to suit whoever was doing the interpreting:

the organisation was now less transparent, the assemblies were much more tense, consensus was not so easy, some votes had to be forced through, horizontalism now was very much defined by certain leaderships. Which is to say, in that second [phase of] Ganemos these concepts [constitutional principles] are now going to have different characteristics. ... the idea of horizontalism was not the same in the first as in the second Ganemos.<sup>718</sup>

Ganemos had become ‘a space of power’ in which IU, Anticapitalistas, Traficantes, Patio, etc, as well as individuals who saw opportunities to build their personal profile as election candidates, each ‘played their cards’ in a game of power and position.<sup>719</sup> The picture P1 paints is of a steady colonisation of Ganemos as a horizontal, *asambleario* space, by the logics of representation and instrumentalism. In coming to organise ‘the entire process in order to be capable of accumulating enough strength to force Podemos to sit and negotiate’, Ganemos was increasingly doing so on the terms of their negotiating partner, adapting itself to Podemos’ instrumentalist populist logic.<sup>720</sup>

In contrast to the multitudinous vision of a confluence of individuals under the Ganemos banner, Montero, who became General Secretary of Podemos Madrid in December 2014, had a very different kind of municipalist project in mind. While some Ganemos and Madrid129 members understood Podemos Madrid, and Montero especially, to have sought to deliberately constitute Ahora Madrid as weakly as possible, so as not to dilute Podemos Madrid’s own power and influence going forward,<sup>721</sup> Montero claims to be proud that Podemos ended up making its own ‘municipalist wager’ by participating, and he wishes it had been framed more positively, less reluctantly. He sees

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<sup>717</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> E.g. ‘Podemos was and is clear that it does not want to give Ahora Madrid any type of identity or its own political structure. Nor Manuela. For example, M129, one of our commitments was to provide Ahora Madrid with its own political structure. But Podemos doesn’t want it, Manuela doesn’t want it, some people from Madrid en Movimiento don’t want it either. ... Podemos has no intention of constitutionalising anything in Ahora Madrid. Nothing. And they have blocked any attempt. For example, now in February there will be a general meeting of Ahora Madrid. Podemos and Manuela don’t like this. They aren’t blocking it, but they don’t favour it either. Because whatever provides Ahora Madrid with identity, organisation, structure, constitutionalisation as a political actor, is negative for Podemos and Manuela’ (Ibid).

in the municipality a special political character, particularly apt to confluences of 'citizen and popular unity candidacies'.

They are political institutions where ... the residents choose a mayor before a political faction. ... This is also why our commitment to the municipal confluence was not only a reaction, to avoid staining ourselves as a brand, but as a political commitment to the role of the municipalities, for municipalism in the configuration of the Spanish state itself. ... The municipalities have to be an actor of the constituent process, with independence furthermore from the political parties.<sup>722</sup>

This is clearly, however, far from the idiosyncratic role envisioned by more radical municipalists. It is a much more apolitical, technocratic vision, for which Carmena was the perfect vessel.

In broader terms, Montero describes his 'two objectives for achieving a successful candidature': first, 'strong leadership', and second, to 'reach an agreement with all the forces present in Madrid'. Regarding leadership, recall Montero's words, discussed already in Chapter 3, that without 'strong leaderships, we would not be here. ... Its electoral efficacy has been demonstrated. ... Ada Colau repeated it. ... Without Manuela there is no mayoralty.' So in this regard at the very least Montero was seeking to constitute Ahora Madrid in Podemos' image, with a strong leadership whose primary purpose is to cohere an electoral majority. An understanding of 'strong leadership' that ultimately comes down to votes, as does Montero's second key priority, the 'agreement with all the forces present in Madrid.' Montero justifies both in terms of electoral mathematics, which he thinks proves that Manuela's strong, 'independent leadership ... supplied approximately 10%' of the total Ahora Madrid vote, mostly taken from PSOE. The agreement of all the forces of Madrid, considering how this idea appears at several points in the interview, seems to express a kind of united front mentality, focused on the electoral effects of that summation of 'forces', more than any democratic (or prefigurative) potential of confluence as more than the sum of its parts. Montero sees the constitution of Ahora Madrid not as a deliberate attempt to constitute it weakly, to preserve power for Podemos, but as the successful constitution of a municipal electoral war machine, a united front that combines the existing support for its constituent parts under Carmena as powerful empty signifier who can extract new votes from the old parties, while maintaining space for independents:

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<sup>722</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018.



Ahora Madrid is an electoral candidature formed by parties, social collectives and by independents. Those independents have their place and they have their role. Ahora Madrid's electoral success comes from Ahora Madrid's own constitution.<sup>723</sup>

Montero in fact emphasises that the victory was 'not because of the plurality of forces ... not because of the Dowdall method [in the primaries] ... This remaining 2.5% [of Ahora Madrid's vote that Montero cannot attribute to pre-existing electoral forces like Podemos or IU, nor to Manuela stealing votes from PSOE] is the fruit of the gathering of all the groups that are in the candidature'. This is to contest narratives that attribute the victory mostly to the magic of confluence, of the multitudinous *desborde* campaign, to the energy produced by the pluralism expressed in the primaries through the Dowdall voting system, all sometimes argued to have inspired a great uprising of previous non-voters. Rather Montero believes that the victory was fairly simple electoral maths: Podemos and IU's existing support, plus 10% taken from PSOE by Manuela, + 2.5% perhaps from the previous non-voters freshly energised by the novelty of Ganemos' horizontalism or the *desborde* campaign. As we will see in Chapter 4.2.2, the same kind of argument from electoral mathematics will be mobilised by P5 to justify the perceived inadequacy of Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación* and its immediate marginalisation.

Montero is fairly clear in describing his own vision of Ahora Madrid as an organisation: 'Yes to a municipalist candidature. No to integration in Ganemos. Yes to creating a space beyond Ganemos.' A 'space' that should have 'a structure, but not an organisation.' What did he mean by this? 'Structures of coordination, district groups ... [coordination] between the forces, always considering that there are independents.' Ahora Madrid should not 'be constituted as autonomous, distinct political subject, but as a space of confluence: deliberative, participative, coordinative, but not necessarily identitarian' (note the mobilisation of the idea of 'confluence'). Montero's justification is not entirely convincing:

Why not? Because I think that would kill one of the strengths, which is the place of the independents, because in the end it would force certain internal dynamics of tendencies that end up killing any non-identitarian space. Meanwhile, this way there are counterweights. The parties have their identities, the independents have their identities. It is less ideal, but I believe it is more optimal.<sup>724</sup>

I proposed to him the *asambleario* counterpoint: surely a richer organisation would allow more people to participate in Ahora Madrid, not only the leaderships of the parties, and perhaps certain

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<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

influential independents? To which Montero responds, interestingly, that this line of argument assumes ‘a premise that is somewhat false’:

which is that people exist beyond Podemos, Ganemos, IU. Independent, that is, of Ahora Madrid. They speak of “the militant base of Ahora Madrid.” Ahora Madrid does not have a militant base because it does not have organisation.

Later Montero described his vision as not to be a new party, not to be a ‘new centrality’; better to have something ‘more creative, more imaginative, a plurality of autonomous forces that converge in the dissolution of all in a new subject.’ Which all seems quite problematic, in places circular, in places contradictory. Ahora Madrid has no militant base because it has no ‘organisation’, but Montero specifically did not want Ahora Madrid to have any ‘organisation’. Could it not have developed a militant base through organisation as Ganemos had hoped? Meanwhile this idea of the ‘dissolution of all in a new subject’ seems highly contradictory to the earlier claim that Ahora Madrid should not be an autonomous political actor. Whatever the initial intentions of Montero and Podemos Madrid for the constitution of Ahora Madrid, by March 2016 Montero was much more explicit: ‘Ahora Madrid does not exist as a political party nor was it intended to. ... We want Ahora Madrid to remain dormant, we are not looking to create another party, for that we already have Podemos, IU and Equo.’<sup>725</sup>

On the Ganemos side, the *Coordinadora* created a commission, sometimes to as the Diplomacy Group, and that group decided who would be the negotiators. This did not happen at a plenary, because the *Coordinadora* believed it already had a clear mandate from past plenaries.<sup>726</sup> Those already elected as spokespeople were barred from election as negotiators, in order to avoid any over-accrual of power to any one person in a horizontal organisation with few individual positions of power.<sup>727</sup> Negotiations proceeded between Ganemos and Podemos, with the Ganemos negotiators reporting back regularly to the *Coordinadora* and the *Coordinadora* reporting back irregularly to the plenary. My research revealed some confusion over the issue of ‘red lines’. P1, for example, repeatedly spoke of ‘red lines’, recalling that they included the Dowdall voting system for the primaries, a participatory crowdsourced program,<sup>728</sup> Ganemos’ plans for a ‘radical model of the city’, and the creation of a ‘political tool’ between Ganemos and Podemos that would give life to Ahora Madrid as political actor with structure, which resulted in Ahora Madrid’s *Mesa de*

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<sup>725</sup> García Gallo 2016.

<sup>726</sup> ‘The Coordinadora decided that there was going to be a commission, that some people had to be appointed, and that we had to vote. ... There was no need for a plenary because really the mandate was clear. The mandate had been given by the plenary, so those people just had to fulfil that mandate’ (P3 interview 8 June 2018).

<sup>727</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>728</sup> Which many in Ganemos expected to be binding in some way.

*Coordinación*. However, the minutes of Ganemos meetings reveal something slightly different. The plenary of 20 December 2014 included a vote on ‘confluence criteria’, with the following results:

Primary regulations; code of ethics; mechanisms of control: 55 points.

Participatory Programme; political agreement: 51 points.

Ganemos Madrid as space of confluence: 45 points.

Municipalist and Citizen Movement: 38 Points.

Post-electoral Organisation: 27 points.

Confluence space and mechanisms of decision: 11 points.

Juridical form: 6 points.

Brand, acronym: 2 points.<sup>729</sup>

However, at the plenary of 14 February 2015, a question is noted as to what ‘red lines’ each party has presented to the negotiations, and the response is that ‘No party has marked red lines’:

as an exercise of political responsibility in favour of generating a possible common framework of understanding. With red lines, it would have been very difficult to reach an agreement. Alternatives have always been sought where there are disagreements. This has been fundamental.<sup>730</sup>

So *red lines* seems to be a misunderstanding of how Ganemos’ negotiation priorities actually functioned in practice, but a set of *priorities*, if not *red lines*, were indeed agreed at that December 2014 plenary. In more detail:

Conclusions of the plenary regarding the confluence:

- Do we agree with the general approach?
  - Everyone agrees with the approach.
- What kind of confluence would be desirable?
  - Ganemos Madrid is the space of confluence.
  - The confluence must take place around a program, as is happening: democratic, participatory, attending to the needs of the majority of citizens.
  - Generate a plural space with different identities: individuals, social and political organizations. ...
- What topics or aspects are most important for a citizen candidacy?
  - In the period until the elections:

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<sup>729</sup> Ganemos Madrid 8 February 2015b [20 December 2014b].

<sup>730</sup> Ganemos Madrid 24 February 2015 [14 February 2015].

- Be firm that the process of confluence is based on participation, democracy, openness. ...
- The space of confluence is Ganemos.
- There is flexibility in the legal form and brand.
- After the electoral period:
  - Organisation of the structure that emerges.
  - Forms of recall, accountability, economic organisation, territorial work, code of ethics.<sup>731</sup>

The negotiations proceeded from December 2014, in roughly two phases, the first to agree what in January 2015 would become the *Marco Común de Entendimiento* ('*Marco Común*'), and then a second phase in which many finer details still needed to be worked out, the participatory programme had to be developed and agreed, etc, now working primarily in more specialised *Grupos Mixtos* (mixed groups of Podemos members and Ganemos activists).

The negotiations were difficult from the start. For one, Ganemos' negotiation strategy was essentially public.

Bear in mind that we left the negotiation, we went to the *Coordinadora*, and we had to relate to our colleagues everything that had happened, what were our negotiating strategies, publicly. ... Podemos knew what we were thinking, ... and what our next step would be. In that sense, ... Podemos had a more Machiavellian, elite strategy, and Ganemos a more democratic strategy. ... I see that we were each defending our interests as best we could, but at the same time, I do see differences. I don't think we were the same in that.<sup>732</sup>

Which bleeds into a second, related reason why the negotiations were so difficult, from P3's perspective at least: P3 perceived from Podemos negotiators a very negative attitude from the start, evolving, as negotiations progressed, into the perception that they were not even negotiating entirely in good faith. P3 attributes this in part to Montero's own scepticism towards the project, that at first he did not want the confluence to happen, but felt politically obliged to at least engage in dialogue.<sup>733</sup> From the very first meetings, P3 felt a great deal of 'tension' from unfriendly gestures and a dismissive attitude on the part of the Podemos negotiators. Although, 'later when you start to speak the language of politics, then you begin to understand a little. But yes, the early attitude with

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<sup>731</sup> Ganemos Madrid 8 February 2015b [20 December 2014b]. Note the repetition of the demand that 'Ganemos Madrid is the space of confluence,' which accurately underlines its importance, at this stage.

<sup>732</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

Podemos was very negative.’ This negative attitude eventually manifested itself, P3 claims, in sheer dishonesty:

If a journalist asked me, I wouldn’t tell them; but I’ll tell you: I think Podemos’ negotiating position was very dishonest, on many occasions. They used deception, ... telling you to your face: ‘No, I did not agree that with you,’ when you know you did. You know, ‘no, I didn’t put it in writing.’ But are you denying that you said it? ‘Yes, I didn’t say it.’ It’s a bold-faced lie. ... The people [of Ganemos] were very angry at Podemos, they were like villains, they were behaving very badly, and dishonestly.<sup>734</sup>

Whatever the truth of the matter, this explains how the inclusive plurality of Ganemos’ multitudinous logic of confluence hardened into a binary and often antagonistic relationship between Ganemos and Podemos, or as P3 describes it, ‘us and them’. Within Ganemos, Traficantes in particular began to argue that the negotiations with Podemos should end, that Ganemos should ‘go alone’:

[Podemos] did not want a democratic model, but a more vertical model. And then many in Ganemos said: ‘They aren’t like us. We cannot form a political project with them. ... We have to abandon it, get rid of them, go alone, because Podemos are crooks. ... They are undemocratic, they are Jacobins, they are led by Napoleón Bonaparte (Íñigo Errejón, the strategist). They are not honest, they are elitist.’ And then I said: yes, but it is important now to have the electoral alliance.<sup>735</sup>

The distrust and confrontations with Podemos was having a contradictory effect within Ganemos, both hardening internal divides, but also in other ways, for at least some participants, creating a greater sense of unity:

Little by little we were feeling ever closer together: Equo, myself, you know, people I didn’t know at all. Little by little the mistrust was diminishing. ... I was feeling closer and closer to those people and creating a *we*, a story of *us*. When you have spent so much time together, it becomes an *us* and a *them*, and ‘they’ were Podemos, and in the end it was a binary.<sup>736</sup>

A key intermediary stage described by P3 was when, during parts of the first phase of the negotiations, P3 felt as if there was more of a trinary model of power, with IU playing a powerful role in between Ganemos and Podemos. IU were embroiled in their own melodrama in the Madrid region (Comunidad de Madrid) during the Ganemos-Podemos negotiations. In brief, the *tarjetas*

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<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid.

*black* scandal came to light in October 2014, alleging corruption on the part of various leading politicians at the regional level, including PP, PSOE and the regional IU party, Izquierda Unida Comunidad de Madrid (IUCM). This catalysed the victory of a platform of ‘renovation’ in the IUCM primary elections at the end of November 2014, with the winning candidate for Mayor of Madrid, Mauricio Valiente, standing on a platform of converging with Ganemos. However, on 14 March 2015 the leadership of IUCM conducted a vote among IU members in the city of Madrid asking whether they wanted to integrate with what was now Ahora Madrid. The result was a slim ‘no’, and so IUCM began preparing its own candidacy that would compete with Ahora Madrid, with Raquel López running for Mayor. At the end of March the plebiscite was then ruled invalid by the national leadership of IU, who also decided not to recognise López’s candidacy.<sup>737</sup> Later still, on 14 June 2015, IU decided to eject IUCM from the federation entirely, leading to the refounding of IU in the region in April 2016 as Izquierda Unida-Madrid. In the short term, however, Valiente and his IU allies were forbidden by IUCM from participating in Ahora Madrid, and so had to choose between the two. They chose Ahora Madrid and formally resigned from IU, which was a powerful gesture to the more movementist, *15Mayistas* participants of Ganemos, many of whom had long been suspicious of IU’s politics and tactics.<sup>738</sup> This created a renewed sense of camaraderie.

One of many causes for the negotiations to almost break down completely was Podemos Madrid’s dissatisfaction with the participation of Valiente and his (now ex-) IU comrades. P3 seems to imply that the Podemos negotiators did not want them to participate in the primaries, and perhaps not in the confluence whatsoever ([Podemos] wanted them out’),<sup>739</sup> but is very clear that the negotiations almost broke down over the membership of Ahora Madrid’s *Mesa de Coordinación*. Podemos vetoed Valiente, or anyone close to him or Alberto Garzón.<sup>740</sup> IU suggested Lara Hernández, Ganemos suggested her to Podemos, they said no, and negotiations broke off completely. This whole affair only further strengthened the camaraderie among all the diverse *familias* of Ganemos.

Ethically it was very difficult for me to go along with this, because to me it would be a betrayal of comrades. ... Immediately, of course, the *Coordinadora* was, like: ‘No, no, no.’ And it surprised me, because there were sectors that had been super critical of IU the whole time. That they said, ‘no, no, that’s unacceptable, IU has to be [on the *Mesa*],’ why?

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<sup>737</sup> EFE 2015.

<sup>738</sup> A powerful example here is IU’s early attempt to mobilise the energy of 15M into an electoral project in 2013, called Suma.

<sup>739</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>740</sup> ‘Alberto Garzón, who at that time was the person leading this whole sector’ (ibid).

Precisely because we spent months pushing IU into an internal rupture so that they could join us. And now that they've done it, are we going to kick them out? No, it cannot be.<sup>741</sup>

Montero called a Ganemos negotiator at 10pm to concede the issue; and the negotiations resumed.

Another key dispute was over the primaries, which Montero describes as 'the crisis over Dowdall'. This debate is crucially important because it defines key differences between the politics of Ganemos and Podemos, and in ultimately being decided largely on Ganemos' terms gives us a key example of how Ganemos sought to integrate horizontalist principles like consensus, inclusivity and transversal plurality into a scalable electoral framework. Furthermore, the need to agree a written proposal for primary regulations was an important constitutional moment for Ganemos, where their horizontalist principles would need to be formalised and codified, even though, even at this stage, there were still anti-constitutional elements who were against even having written regulations for the primaries.<sup>742</sup> Ganemos approved their proposal for primary regulations in December 2014. They had been developed always with the prospect of negotiations with Podemos in mind. Initial plans were developed to appeal to Podemos by being more majoritarian, but then went in the opposite direction in order to establish a radically proportional position from which to negotiate a compromise. There were early debates within Ganemos as to whether candidates should be chosen through recognisable primaries at all, or whether Ganemos could instead use a more *15Mayista* deliberative process; but this was quickly settled in favour of primaries, so as not to risk alienating any of the parties already involved (IU, Equo and Por un Mundo Más Justo) or soon to be involved (Podemos). The key requirements for a primary voting system were that it be proportional, with open lists, and that anyone could stand, with or without a list. These requirements are immediately problematic, as clearly the hegemonic centres of power would form lists that would crowd out any space for individuals; and this is indeed what happened. But in drafting the primary regulations this was only more motivation to decide on a system that was as radically proportional as possible.<sup>743</sup>

Various voting systems were discussed, from Sainte-Laguë to Borda, Dowdall, and even original bespoke systems. Dowdall, a modified form of the Borda count method, quickly became the preferred option. Borda is a preferential voting system in which a voter's first choice receives  $n - 1$  points, where  $n$  is the total number of candidates. Second choice receives  $n - 2$  points, etc. Borda can sometimes choose a candidate who did not receive a majority of first preference votes, making them the least disliked rather than the most liked candidate. In this way Borda arguably manages to incorporate into a voting system something approaching a principle of consensus. In Dowdall, the

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<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> 'Some people even objected to having rules. ... They didn't want regulation at all' (Ibid).

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

first choice receives one point, second choice receives half a point, third choice receives a third, etc. The key distinction is that Dowdall creates greater distance between preferences. Under Dowdall, the second preference always receives half the points of the first preference. Under Borda, second place always receives more than half the points of first place in any election with more than two candidates. In a Borda election with 101 candidates, second place would receive 99% of the points of first place. Relative to Borda, Dowdall is less proportional or consensual in single winner elections as it favours the candidate with more first preference votes. For multi-member open-list elections, however, this is reversed. Now a 'quota Borda' system (as describes the adapted version for multi-member elections) favours the most popular list, whereas Dowdall allows for a more proportional, pluralist result with more lists, and perhaps even individuals without lists, reasonably able to gain some representation. This is because, by more greatly separating preferences, Dowdall makes it more likely that, for example, the primary candidate in the second most popular list will beat the second candidate in the most popular list. In order to fully maximise this capacity of the Dowdall system to reflect some of Ganemos' horizontalist, *asambleario* values, the agreed primary regulation proposal was in fact a modified Dowdall system, dividing not by sequential numbers (1, 2, 3, etc) but by odd numbers (1, 3, 5, etc), making it even more proportional and pluralistic.

Podemos Madrid were not easily convinced. During the first phase of negotiations, one of Montero's primary concerns was to exclude 'weirdos',<sup>744</sup> repeating the persistent Podemos attitude that their greatest fear in entering the municipal elections was not to 'stain ourselves' by association with problematic candidates. Montero was assured that they would implement a minimum vote threshold that should exclude any undesirable elements; and so it was agreed. Or rather, it was agreed verbally. What actually appeared in the *Marco Común* was that there would be a 'weighted' voting system, and this kind of ambiguity is precisely what allowed the *Marco Común* to be agreed in general:

The agreement was somewhat verbal. ... But the letter of the agreement only says weighted vote. ... There is an ambiguity that I think was what allowed us to move forward. ... Verbally he [Montero] had said yes, ... that we would go with our system, with the corrections.<sup>745</sup>

This ambiguity is why, after agreement of the *Marco Común*, in the second phase of negotiations, Dowdall becomes an even worse crisis when Podemos representatives deny that they had agreed to it. Montero still denies it: 'What was approved was that there would be a weighted system. There was talk of Dowdall, but we were resistant.'<sup>746</sup> P3 and José Haro, who were both Ganemos

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<sup>744</sup> As paraphrased by P3 (ibid).

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018.



negotiators, are adamant that Podemos, and Montero specifically, had explicitly agreed to the modified Dowdall system.

The *Marco Común* is presented and a few days later it seems that Podemos are renegeing. ... You would have to ask them why they pulled that stunt.<sup>747</sup>

First meeting, Podemos: 'We don't like this regulation. ... This Dowdall, no, we didn't agree this with you.' Eh? Yes, yes, I agreed it with... 'No, no, look at what the *Marco Común* says. The *Marco Común* says weighted vote. We haven't agreed this with you.' We didn't put it in writing but we agreed it verbally. We agreed it was going to be Dowdall, and that we would introduce corrective elements to give some guarantees. 'No, no, no. We want Borda.' Borda? ... That's insane, Borda is everything for the majority and that's it. ... So, that was a moment of almost total rupture.<sup>748</sup>

This 'crisis over Dowdall' illustrates further tensions between principles and political exigency, because the principled positions of the negotiating parties cannot be separated from the fact that Podemos was universally seen as the more powerful political subject that would benefit most from a more majoritarian system, and Ganemos participants were perfectly cognisant that a more pluralist system was not only a matter of principle, but a question of the survival of anything like the municipalist project they had imagined.

If we wanted to continue being part of this process to which we had contributed so much, we had to have a pure proportional system. ... If we didn't get it, we were dead.<sup>749</sup>

Reflecting on the effects of the Dowdall system, both Montero and P5 (a member of Carmena's inner circle) share a similar analysis that reflects their majoritarian values quite clearly:

It generates a great *over-representation* of minorities, which is very good in that it allows us to include sensitivities that otherwise are always marginalised, and it has a very bad aspect, which is that it allows minorities with a negligible representative mandate to block the process. People who do not represent anyone suddenly have the possibility of blocking the majority.<sup>750</sup>

Montero is perhaps even more direct, describing Dowdall as 'an exception Podemos made in favour of the *hypertrophied representation* of whatever group that stands.'<sup>751</sup> All Ganemos participants I

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<sup>747</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>748</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018, emphasis added.

<sup>751</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018, emphasis added.

spoke to on the matter, in contrast, agreed on Dowdall as one of the great successes not only of the negotiations but of the Ganemos and Ahora Madrid projects as a whole. José Haro, for example, celebrates the Dowdall system as ‘more than optimal’:

It was the system of weighting that allows for the diversity of the different sensibilities. ... I think each one was fairly well represented, in percentage terms, corresponding to its real strength.<sup>752</sup>

P1 had similar feelings: ‘Dowdall allows that the complexity, the ecological atmosphere, all the different actors could enter in the candidacy. So for me it’s the best system.’<sup>753</sup> Though P1 also saw that all ‘good things’ have an ‘other side’, and that all of Dowdall’s benefits could not prevent that the primaries would radically accelerate the process of, as P1 perceived it, subsumption under an ever-more representative logic; which will be discussed further in the following section.

#### 4.1.2 Constitution

Despite all the difficulties, and the vagueness of its final form, Ahora Madrid was constituted through the *Marco Común* in January 2015. Dowdall (or a ‘personalised and weighted’ voting system) and the inclusion of Lara Hernández of IU on the *Mesa de Coordinación* were big victories for Ganemos, and although they had failed in their central goal – that Ganemos would itself be the space of confluence – the *Marco Común* seemed to contain the seeds for Ahora Madrid to fulfil its function well, with at least some basis established for a structure of political organs that could be used to coordinate the interface between the municipalist movement and its representatives in the city council. Ultimately it was Podemos who were under more pressure to come to an agreement with Ganemos, because ‘it was very late for them to mount their own candidature,’ and if Podemos did stand themselves, ‘there would have been two candidatures, Podemos and Ganemos. ... It would have been without doubt a much harder campaign.’<sup>754</sup> Montero himself confirmed as much: ‘there were many messages to the media, a lot of pressure, a press conference given by Ada Colau in Madrid, saying, “The public would not understand if Podemos does not integrated into Ganemos.”’<sup>755</sup> Add to this the fact that no one genuinely believed Ahora Madrid could win the mayoralty that had been held by PP since 1991. ‘That was the perspective of many actors’, and this was one reason why Ganemos fought so hard in the negotiations: ‘and that’s why we defended the model to the death.’<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>753</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>754</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>755</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>756</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

Ahora Madrid was now constituted as an 'instrumental party' via its core constitutional document, the *Marco Común de Entendimiento* (Common Framework of Understanding, *Marco Común*).<sup>757</sup> It begins:

Podemos Madrid and the space of Ganemos Madrid, where citizens, social organisations and political parties such as Izquierda Unida, Equo or Por un Mundo Más Justo converge, call on citizens to build a citizen candidacy of popular unity that opens the way for change in Madrid in the next elections to the City Council.

Key elements of the *Marco Común* include that the candidature 'will share the same programme', which 'will be realised through a participatory process'. There will be an Code of Ethics (*Código Ético*) that candidates must agree to in order to stand. There will be 'a process of primaries open to citizens', with 'integrated platforms of candidates with broad citizen support that guarantee the conformation of a reliable and integrated government team'; each elector will have '30 personalized and weighted votes' with which to vote for any candidates they wish, from any list, including mixing lists and regardless of the order the candidates are presented in their list; electors will vote separately for the mayoral candidate; and the final candidacy will account for 'criteria of interleaved gender parity'.<sup>758</sup> The juridical form will be the 'instrumental party', and the electoral campaign 'will be directed by a team conformed according to the principles of consensus, effectiveness, ability and diversity.'

The 'Organisation' section is what most interests us. Here we are told about what became the *Mesa de Coordinación* ('a coordinating commission will be created, composed of 20 people in agreement with technical, political and organisational criteria', plus any elected councillors and the mayoral candidate); the *Grupos Mixtos*, the mixed-composition working groups that did indeed form in the pre-electoral period, to work on the primaries, programme and campaign; and a broad set of organisational subgroups: 'coordination, territorial structure, funding, protocols...'. The post-electoral organisational vision consists of the following:

A district coordination space will be fostered that deepens the articulation/coordination of the municipalist movements. Clear mechanisms will be sought so that the territorial nodes of the district have the capacity to participate. To this end, once the legislature has begun, there will be established mechanisms for organisation, control and monitoring of the popular unity candidacy and its coordinating body. At all times an attempt will be made to

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<sup>757</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015. Full title, *Marco Común de Entendimiento y Hoja de Ruta para el Impulso de una Candidatura Ciudadana de Unidad Popular en la Ciudad de Madrid* (Common Framework of Understanding and Roadmap for Promoting a Citizen Candidacy of Popular Unity in the City of Madrid).

<sup>758</sup> I.e. the primary results will be adjusted to form a final electoral list that alternates between men and women.

establish processes of consensus or broad agreement that allow for cohesive structures. Major strategic issues or debates (for example, possible government pacts, investiture agreements, etc) must be subject to binding democratic processes through participatory procedures.

Here we see very clearly that Ganemos were seeking to constitute Ahora Madrid in their own image, to replicate in the new organisation their vision for a participatory structure that connects the institution, the movements and the citizenry in order to construct Ganemos' vision of a 'new institutional architecture'. Crucially, Ahora Madrid's representatives should not be free to work entirely on their own initiative, they should be subject to the 'control' of the grassroots district nodes as well as Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación*, with 'binding democratic processes' for the most important issues. No specificity is given to these 'participatory procedures' of 'control and monitoring', nor any provision for how to deal with noncompliance with such procedures or with the *Marco Común* generally. Another example, like the primary regulations, of the 'ambiguity that ... was what allowed us to move forward.'<sup>759</sup>

Some further mechanisms of democratic control beyond the faint provisions of the *Marco Común* were set out slightly later. On 25 February 2015 two new documents were agreed. The 'Agreement of the Territorial Models Group' expands on the *Marco Común*'s vision for a space of 'district coordination' and 'territorial nodes'. It opens by citing sections of the *Marco Común* as its constitutional 'antecedents'. The territorial structure it imagines is based on *Mesas de Coordinación Distritales* (District Coordination Committees) that will:

collaborate with Ahora Madrid's Municipal Group [councillors] for the development and organisation of the spaces of citizen participation contemplated in the electoral program. Likewise, it will promote different social activities and citizen initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in the district, in collaboration with the associative fabric and organized civil society of the district.

Their composition would be similar to the central *Mesa de Coordinación*, and a *Grupo de Mediación* (mediation group) would be established to help resolve any problems. The document 'Constitución, Composición y Régimen de Sustituciones de la Mesa de Coordinación', also agreed on 25 February 2015, further elaborated the constitution of the central *Mesa*.<sup>760</sup> It stipulates that decisions will seek consensus ('in the first instance'),<sup>761</sup> it will publish meeting minutes, maintain gender parity in its

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<sup>759</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>760</sup> 'Constitution, Composition and Substitution Regime of the Coordination Board.'

<sup>761</sup> 'In every case, [the Mesa] will adopt its decisions through democratic procedures, seeking in the first instance adoption by consensus.'

composition, it establishes mechanisms for substituting members, and stipulates that members will, like the electoral candidates, be subject to the *Código Ético*, and will be subject to recall should they be found in contravention.

The *Código Ético* was agreed on 9 March 2015. It contains some measures to prevent corruption, promote transparency, condemn discrimination, etc, and then some more organisational-constitutional content in the second section, 'Democratisation of Political Representation, Citizen Participation and Real Democracy.' It defines Ahora Madrid as 'a political space of citizen encounter that rejects mere representative democracy and makes citizen participation its *raison d'être*.' Democracy is defined as the existence of 'effective mechanisms of participation that allow us to make political decisions that affect our lives'; and participation is defined as 'going far beyond the scope of the strictly institutional,' rather,

It is necessary to strengthen (guaranteeing their independence) the associative fabric, citizen movements in general, or the multiple and diverse self-managed spaces that favour and constitute processes of self-organization and popular empowerment.

The *Código Ético* therefore commits Ahora Madrid's representatives (both in city council and in the *Mesa de Coordinación*, and presumably also in the *Mesas Distritales*, though the *Código Ético* is not mentioned in the 'Agreement of the Territorial Models Groups') to: 'Guarantee citizen participation in the decision-making and political stance of the candidature on issues of general interest; maintain contact with 'collectives in vulnerable situations', responding to their proposals and taking their issues into account in decision-making; 'defend the candidacy's political program and act as representatives, obliged to follow the decisions made in the democratic mechanisms'; representatives must publish their agendas, detailing who they meet with and what they discuss; be accountable to citizens through both virtual and face-to-face methods; and 'accept the censure (and recall, if applicable) of councillors and other staff ... for mismanagement or flagrant and unjustified non-compliance with the program.'<sup>762</sup>

The final of the most important constitutional documents of this pre-electoral period is that which constitutes the *Secretaría Técnica de la Mesa de Coordinación* (Technical Secretariat of the Coordination Board).<sup>763</sup> The *Secretaría Técnica* itself would consist of five members whose task is the administrative oversight of Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación*. One of the key tasks of the *Secretaría* would be to categorise all the decisions of the *Mesa* as either *ordinary*, *extraordinary*, *structural* or *external* processes, each demanding different decision-making procedures, and

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<sup>762</sup> Ahora Madrid 9 March 2015b.

<sup>763</sup> Date unknown, but it must be from around February-March 2015.

different levels of support, thus creating a form of constitutional entrenchment through ‘escalating amendment thresholds’.<sup>764</sup> *External* processes would be the ‘Major strategic issues [that] must be subject to binding democratic processes through participatory procedures’, as the *Marco Común* put it;<sup>765</sup> requiring ‘citizen consultation’, i.e. the broadest possible process.<sup>766</sup> *Structural* processes are those that seek to modify the *Marco Común*, i.e. the most fundamental constitutional amendments:

These processes will follow the same mechanisms used for the approval of the *Marco Común*: consultation with the parties, with each party being responsible for defining their internal consultation mechanisms.<sup>767</sup>

*Extraordinary* processes consist in what we might call internal legislation or legislative amendment:

Extraordinary processes are only those whose object is the approval of new agreements or regulations that in any way modify or substitute those already approved regarding organisation, the *Código Ético*, the *Carta Financiera*,<sup>768</sup> programme, primaries, juridical form, framework, electoral campaign, [etc].

For *extraordinary* processes the quorum is set at 75% of members of the *Mesa*. These decisions will, as per the *Marco Común*, seek consensus in the first instance. However, in order to have more flexibility than pure, absolute consensus can (arguably) offer, extraordinary decisions are to be conducted across three potential rounds: the first seeking absolute consensus; failing that a second round seeking a 75% majority; and failing that a third round seeking a 66% majority. A system clearly modelled on that developed by Ganemos in its December Protocol.<sup>769</sup>

Decisiones extraordinarias	Condición para aprobación	Votos favorables (asistencia de 45 personas)	Votos favorables (asistencia de 34 personas)
Primera ronda	Consenso	Sin votos en contra	Sin votos en contra
Segunda ronda	75%	34	26
Tercera ronda	66%	30	22

Figure 9, decision-making rounds for Ahora Madrid’s *Mesa de Coordinación*.<sup>770</sup>

The document does not seem to imagine these successive rounds of voting occurring on the same day: ‘A period of one week is established between each vote, unless the *Secretaría* agrees on a

<sup>764</sup> Albert 2015.

<sup>765</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015.

<sup>766</sup> Ahora Madrid 2015.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> The *Carta Financiera* is another important document that sought to deal with the excess of donations received for Ahora Madrid’s election campaign. I was repeatedly told that this was a very important issue and source of strife within Ahora Madrid, but it is not crucial for our purposes.

<sup>769</sup> Ganemos Madrid 20 December 2014.

<sup>770</sup> Ahora Madrid 2015.

shorter period.’ So although this system will clearly be more able to actually reach a decision than one of absolute consensus, it will still not necessarily be an entirely agile and responsive system; and this infelicitous potential was indeed realised, as confirmed by José Haro.<sup>771</sup> Ordinary processes include decisions relating to the ‘everyday work of the *Grupo Municipal*’, communication, Ahora Madrid’s various working groups, and generally whatever falls outside the scope of the other three categories. For these decisions the quorum is slightly lower at 66% of members; they follow the same course as extraordinary processes except for the addition of a fourth possible round of voting, seeking a 56% majority.

For all its ingenuity, the system did not work well in practice. For one, the *Mesa* never had the opportunity to make any decisions of great political import after the election, as we will come to shortly. Furthermore, the ideal of consensus was greatly undermined by the antagonisms between Ahora Madrid’s constituent groups, and the quorum was rarely achieved when the *Mesa* met. Finally, some months after the election, it was while trying to implement the *Secretaría Técnica* system over a decision on the *Carta Financiera* that Podemos rejected the result of the process and, according to José Haro, walked out of the *Mesa* until it was conceded that the decision could be made by simple majority. Since then all further decisions in the *Mesa de Coordinación* were made by simple majority. Haro was in fact one of few Ganemos participants to be consistently critical of the commitment to consensus that produced the *Secretaría* system. He now describes the commitment to consensus itself as ‘an error’, and the compromise solution of the *Secretaría* as,

excessively complex, ... a mess of decision-making regulations that has made the space completely inoperative. ... It didn’t allow for agility when voting through the levels, due to the sequence before reaching the last vote. A sequence where there had to be one, two meetings, a mediation group, I don’t know what. That led to a decision that should be made in one minute requiring three weeks of work. That made it completely inoperative.<sup>772</sup>

Behind all of the above from Ahora Madrid’s agreed constitutional documents are also some further organisational aspirations of Ganemos participants that are worth setting out at this point. At least some members of Ganemos were also hoping for further structures, such as *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*, organs of popular participation and real social and political power modelled on the Zapatista institutions, the core of Ganemos’ dual power strategy, which ultimately did not come to fruition. *Foros Locales* (Local Forums) did happen, with a general consultative function as well as concretely feeding into Ahora Madrid’s participatory budgeting project, *Decide Madrid* (Madrid Decides). Then there were the *Grupos Técnicos* (technical groups). Whereas the *Juntas de Buen*

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<sup>771</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

*Gobierno* and the *Foros Locales* were spaces of citizen control, the *Grupos Técnicos* were a key element of *Ahora Madrid* as itself a participatory dispositif. They would form around policy areas (e.g. urbanism, environment, economy, mobility, etc) and, on P2's understanding, be open to all *Ahora Madrid* activists, where they could contribute to policy development:

It was intended that we create areas of government support. ... As we know the institutions are very contaminated, we need the support from outside, of activists, of militants, to make good decisions in government. ... The idea of democratisation was to create these groups so that all the activists of *Ahora Madrid* who wanted to participate in or contribute to the decisions could join the groups they wanted, and debate and produce ideas, which would then go to the *Mesa de Coordinación* so that they later go to the government. ... The idea that arrives here, then arrives here, it is voted on, and if the result is yes, it's an order.<sup>773</sup>

To summarise how the 'new institutional architecture' was being imagined at this point by *Ganemos* participants: on the one hand, the city council (if controlled by *Ahora Madrid*) would be used to establish public spaces of citizen participation (like the *Foros Locales*) and even of citizen dual power (the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*). On the other hand, the structures of *Ahora Madrid* would hold its representatives to both the abstract ideals of the candidature and to the concrete provisions of the electoral programme (which *Ganemos* understood to be a binding set of commitments), while providing a democratic mechanism of adaptability through the generation of new policy ideas in the *Grupos Técnicos*, which could offer proposals to the *Mesa de Coordinación*, which would have the political and constitutional power to mandate *Ahora Madrid* councillors. The power of recall established in the constitutional document of the *Mesa de Coordinación* is perhaps the most crucial democratic link between the grassroots and the *Mesa*, or at least the democratic determination in the last instance.<sup>774</sup> The most important link in the whole democratic chain, however, is clearly that between the *Mesa* and the mayor and councillors in the city council. Without that mandatory link, the *Grupos Técnicos*, the *Mesas Distritales*, or any other function of direct democracy internal to *Ahora Madrid* would exist only, and at best, in a liminal space between recognition and dismissal. As is indeed what happened. Some *Grupos Técnicos* continued to function, especially the mobility group (*Ahora Movilidad*), but with only a propositive function, offering ideas to individual councillors who were free to listen or ignore them as they wished.

The primary election process took place throughout March 2015, with the results announced at the end of that month. Six lists (plus 12 individual candidates) were voted on by

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<sup>773</sup> P2 interview 27 June 2018.

<sup>774</sup> *Ahora Madrid's Constitución, Composición y Régimen de Sustituciones de la Mesa de Coordinación*, 25 February 2015. Not the *Marco Común*.



15,319 people.<sup>775</sup> Below, figure 10 (also presented in Chapter 2 as figure 3), is a flow chart of the candidatures produced by one of the lists, Toma Madrid (not necessarily definitive, but somewhat helpful).



Figure 10, map of the confluence from Municipalia to Ahora Madrid primaries, drawn up by members of the Toma Madrid primary list.<sup>776</sup>

Madrid City Council has 57 seats, and Ahora Madrid stood 57 candidates for those seats, plus nine supplementary candidates. Of course the majority of these candidates had no reasonable expectation of becoming councillors, but this precisely meant that Ahora Madrid could celebrate its internal diversity with a diverse list, while knowing that the candidates with a realistic chance of election were from the more organised and well-known groups, a particular comfort to Podemos and Jesús Montero.<sup>777</sup>

In 49<sup>th</sup> place came the only elected independent. Podemos Madrid, a low profile group of Podemos members, won no candidates. Toma Madrid, a diverse collection of *15Mayistas*, had only their top candidate selected, in 56<sup>th</sup> place. Madrid Incluye had only their top candidate selected, in 26<sup>th</sup> place. None of the above would become councillors. Madrid en Movimiento was the list that most closely represented the radical municipalist aspirations of early Ganemos, primarily an alliance between members of Anticapitalistas and the Traficantes milieu. Madrid en Movimiento effectively

<sup>775</sup> Ríos 2015; Ahora Madrid April 2015.

<sup>776</sup> <<https://web.archive.org/web/20161003161740/https://tomamadrid.wordpress.com/2015/03/25/quien-es-quien-en-ahora-madrid>> accessed 21 May 2021.

<sup>777</sup> This did not prevent the press digging up controversial social media posts from candidates lower down the list, however. See for example Martín 2015.

came third, their top candidate Pablo Carmona placing 6<sup>th</sup> on the final list. He would become a councillor alongside Rommy Arce and Montserrat Galcerán. A por Ellos was very much the Izquierda Unida list (except that, paradoxically, to be on the list one had to leave IU; as discussed earlier). A por Ellos effectively came second, their top candidate Mauricio Valiente placing fourth on the final candidature, becoming a councillor along with Carlos Sánchez Mato and Yolanda Rodríguez.<sup>778</sup>

The clear winner was Más Madrid, who constructed an impressively diverse list with transversal appeal. It contained Podemos members who would later become known as Pablistas, as well as Podemos members who would become known as Errejonistas (as the Iglesias-Errejón conflict continued to harden). It contained people generally considered independents, like Nacho Murgui and Pablo Soto. It contained Inés Sabanés from the Equo, the main green party in Spain. It contained Ganemos activists with diverse backgrounds – though an interesting pattern is that most of the Ganemos activists who stood on the Más Madrid list went on to split from Ganemos to form Madrid129. Finally, the Más Madrid list was headed by Manuela Carmena as mayoral candidate. Former member of PCE, former lawyer and judge, she had previously worked with the UN and with the Basque government. She was by no means a household name, but to have a figure of such gravitas (and charisma) as mayoral candidate was a magnificent coup for the platform.<sup>779</sup> Montero takes most of the credit for approaching and convincing Carmena to stand; a process that seems to have begun in December 2014 at the earliest, possibly January 2015. Regardless, Carmena famously only accepted mere weeks before the primaries. In the separate primary vote for mayoral candidate, Carmena won 64% of the vote. Valiente was second, with only 17%.

The major significance of the Más Madrid list in our narrative lies primarily in the worldlines of the Ganemos activists that joined it. Alejandra de Diego Baciero, a Ganemos activist who supported the Más Madrid list, lamented the logic of ‘quotas’ that dominated the formation of the primary lists, that ‘there was no desire to create a fusion’.<sup>780</sup> That is, this was a particular moment of acceleration of the transition from the logic confluence, the ‘dissolution of historic identity and the construction of a new identity,’<sup>781</sup> towards more reductive, identitarian logics of quotas and

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<sup>778</sup> Iris Urquidi was also selected from the A por Ellos, but then had to stand down due to a treaty issue between Spain and Bolivia (Europa Press 2015).

<sup>779</sup> Without Carmena, ‘They did not have any figure able to compete with Esperanza Aguirre in the elections [the well-known PP mayoral candidate]’ (P5 interview 11 July 2018). This was not at all a controversial perspective during the primaries, one shared by the vast majority. Ganemos activist Alejandra de Diego Baciero, for example: ‘The momento they said “Manuela is on the list,” we all said “ok, now there are possibilities!” She was the only candidate that could compete against [PP mayoral candidate] Esperanza Aguirre in that moment’ (Alejandra de Diego Baciero interview 3 July 2018).

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Gil and Jurado Gilabert 2015.

coalitions.<sup>782</sup> P1, also a Ganemos activist who supported the Más Madrid list, describes an even stronger distaste for this period.<sup>783</sup> They supported Más Madrid because its more ‘transversal’ and ‘populist’ politics seemed more appropriate in that moment than the more movementist, CUP-inspired Madrid en Movimiento list. This was something they now regret, wishing they had supported a purely Ganemos list that could have defended the original municipalist project against populist subsumption.<sup>784</sup> It was also no bad thing for Montero and Podemos Madrid that such a transversal list emerged. In P3’s view, Podemos ‘wanted to ensure that Manuela did not look bad, so they had to win by a long way. ... To make sure her list was the most voted, they put in a ton of people from Ganemos.’<sup>785</sup>

Thus Ahora Madrid had assembled its motley crew of candidates, and its (surprisingly) popular mayoral candidate (as it would turn out). Carmena’s last minute acceptance after negotiating mainly with Montero meant that, in P5’s words, ‘she agreed to stand almost as a blank cheque.’<sup>786</sup> Or in P1’s words:

Manuela Carmena was not an important political actor at that time in the candidacy. She was to become the most important political actor in the candidacy. This we only found out later. We [Ganemos activists supporting the Más Madrid list] were also in favour of a horizontal, assemblyist model. What we didn’t know is that the one who was not in favour of an assemblyist, horizontal, transparent model, was Manuela Carmena; that later she and her group would themselves become a political actor within Ahora Madrid.<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> ‘They negotiate who goes from each side, who from Podemos, who from Ganemos. ... There is no desire to create a fusion. There is something else that matters more, the maintenance of what already exists, the struggle to hold ground and to hold power’ (Alejandra de Diego Baciero interview 3 July 2018).

<sup>783</sup> ‘After [negotiations began with Podemos, and as the primaries approached], Ganemos became a space of power. Each party played their cards. IU played their cards. Anticapitalistas played their cards. There was a gradual distancing between Patio Maravillas and Traficantes. And we all played our cards. ... At the same time as Dowdall allowed this kind of ecological situation, ... if you are clever you could use Dowdall in order to put your candidates in the list. ... Those who best understood the primaries were the political sectors that were no longer thinking in collective terms, but rather only in terms of their strategy to position their candidates. ... In this moment, each main actor, in my opinion, didn’t think in the common process, in the democracy of the base, in this principle of methodology, in this moment each actor only thought in their own objectives, aims, people, who could enter in the different lists. They only thought in their particular political strategies, not in the common strategy. And for me it was a moment very – I was very upset in this moment. ... Because all this work, all this process, ... definitely broke in this moment’ (P1 interview 6 February 2018).

<sup>784</sup> Note that, as with every aspect of the Ahora Madrid narrative, this framing of specifically *populist* subsumption is not universal, though most agree on something at least analogous. P6, for example, viewed the mutations of Ganemos as an encroaching ‘leviathanic’ logic, combined with an increasing ‘masculinisation’ of internal politics (P6 interview 10 July 2018). José Haro, meanwhile, argued that Ahora Madrid was not ‘a populist project as such. It is a personalist project, which is something else,’ though this was referring more specifically to Carmena’s role (José Haro interview 20 June 2018).

<sup>785</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>786</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018

<sup>787</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

This was one significant complication for Ahora Madrid post-election. Another significant, and highly unexpected complication is described by Zapata, a Ganemos activist who not only supported, but stood on the Más Madrid list, and would become a city councillor:

I think it would be much easier to have constituted that subject of democratic radicalisation from opposition, because in opposition that would really have been the only objective. We wouldn't have had to worry about anything else. We wouldn't have to perform the ritual of representation, we could rather work to de-represent the institution, to transfer as much power as possible to the outside, which would be the institutional counterweight. *But we won.*<sup>788</sup>

## 4.2 Leadership

I think, even had there been a more rigid agreement, due to Manuela's personality itself, the same thing would have happened; and because of the political model that the Podemos leadership implemented, I think the situation would have been the same.<sup>789</sup>

One of the earliest hypotheses of this research was that Ahora Madrid was a fertile seedbed of political experimentation (this certainly turned out to be true, in many ways), specifically generating, through a productive, agonistic process of confluence, a novel form of prefigurative populism. The latter turned out to be a much more problematic assumption than the former. Not entirely untrue, but as we have already seen, the prefigurative-populist relationship was in many ways and at many times much more antagonistic than agonistic. This led to an amended working hypothesis: that Ganemos' assemblyist, horizontalist politics was subsumed and consumed by Podemos' populist logic, and by the representative logic of electoralism. This also turned out to be only partially true. In terms of *explaining* the events of Ahora Madrid's narrative, the above hypotheses, as well as the work done so far on Negri and Laclau, only takes us so far. The key issue in all of this, to the surprise of everyone involved, is the figure of Manuela Carmena. It may seem obvious that the mayor would be a crucial determining factor in attempting to govern Madrid in accordance with the values of *la nueva política*, but as has been emphasised already, no one reasonably expected that Ahora Madrid would win. Indeed they won one less seat than the PP, but were able to form a municipal government by winning an investiture vote for Carmena, as PSOE allowed for a one seat majority over the alternative coalition of PP and centre-right Ciudadanos. And so the PP lost the Madrid mayoralty they had held for 24 years, to this ragtag bunch of upstart activists.<sup>790</sup> As has also been

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<sup>788</sup> Guillermo Zapata interview 13 July 2018, emphasis added.

<sup>789</sup> José Enrique García Blanco interview 15 June 2018.

<sup>790</sup> 'Jesús Montero once said, it's incredible what a bunch of squatters and booksellers have been able to achieve' (P6 interview 10 July 2018).

mentioned, Carmena was an almost completely unknown quantity. The perfect empty signifier; but also a new political force, one that would quickly become a new collective political subject within *Ahora Madrid (Manuelismo)*, and one that had not been accounted for in the movement-party's constitution.

The manner in which Carmena came to dominate the course of *Ahora Madrid's* governance of the Spanish capital can to some extent be explained simply by the institution into which she and *Ahora Madrid* entered: Madrid city council centralises a vast amount of legal power in the individual figure of the mayor. This is furthermore a prefigurative-constitutional issue, in that, self-evidently, not enough had been done by *Ganemos* (in whose political interest this would serve) to constitutionalise stronger controls on *Ahora Madrid* representatives in general, and specifically on the all-powerful mayor. In order to effectively *theorise* this turn of events, however, we need to incorporate a new key term, which will serve not only to theoretically explain events but also, ultimately, to form a foundation for a closer theoretical interlocution between prefiguration and hegemony. That key term is leadership.

#### 4.2.1 *Al Final Ganamos las Elecciones: From Leadership to Hyperleadership*<sup>791</sup>

##### *Campaña de Desborde*

Although there is some divergence over the precise electoral weight that should be given to the various political forces involved, everyone agrees that the election campaign was a marvel. The negotiations had agreed Errejón as the official campaign manager, who delegated much of the work to Rita Maestre; but neither Errejón nor Maestre are the key factors mentioned when people discuss the campaign, which almost everyone now refers to (even if with different understandings of what it means) as the *campaña de desborde* (overflow campaign). Even while P5 (a Manuelista) tries to assign the motor force of the campaign to Manuela herself, they acknowledge its ebullient energy:

In large part due to Manuela's personality, and in large part due to a disastrous electoral campaign by Esperanza Aguirre [PP mayoral candidate], Manuela's calm, brilliant, empathetic disposition generated a rare current of hope, displayed in spontaneous campaigns of popular support for the figure of Manuela, as a great hope to end 25 years of the Popular Party. It began to generate an incredible current of affection.<sup>792</sup>

For Jesús Montero, the primary factor was not Manuela but, unsurprisingly, Podemos.

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<sup>791</sup> *Al Final Ganamos las Elecciones* (In the End We Won the Elections) was published in 2017 by Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica to commemorate the celebrated *desborde* campaigns in both Madrid and Barcelona by collecting some of the campaigns' graphic design (Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica 2017).

<sup>792</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018.

Podemos is why Manuela is a councillor. Without Podemos, Manuela is not a councillor, because Manuela is known by 1.7% of Madrid in March 2015. At the same time, without Manuela we would not have the mayoralty, because the strong, independent leadership of Manuela supplies approximately 10%. Election results 24 May 2015, city council: Ahora Madrid gets 32.5%: more or less 20% is Podemos. More or less 10% is Manuela. Why? Because the difference in votes of the PSOE, between the region and the city, is less than 10%.<sup>793</sup>

Nevertheless, Montero admits that the campaign can be characterised as an ‘overflow’; though he denies that the horizontalists can take all the credit. Montero described it as a ‘generalised’ overflow, caused by the confluence of established political forces combined with the good management of the Podemos campaign team and ‘the leadership’ and ‘the attributes of Manuela’, citing the *Mujeres con Manuela* event (Women with Manuela) as a truly transversal overflow, by which he seems to mean less radical, less movementist, more appealing to the political centre. Montero’s conclusion is that ‘these are the factors of success: the electoral strength of Podemos, strong leadership, ... and the gathering of all the forces of change.’<sup>794</sup>

The overflow campaign is seen differently by Ganemos and the other movement activists involved. P3 maintains a balanced view of how important it was that Manuela could appeal to moderates, but introduces for us the 15M framing that is so important to the *desborde* narrative:

The campaign was fabulous. Mobilisation of the spirit of 15M, the people went crazy, crazy over helping with the campaign, ... and with a good candidate to convince the moderates. But I really think it was the articulation of the two sectors: the fact that people ... who were more *15Mayista*, more to the left, very mobilised, had a letter of introduction that was Manuela, that was so suited to capturing more moderate votes. It was a good combination. But I think it wasn’t just Manuela, it was Manuela and those who mobilised to defend her.<sup>795</sup>

The official campaign was tightly controlled by Rita Maestre and what P1 now calls ‘the Errejonist sector’ of Podemos Madrid.<sup>796</sup> P7 claims, for example, that Pablo Carmona, head of the Madrid en Movimiento primary list and sixth on the final Ahora Madrid list, was specifically ‘vetoed’ by Podemos from appearing at certain events, and that in general they were ‘completely excluded from the management of the campaign.’<sup>797</sup> The true energy of the campaign, says P1, came precisely from

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<sup>793</sup> Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

<sup>795</sup> P3 interview 8 June 2018.

<sup>796</sup> Though I do not believe the terms ‘Pablista’ and ‘Errejonista’ were in heavy use back in 2015 (P1 interview 6 February 2018).

<sup>797</sup> P7 interview 25 July 2018.

‘the overflow ... of the people.’<sup>798</sup> By which P1 refers to the effectively spontaneous eruption of activity outside the official campaign. An emergent network rapidly materialised, centred around hacktivists, graphic designers and other creatives, and in particular the groups Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica de Madrid (Madrid Graphic Liberation Movement, LGM) and Madrid con Manuela (Madrid with Manuela). Both groups had their core online presence on Tumblr; their pages are still active, and replete with a seemingly interminable stream of designs for posters, stickers, Twitter memes and animated gifs, that catalysed an immense memetic effervescence, both online and offline.<sup>799</sup> The images are immensely diverse in style, but the selection below is typical of the most common content: Carmena’s face (and usually, if there is any text, the name Manuela).<sup>800</sup> Below are some further designs shared on Twitter, with the suggestion that they be used as masks:



Figure 11, mask designs shared from the ‘Madrid con Manuela’ twitter account during the 2015 election campaign.<sup>801</sup>

Whatever the reality of the electoral mathematics, the *desborde* campaign was a powerful example of the promise of prefigurative populism. Carmena was such a powerful empty signifier not only because people liked her when they saw her interviewed, while knowing only enough about her to find something to relate to.<sup>802</sup> The radical diversity of the *desborde* campaign itself produced a radical emptying of the content of Carmena’s image. The more versions of her face proliferated, the more detached it became from her as an individual, from her biography, and from the pre-

<sup>798</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>799</sup> LGM: <<https://mlgmadrid.tumblr.com>>; McM: <<https://madridconmanuela.tumblr.com>>.

<sup>800</sup> No selection offered here can remotely approximate the sheer diversity and creative brilliance of the images produced by the *desborde* campaign, so it is strongly recommended that the reader at least briefly skim through the Tumblr pages listed in the previous footnote.

<sup>801</sup> Madrid con Manuela 2015.

<sup>802</sup> ‘The point with Manuela in the campaign is that it was the best empty signifier, better than what Errejón could have done. So women saw in her, you know, this feminist with an open relation that speaks about sex and is very progressive. ... the people from the culture of the transition saw the ... lawyer with Abogados de Atocha, a symbol of the resistance against Franco. The people that just wanted things to work better saw the judge [who] has been taking care of social rights. The progressive people from the 15M saw an old figure that was actually ... rejecting old politics and was proposing a new politics’ (P6 interview 10 July 2018).

constituted identities that converged in Ahora Madrid. This latter aspect was emphasised by Carmena herself in interviews.<sup>803</sup> Gutiérrez, participant in the *desborde* campaign, writes about it under the intriguing title ‘When The Mayor is a Mask of the Multitude’.<sup>804</sup> He emphasises the function of identification as ‘mythopoiesis’, as a subjective disruption, ‘as fiesta, as ritual celebration’. Gutiérrez sees this mythopoiesis functioning most strongly through ‘mutant, remixable, adaptable identities,’<sup>805</sup> claiming,

Manuela was not a closed, exclusive identity. ... And the Manuela masks that covered the network at the speed of wildfire, they were more than Manuela. They were Manuela+1, +1000, Manuela + other identities, sensitivities. Putting that mask on their Facebook profile or on their face, the citizens were giving form to a collective body, to a new mask of the multitude.

Here we see the potential for a horizontal, self-organised network to build a chain of equivalence in a more complex, emergent manner than the top-down, centrally managed, tightly controlled populist strategy of Podemos: hegemonic articulation as emergent property of a complex political system – an idea whose full significance will become clear later in the chapter via the work of Alex Williams.<sup>806</sup> It is easy to imagine how such an emergent chain of equivalence might be the more powerful of the two, as it is likely to have a more *authentic* affective resonance. For all the ambiguity of the idea of authenticity, surely it overlaps, even approaches some degree of synonymy, with that of emergence. Indeed it is precisely the authentically grounded, emergent properties of 15M that Podemos has sought to mould into a counter-hegemonic popular subjectivity.

Gil and Jurado Gilabert argue that the campaign expressed the power of the logic of confluence over the logic of ‘popular unity’,<sup>807</sup> and in that logic of confluence and its diverse emergent properties we see its more general strength, which we could characterise as ‘collective intelligence’.<sup>808</sup> In our interview, P6 moved precisely from discussing the election campaign to discussing the general merits, in their view, of horizontal, *asambleario* organising:

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<sup>803</sup> ‘In practically every interview, Manuela Carmena tried to make it clear that it was a candidacy of people and not parties. She has even gone so far as to say that “parties are becoming obsolete” (Gil and Jurado Gilabert 2015). See also Carmena’s common refrain, ‘I am not Podemos’ (Manuela, quoted in Sánchez 2015).

<sup>804</sup> Gutiérrez 2019.

<sup>805</sup> Which he models on open source software development, hacker culture and technopolitics.

<sup>806</sup> Williams 2020.

<sup>807</sup> Gil and Jurado Gilabert 2015. With the sweeping victories of municipalist confluences in 2015, while Podemos failed to ever return to its peak polling performance, it is obvious that this kind of conclusion would be difficult to avoid at the time. However it is worth noting that today, of course, fortunes have reversed, with the sweep of municipalist defeat in 2019, while Podemos has finally made it to national government, if only as junior coalition partner. See also Sánchez 2015, and Rosa 2015.

<sup>808</sup> P6 strongly emphasised collective intelligence as an important quality of horizontal organising. It was also discussed by Miguel Arana Catania, regarding the more technopolitical aspects of Ahora Madrid, such as *Decide Madrid* (P6 interview 27



Podemos, in the campaign, wanted to control everything. Like, for example, ... in a certain point we propose, 'let's give some money of the campaign to the local groups in the districts, ... let's give them money to do whatever they want.' [Podemos] said, 'no, these people are crazy, you don't know what they are going to do. You cannot trust them.' ... You know what is going to happen? Three of them are going to be a disaster. Another five are going to be, more or less... But another, let's say, fourteen, fifteen are going to be good. And then three of them are going to do incredible things. ... If you want to control everything, there are not going to be disasters but there are not going to be great things. Actually, at the end of the day, there might even be disasters. I do think that Ganemos had a certain kind of intelligence in its organisation that made this horizontalism possible. ... It gave everybody the opportunity to do things, but it also gave everybody a frame so that what you were doing was contributing to ... a collective endeavour. ... Self-organisation is not non-organisation. ... The horizontal model allows for collective intelligence, and collective intelligence is always better than the brightest of the intelligence alone. ... Also I'm very biased by my experience with the Podemos organisation, which I think is absolutely crap. Maybe you can quote that. ... Distributed leadership, in my opinion, is not that everybody's a leader. A distributed leadership means that you recognise that there are people in different fields for different tasks, for different areas and different situations, that should be taken into account as the leadership. It's not that everybody in every moment could do whatever. I think that's a mistake. ... There are different levels of knowledge, there are different levels of information, there are different levels of experience, there are different levels of power, but those are different levels of capacity. The question is how you can take this diversity and make it so that it's not one person that is supposed to know everything and decide everything and have all the responsibilities, but that this is distributed.<sup>809</sup>

Which leads to a further possibility that we will return to shortly: that leadership itself might be a potential emergent property of horizontal, *asambleario* collective intelligence.

### *Laclau, Leadership and Radical Democracy*

I argue that one of the key (failed) challenges for Ahora Madrid, and for any future prefigurative populism, is that of a (more) horizontalist, *asambleario* reimagining of leadership. Such a

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July 2018); by P5, acknowledging the strengths of *asamblearismo* while offering their critique of horizontal assembly democracy (P5 interview 11 July 2018); and it was present in Ganemos Madrid's political manifesto (Ganemos Madrid 1 October 2014 [27 September 2014]).

<sup>809</sup> P6 interview 10 July 2018. A methodological note: in our interview, I was the first to mention 'distributed leadership'. This concept was a result of the grounded theoretical sampling and concept-building process. While I introduced the concept to this conversation, the energy and detail of P6's response clearly shows that it resonated strongly with what they were already conceiving in terms of 'collective intelligence'.

reimagination would have to shatter the claims of the ‘iron law of oligarchy’, which so far Ahora Madrid and Podemos seem more to have confirmed than refuted. ‘Leadership is a necessary phenomenon in every form of social life,’ wrote Michels, to which neither Gramsci nor Laclau, nor Negri (post-*Assembly*) would disagree.<sup>810</sup> It seemed to Michels that, in the party especially, this ‘technical indispensability of leadership’ leads to oligarchy, deriving partly ‘from the psychical transformations which the leading personalities in the parties undergo’, but also, and more interestingly, depending upon ‘the psychology of organization itself, that is to say, upon the tactical and technical necessities which result from the consolidation of every disciplined political aggregate.’<sup>811</sup> Thus after leaders arise – at first ‘spontaneously’ – they soon become ‘professional leaders, and in this second stage of development they are stable and irremovable. ... The mass will never rule except *in abstracto*,’ concludes Michels, glumly; the question therefore remaining: ‘not whether ideal democracy is realizable, but rather to what point and in what degree democracy is desirable, possible, and realizable at a given moment’.<sup>812</sup> To break this supposedly iron law would require rigorous constitutional checks to account for the ‘psychical transformations’ of the leadership, and a radically new ‘psychology of organization’ that distributes rather than centralises leadership functions.<sup>813</sup> Populist strategy places yet further impediments to the challenge of deconstructing leadership. On top of the organisational necessity of leadership we find the populist indispensability of the ‘mediatic leadership’.

The problem of thinking leadership constitutionally, and in terms of a possible prefigurative populism, requires attending to the hegemonic function of leadership both within and outwith the (movement-)party, in fact precisely to the interaction between the within and the outwith. *On Populist Reason* begins to bridge that gap by providing a theorisation of how the relationship between group and leader can be characterised along a spectrum that runs between the extreme limit cases of the ‘purely narcissistic leader’ and the ‘fully organized group’.<sup>814</sup> Here Laclau tackles the psychoanalytics of leadership as an antidote to the denigrating early analyses of crowds and masses, in order to progress onwards towards the construction of a popular subject through ever-expanding logics of equivalence. The early psycho-social studies that Laclau draws upon are used metaphorically to develop Laclau’s ‘social logics’ of equivalence and difference, which he ultimately uses to explain his theory of hegemony and populism at the broad level of the social. However, the groups discussed along the way are usually sub-state organisations such as church or army,

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<sup>810</sup> Michels 1915: 400; Hardt and Negri 2017.

<sup>811</sup> Michels 1915: 401-02.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid.

<sup>813</sup> For our purposes we could think of a ‘psychology of organization’ as something like ‘constituent imagination’; something less psychologistic and more constitutional or systems-theoretical, focused on organisational incentive structures, entrenched values, etc.

<sup>814</sup> Laclau 2005: 58.

providing us with a populist discussion of leadership, focused, if only transiently, on sub-national organisations, that turns out to be eminently applicable to our prefigurative-constitutional investigation that operates at the scale of the movement-party. Although Laclau does warn that conclusions ‘about constituting a signifying totality’ do not ‘lead automatically’ to conclusions about ‘actual ruling’, and presumably vice versa, we can draw out of this section of *On Populist Reason* a populist defence of charismatic leadership (as ‘a far more democratic leadership than the one involved in the notion of the narcissistic despot’),<sup>815</sup> and an understanding of the equivalential function that at least partially defines the task of leadership within a single organisation just as much as it grounds Laclau’s conception of hegemonic ‘social leadership’. This will form the basis for further dialogue between populist and horizontalist understandings of leadership; and that further dialogue, after introducing Hardt and Negri’s latest book, *Assembly*, which conveniently focuses on leadership, will become the core terrain for finally drawing together our discussions of Negri and Laclau, horizontalism and populism, prefiguration and hegemony. Specifically, the following analysis of Laclau provides the conceptual tools needed to explain *the prefigurative problem of charismatic leadership*: the greater the extent to which the individual leader functions themselves as the primary empty signifier holding together a wider social chain of equivalence, the more internal party democracy is, in some crucial ways, hollowed out. Following the temporal-ontological claims of prefigurative politics (as found in the theory of path dependency), the party thus comes to prefigure not radical democracy but an instrumentalist prefigurative constitutionality that undermines democracy both in the present and the future.

By way of extensive Freudian exegesis, Laclau arrives at the two aforementioned limit cases that Freud had considered as possible grounds for the cohesion of the group: either *narcissism*, or *organisation*. The *narcissistic* ground is the libidinal tie between leader and led, which Laclau summarises with the following quote:

A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego.<sup>816</sup>

Such a group would be characterised by the aphorism ‘identification between brothers, love for the father.’<sup>817</sup> By this Laclau means that there is a crucial separation in function between the relationship of ‘common love’ for that ‘same object’, with love functioning in Freudian terms as *idealisation*, whereas the relationship of *identification* occurs only between members of the group, and *not*

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid: 60.

<sup>816</sup> Freud 2001 [1921]: 116.

<sup>817</sup> Laclau 2005: 56.

between them and the 'same object' itself. If that 'same object' is an individual leader then we are presented with an extreme despotism, because the group's sole cohering force is the constitutive power of the idealised love for the 'beloved chief', which cannot therefore be easily replaced, nor can it be an accountable form of leadership in the manner defined by Laclau as '*primus inter pares*', to which we will return shortly. Even if this 'same object' of 'common love' is not an individual leader but an abstraction (a possibility that Freud himself acknowledges, and which is of course crucial to the ultimate direction of Laclau's argument here), then Laclau's reading would still suggest a kind of dogmatic, even fanatical group psychology, not an appropriate model for radical democracy.<sup>818</sup>

The alternative limit case is the group cohered not through the narcissistic, libidinal relationship between leader and led, but through *organisation*. Freud's organisational hypothesis comes as a rejection of the claim, made by psychologist William McDougall, that 'the intellectual disadvantages of the group can be overcome "by withdrawing the performance of intellectual tasks from the group and reserving them for individual members of it".'<sup>819</sup> What if, Freud muses, the problem consists rather in 'how to procure for the group precisely those features which were characteristic of the individual and which are extinguished in him by the formation of the group.'<sup>820</sup> Laclau dismisses this possibility, in perfunctory style:

in the imaginary (*reductio ad absurdum*) case in which the breach between ego and ego ideal was *entirely* bridged, we would have ... the total transference — through organization — of the functions of the individual to the community. The various myths of the *totally* reconciled society — which invariably presuppose the absence of leadership, that is, the withering away of the political — share this last type of vision.<sup>821</sup>

Laclau may not think much of this line of thought, but this is almost exactly the solution that Hardt and Negri arrive at in *Assembly* for a horizontalised model of distributed or emergent leadership, to which we will return in Chapter 4.2.3.

Laclau sees these two possibilities – the group cohered either by the purely narcissistic leader or through pure organisation – as archetypes, extreme limit cases, neither existing in isolation but rather constituting two overlapping social logics. For Laclau, real leadership (whether leadership of an organisation or hegemonic leadership of society) therefore necessarily functions in that middle ground. In Freudian terms (developed via a reading of Freud's chapter 'A Differentiating Degree in the Ego'), that middle ground exists where 'the need for a strong leader meets the individual only

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid: 57.

<sup>820</sup> Freud 2001 [1921]: 129.

<sup>821</sup> Laclau 2005: 62-63, emphasis Laclau's.

halfway,' i.e. the ego and ego ideal are neither completely separated nor completely reconciled.<sup>822</sup> In this case:

the leader will be accepted only if he presents, in a particularly marked fashion, features that he shares with those he is supposed to lead. In other words: the led are, to a considerable extent, *in pari materia* with the leader — that is to say, the latter becomes *primus inter pares*. And three momentous consequences follow from this structural mutation: first, that 'something in common' which makes the identification between members of the group possible cannot consist exclusively in love for the leader, but in some positive feature that both leader and led share. Second, identification does not take place only between egos, because the separation between ego and ego ideal is far from complete. This means that a certain degree of identification with the leader becomes possible. ... Third, if the leader leads because he presents, in a particularly marked way, features which are common to all members of the group, he can no longer be, in all its purity, the despotic, narcissistic ruler. On the one hand, as he participates in that very substance of the community which makes identification possible, his identity is split: he is the father, but also one of the brothers. On the other hand, since his right to rule is based on the recognition by other group members of a feature of the leader which he shares, in a particularly pronounced way, with all of them, the leader is, to a considerable extent, accountable to the community. The need for leadership could still be there ... but it is a far more democratic leadership than the one involved in the notion of the narcissistic despot.<sup>823</sup>

While Laclau's core intention here is to establish the malleable, recallable, and therefore 'democratic' nature of the social leadership function of hegemony and the empty signifier, he also accidentally provides us with a striking argument for the democratic accountability of charismatic leadership of a movement or party. Populism may encourage an instrumentalist prefigurative constitutionality, in which internal party democracy is forever subordinated to the discursive strategy of the mediatic leadership, forever postponed until 'after the revolution' (or, after the electoral victory); but any hollowing out of democratic procedures is counterbalanced by the leader's libidinal accountability to those she leads, potentially both within and outwith the party. That is to say, whatever the lack of constitutional checks that seemingly leaves the populist leader free and unconstrained, they are in fact still constrained by the very nature of the populist, hegemonic relationship to continue to reflect those positive features 'that both leader and led share'. To be blunt, this is such a poor argument for the supposed democratic accountability of

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid: 59.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid: 59-60.

charismatic leadership, at least from any perspective that deserves the label ‘radical democracy’, that it would be harsh to argue that Laclau would actually defend it at the level of party organisation. We cannot rule out that he might (he was particularly fascinated by Perón’s populist success, after all), but whether he does or not is really beside the point when the argument so clearly applies to Podemos’ populist constitutionality regardless.

A perfect example of how this libidinal tie can fall into crisis came when the Spanish media learned of the new house (or ‘chalet’) Iglesias bought in 2018, worth €600,000, complete with a pool and a picturesque view of the mountains of the Sierra de Guadarrama. Iglesias has, of course, been constantly subject to media attacks from the right. This controversy, however, quickly gained purchase across the political spectrum, especially after a 2015 interview was unearthed that made the purchase seem particularly hypocritical.<sup>824</sup> Rodríguez summarises well how Iglesias’ left populist image made this especially problematic:

The populist strategy was effective while it could sustain a sharp division of moral roles: the ‘*casta*’ that Podemos criticised had to appear as corrupt and dirty as the finger Podemos used to accuse them was immaculate and consistent.<sup>825</sup>

Iglesias’ response was to invoke a recall referendum, both for himself and his partner, Irene Montero, who was herself Podemos’ speaker in Congress (now Minister of Equality). The plebiscitary question was ‘Do you think that Pablo Iglesias and Irene Montero should remain at the head of the general secretariat of Podemos and of the parliamentary office of spokesperson?’ The possible answers were ‘Yes, they should remain’ or ‘No, they should resign from the general secretariat and from the parliamentary office of spokesperson and from their duties in Congress.’ The vote returned the highest turnout in such a party plebiscite up to that point. 68% voted ‘Yes, they should remain’, the lowest level of support for Iglesias in any party-wide vote up to that point (see figure 12 below). Gerbaudo summarises the affair well:

the referendum was widely criticised as being preposterous and a manifestation of the worst plebiscitary and leaderistic tendencies of digital democracy. ... the accompanying text was rather tendentious in presenting Iglesias and Montero as the victims of a media persecution campaign. After the vote, the two continued in their positions despite the

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<sup>824</sup> Iglesias said, infelicitously: ‘It seems dangerous to me that someone isolates themselves ... Then they don’t know what’s going on outside. These politicians who live in Somosaguas [an affluent area of Madrid], who live in chalets, who do not know what it is to take public transport’ (Iglesias quoted in *El Periódico* 2018).

<sup>825</sup> Rodríguez 2018.

comparatively high number of members who had expressed dissatisfaction with the leadership and with the Anticapitalistas having called for an abstention.<sup>826</sup>

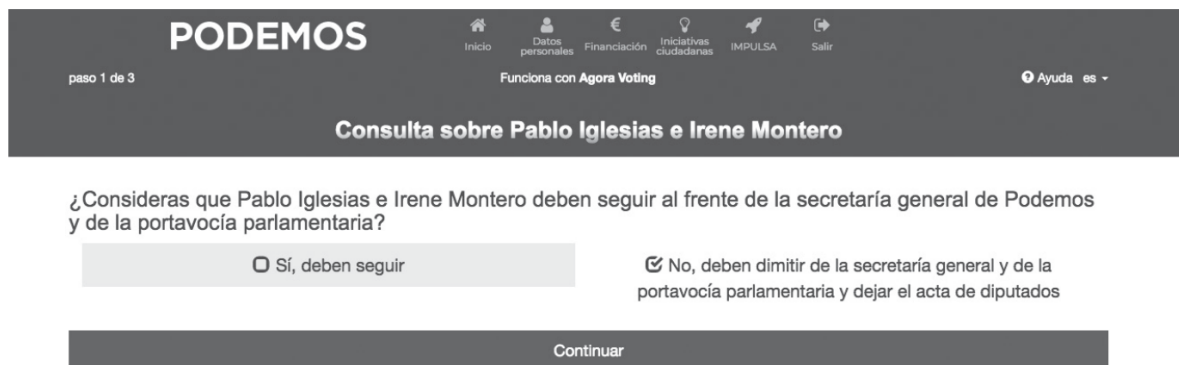


Figure 7.3 Screenshot of Podemos' consultation on Pablo Iglesias and Irene Montero.

Figure 12, screenshot of Iglesias and Montero's recall plebiscite.<sup>827</sup>

It could be argued that this anecdote proves the efficacy of the Freudian libidinal accountability of the populist charismatic leader. Iglesias strayed outside the limits of the shared characteristic values of (some) members of his party, and was held accountable for it. But he was not *held* accountable by any exogenous process. He called the internal vote himself. He did not change his accommodation plans to something more modest,<sup>828</sup> nor even really accept the criticism.<sup>829</sup> He won the vote (if more narrowly than usual), but what choice did Podemos members really have? The Podemos project from inception had been centred on generating recognition of 'the pony-tailed professor', making 'an unconventional left-wing talk-show guest ... a reference point for the socio-political discontent caused by the crisis.'<sup>830</sup> Iglesias was Podemos' empty signifier. Iglesias effectively *was* Podemos (until his dramatic retirement from frontline politics in May 2021). It may well be that in this case the result merely reflects that only a minority of members truly believed that Iglesias' chalet was an unacceptable hypocrisy, a true breach of the libidinal bond of *primus inter pares*. But by turning the issue into a binary choice between continuity and utter crisis, Iglesias revealed the well-known instrumental power of the plebiscite, that she who writes the question determines the outcome. Furthermore, by using that plebiscitary power to quantify his critics as a minority, he legitimised not only his position as leader but also his characteristics as leader. In legitimising *the*

<sup>826</sup> Gerbaudo 2019: 138-139.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid: 138.

<sup>828</sup> An article from 2020 suggests he still lives there (and offers a virtual tour of said house, should the reader be curious) (El Mueble 2020).

<sup>829</sup> The short quotes provided by Marcos (2018) suggest that Iglesias focused on defending the move. See also Gerbaudo's claim quoted above, that 'the accompanying text was rather tendentious in presenting Iglesias and Montero as the victims of a media persecution campaign' (Gerbaudo 2019: 139).

<sup>830</sup> Iglesias 2015 [2014]: 107.

*chalet itself*, Iglesias was able to adjust, or at least clarify, the scope of those ‘features which are common to all members of the group’ and which therefore constitute the libidinal limits of charismatic leadership and give it Laclau’s vaunted ‘democratic’ quality. This is the Laclauian framework for how charismatic leadership becomes hyperleadership.

### *Hyperleadership*

The concept of *hiperliderazgo*, or hyperleadership, emerges in Spain in the mid-1990s, mostly referring to the PSOE and ‘the concentration of decision-making capacity in the party leadership’ under Felipe González.<sup>831</sup> In the early 20th century it enters the lexicon of debates over Hugo Chávez and Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution.<sup>832</sup> From here it is taken up by the Complutense political scientists that would go on to form the core founding cadre of Podemos, whose work before Podemos was mostly centred on the Latin American ‘pink tide’, both academically and sometimes professionally. In 2009 Juan Carlos Monedero gave a presentation in Caracas titled ‘The Spectre of Hyperleadership’.<sup>833</sup> In this context, we can ascertain from other presentations at the same event that the term hyperleadership was being used primarily to refer to Chávez’s problematic indispensability to the revolution and to the functioning of the state bureaucracy.<sup>834</sup> This frames the concept of hyperleadership as a way in which theorists sympathetic to the Bolivarian revolution were trying to understand, to some extent to reconcile and to some extent to offer critical support to the characteristics of Chávez’s role in the revolution that purely hostile critics would simply label authoritarian. Monedero’s nuanced analysis of this idea is as follows:

I think it is typical of countries with limited social cohesion, with a weak democratic party system and with high levels of exclusion. Hyperleadership allows us to establish an alternative to what we call the strategic selectivity of the state. ... In this sense, I understand that hyperleadership plays an important role, it has the advantage of articulating the unstructured and of bringing fragments together, through forms of what Gramsci called ‘progressive Caesarism’, which help to resume the course of the revolution both in times of political vacuum or of ideological confusion. But that form of leadership also comes with problems. Hyperleadership ultimately deactivates popular participation by creating an over-reliance on the heroic abilities of leadership.<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> Vargas-Machuca Ortega 1995: 27.

<sup>832</sup> With definitions such as ‘plebiscitary and charismatic centralism’ (Abal Medina 2006).

<sup>833</sup> Ciudad CCS 2011.

<sup>834</sup> The titles of two of the other presentations make this point perfectly well: ‘The President Cannot Do Everything,’ and ‘You Cannot Do It Alone’ (ibid).

<sup>835</sup> Juan Carlos Monedero, quoted ibid.



We saw in Chapter 3 how Iglesias read the 15M movement as opening an ‘organic crisis’ in Spain’s neoliberal hegemony. Specifically, this moment was read by many in the Complutense circle as inaugurating a situation eminently similar to that which allowed for the rise of the pink tide in Latin America. As Monedero put it: ‘limited social cohesion, with a weak democratic party system and with high levels of exclusion.’ Monedero, however, would stick to his critique of hyperleadership (that it ‘deactivates popular participation by creating an over-reliance on the heroic abilities of leadership’), resigning from Podemos on 30 April 2015 because, in his eyes, Podemos had lost its original connection to the participatory ethos of 15M and had become too much like a traditional party.<sup>836</sup>

Errejón, on the other hand, inverted Monedero’s participatory critique of hyperleadership. Monedero was concerned with the danger of demobilisation posed by a hyperleadership that led an already vibrant, active movement base. Monedero’s critique therefore did not necessarily apply to Spain in the 2012-13 period of post-15M malaise (discussed in Chapter 2.2.2), where demobilisation was the problem that needed to be solved, not a risk worth worrying about. Errejón does not seem to use the term hyperleadership explicitly, but his explanations of the power and importance of a ‘mediatic leadership’ show very clearly that he was applying essentially Monedero’s concept of hyperleadership. Writing in 2013, Errejón saw in the leadership of Morales (in Bolivia) and Correa (in Ecuador) the power of ‘charismatic leadership supported by heterogeneous social coalitions, which polarised the political space by presenting the suffering people as the alternative to a “corrupt and incapable” system and “selfish and moribund” elites,’ to play a ‘catalyzing role’ in a context of ‘lower communal density of the social fabric (union, neighbourhood, indigenous) and greater degree of institutional decomposition’:

The importance of the catalytic role of leadership is inversely proportional to the organicity of the coalitions that support it and the ‘availability’ of social spaces and discourses for the communal aggregation of discontent.<sup>837</sup>

A year later, in 2014, with Podemos riding high on its shocking success in the European elections of May that year, Errejón explicitly applies this line of thought to Podemos’ populist wager, arguing not only that Podemos *could* use the power of mediatic hyperleadership to reverse the traditional order of first building grassroots organisation and then mobilising that organisation in elections, but that in fact Podemos had already been proven correct in attempting to do so:

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<sup>836</sup> Carvajal 2015.

<sup>837</sup> Errejón 2013: 31.

In reality we are facing a situation in which what is very broken at the bottom can also be articulated through a movement from top to bottom. At the beginning of the process, some raised their voices arguing that we were making a mistake by standing for election without first having built the social force to do so. We had the Ecuadorian experience as a reference. When Rafael Correa wins it is not when people are most active in the street protesting, but after the end of a cycle of protests and after having suffered another deplorable government. After that experience there is a certain disillusionment, which can produce an identification with a charismatic leadership that serves as a vehicle for a social bond, which empowers the 'below'. When speaking of the opposition between the social and the electoral, I think how in Madrid (where I am from): today Podemos has a Circle in every neighbourhood. These are people who sit down to discuss, and who seem to identify with a discourse that most citizens have heard through the mainstream media. It is a discourse that unlocks and has an effect on the organisation of the 'below'. ... The leadership of Pablo Iglesias has also acted as a catalyst, becoming a partially empty signifier, which produces identification with his words and comes to represent a collective function. There is a liberal-conservative image in which serious citizens identify with institutions and policies, and less intelligent citizens identify with leaders. I do not share that opinion. At any given moment, a particular symbol can act as a catalyst for things that are dispersed and contribute to the construction of a new identity.<sup>838</sup>

Elsewhere that same year, Errejón also explicitly drew together 'the strategic use of leadership, particularly mediatic leadership, such as that of Pablo Iglesias,' with the use of 'plebiscitary forms as levers with which to open dynamics of popular protagonism, something that rubs against the liberal mould of a large part of the European left,' providing some further evidence that Podemos' prefigurative-constitutional pre-constitution of the people (discussed in Chapter 3.2.3) was a conscious part of the party's strategy.<sup>839</sup>

In contrast to Monedero's ambivalent treatment of hyperleadership, and to Errejón's revalorisation of the concept in the form of the power of 'mediatic leadership', Gerbaudo offers a more staunchly critical appraisal. Gerbaudo argues that Podemos' 'digital party' model of online plebiscitary democracy, while serving some deliberative functions, serves primarily to 'verify the level of support' between the 'hyperleader' and what he calls their 'superbase':

While encompassing deliberative elements, the democracy practised within digital parties is clearly skewed towards the 'quantitative' model of plebiscitarian democracy, centring on

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<sup>838</sup> Errejón 2014a: 39.

<sup>839</sup> Errejón 2014b.

initiatives and referenda proposed by the top, rather than towards the ‘qualitative’ model of participatory democracy, with individual members intervening actively in strategy building and policy development. A clear demonstration of the implications of this tendency, and the power of initiative it assigns to the party leadership, is the fact that online consultations have almost invariably returned super-majority percentages ratifying the line proposed by the leadership, with very few cases of rank-and-file rebellion.<sup>840</sup>

Gerbaudo provides striking exemplification in the following graph of all of Podemos’ major internal plebiscites up to May 2018, as well as the two general secretary elections up to that point:

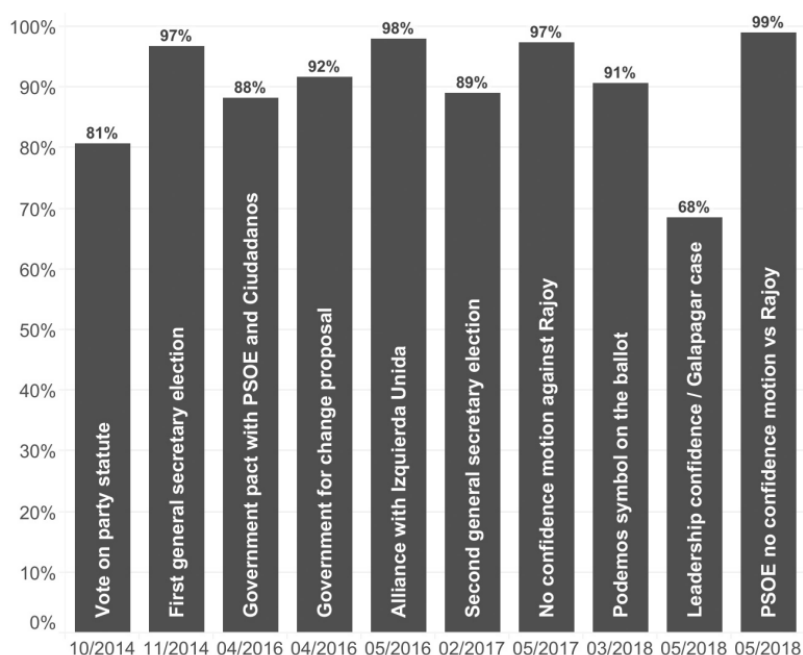


Figure 7.5 Percentage of the winning option in Podemos’ internal referendums.

Figure 13, percentage of the winning option in Podemos’ internal referendums.<sup>841</sup>

‘Online referendums,’ Gerbaudo concludes, ‘while attracting a high number of participants, are little more than the ratification of the decisions already taken by the leadership,’<sup>842</sup> producing a system of high quantity, low quality participation that he labels ‘distributed centralisation.’

All of this serves to illustrate how the digital movement-party’s hyperleader can instrumentalise party democracy to serve their primary task: performing, very self-consciously in the case of Podemos, the function of the empty signifier by ‘representing the party in the media and internet spectacle, by attending TV talk shows and intervening obsessively on social media. Through

<sup>840</sup> Gerbaudo 2019: 18.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid: 140.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid: 142.

his histrionic performances, the hyperleader makes up for the lack of a strong and dependable organisation.<sup>843</sup> Very often, as is the case with Iglesias in Podemos, Grillo in Five Star Movement, and now Errejón in his new party Más País, the hyperleader is also often the founder of the party, further cementing their absolute synonymy with it.<sup>844</sup> In a sense, then, the hyperleader is simply the return of the charismatic leader in the digital age, but that new context certainly provides some unique characteristics that seem to deserve the neologism. What I add to the analyses of Monedero, Errejón and Gerbaudo, in order to further differentiate hyperleadership from classical charismatic leadership, is the above Laclauian reading of how hyperleadership allows greater separation between ego and ego ideal, i.e. allows for a more narcissistic and less organisational (that is, in the most important senses of the word, less democratic) form of charismatic leadership in which the leader's libidinal accountability is less directed by the grassroots and increasingly open to manipulation by the leader themselves. A tendency that we will now pursue to its extreme conclusion in the form of what I call *monstrous leadership*.

#### 4.2.2 The Morning After: From Hyperleadership to Monstrous Leadership



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<sup>843</sup> Ibid: 21.

<sup>844</sup> Errejón's hyperleadership of Más País has been called out explicitly, by Clara Serra, a prominent activist and representative in the regional Assembly of Madrid, first for Podemos and then Más País. Serra resigned from the latter in October 2019, explicitly citing the problems of unrestrained hyperleadership: 'I have important disagreements in the way this project is functioning as an organisation. If we have learned anything from our mistakes, it is that in the name of haste we have always left the slow and careful construction of the organisation in the background. If we have learned anything over these years, it is that verticality and the lack of structures that accompany hyperleadership leave organisations without sufficient counterweights' (Serra 2019). It is quite clear that the 'we' Serra refers to includes not only Más País but also her and Errejón's former party, Podemos.

Figure 14, 'Carmena, in yellow in the centre, surrounded by the other 19 councillors of Ahora Madrid the day after the elections.'<sup>845</sup>

The election result exceeded all expectations. Ahora Madrid gained 20 councillors, only one short of the PP. Crucially, the support of PSOE's nine councillors would give Ahora Madrid exactly the 29 votes needed to scrape through an investiture vote in the council plenary, with the centre-right (PP and Ciudadanos) making up a total of only 28. As P5 describes it:

With the expectation of 10 councillors, we gain 20 councillors. We manage to break the absolute majority of the PP, which now needs other groups to govern. In large part due to Manuela's personality.<sup>846</sup>

Laclau states in *On Populist Reason*, 'the more extended the equivalential tie is, the emptier the signifier unifying that chain will be'.<sup>847</sup> In a later article responding to critics, he expands this equation: 'the emptier the signifier is, the richer it becomes in its extensionality, but the poorer in its intensionality';<sup>848</sup> and Manuela Carmena was, during the election campaign, the emptiest of signifiers. She produced an equivalential tie more extended than most could have predicted; and clearly a crucial part of that victory was the profound lack of intensional specificity she presented as signifier. She only agreed to become a candidate mere weeks before the primaries. A retired judge, member of the PCE from 1965, but only until 1981 (i.e. not *too* recently), she once narrowly survived the bombing of her office by far right militants, leaving the building only minutes before it exploded. Her biography presents a figure of strength, resolve, (cordial, respectable, limited) resistance, progressivism, but also responsibility and order. Her age and appearance, meanwhile, have been widely discussed as presenting the comforting figure of a caring *abuela* (grandmother). It is not hard to see how a vast range of progressives, socialists, feminists, even liberal conservatives, but also horizontalists, movementists and left populists could easily coalesce around her. What kind of mayor she actually wanted to be, however, let alone how she would reconcile institutional governance with the horizontalist aspirations of the movements that put her there, were largely complete unknowns; and this remained the case even throughout the campaign; until, fatefully, the morning after the election.

The day after the election should have been one of jubilation, remembered by many Ahora Madrid activists as the greatest political achievement of their lives. So why does José Haro now remember it as 'a sad day, a difficult day'? 'We all had a different expectation,' he told me; 'the truth

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<sup>845</sup> Retrieved from García Gallo 2016 (photo credit Bernardo Pérez).

<sup>846</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018.

<sup>847</sup> Laclau 2005: 99.

<sup>848</sup> Laclau 2012: 398.

is I remember it bitterly.<sup>849</sup> Haro, one of the Ganemos negotiators, was now a member of Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación*, which you will recall had been invested with powers to submit 'to binding democratic processes through participatory procedures' any 'important issues', such as 'investiture agreements'.<sup>850</sup> He awoke that morning expecting 'simply to comply with the [*Mesa*'s] agenda that day, which was to make a political evaluation of the results, and in accordance with that to plan our next steps together.'<sup>851</sup> In more detail, Haro was looking forward 'to have congratulated ourselves':

because the results were very positive. ... To have made a cursory reading, although it was still in the heat of the moment, of ... the key elements in obtaining those election results. To have launched a slower, longer term process of evaluation, extracting certain lessons from the previous phase, the campaign, but also the conformation of the confluence and Ahora Madrid. [To choose between two options for negotiating with PSOE:] one of just support in the investiture, as happened in the end, or a second option along the logic of coalition in government. ... And other parallel processes: how to conform the areas of internal organisation, who would go to the districts, what this logic of competent management was going to be like. ... To have created the necessary working groups to carry out these tasks. And everything to do with the party itself. We had a design for up until the elections, but then a chasm opened up before us. Also to have set up a series of internal mechanisms for organising Ahora Madrid itself, as a political instrument, in its different sectoral and territorial dimensions.<sup>852</sup>

As the mayoral candidate is listed in the *Marco Común* as a member of the *Mesa*, Carmena came to the meeting. Her intervention, however, 'disrupted everything: ... Manuela came, said goodbye, and did not return.'<sup>853</sup> I did not discover her exact words, but P1 paraphrases them as 'I do not recognise this space'.<sup>854</sup> It turned out Carmena had little time for horizontalist reimaginings of representative government, for popular control, for binding adherence to the crowd-sourced manifesto commitments, for a radical upturning of the leader's relationship with the base of the party and the movement. Interviewees described her general approach to me as managerialist, and fundamentally liberal in her commitment to be the Mayor of Madrid's 'individuals', not of its

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<sup>849</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>850</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015.

<sup>851</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid.

<sup>854</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018. P1 was not present, but everyone I spoke to agrees that this, more or less, was the message. A further example from P9: 'It was blocked the moment Carmena attended the first meeting ... to say that she will not return. "I will not attend this Mesa because there will not be a decision-making body where I go to submit my decisions"' (P9 interview 24 July 2018).

collectives, excluding social movements from the influential role they have played in other municipalist governments, such as Barcelona.<sup>855</sup>

Despite immense dissatisfaction among Ahora Madrid's horizontalists, there was little to be done, except for the three most movementist councillors (those who stuck with the Ganemos brand to the end: Rommy Arce, Montserrat Galcerán and Pablo Carmona) to resist Manuela on certain key issues in the closed meetings of the *Grupo Municipal*, and if need be in the voting chamber of the city council. The institutional figure of the Mayor of Madrid has strong executive powers, and Ahora Madrid had not constitutionalised specific methods of control beyond the nuclear option of recall, which was unusable anyway as it had no legal significance, and no constituent group would accept the legitimacy of Ahora Madrid's organisational husk to remove one of their people. Even if they would, all but the most aggressively radical participants and councillors usually complied with the need to avoid unnecessarily gifting signs of disunity to the hostile media. A powerful illustration of the power of Carmena's hyperleadership is that, once the 2019 municipal elections came into view, with the possibility of new primaries that would be a relatively easy way to replace Carmena, still no one I spoke to at the time seriously wanted an alternative mayoral candidate, no matter how dissatisfied with her rule. There had simply been too immense a symbolic, libidinal investment in Manuela, as the central empty-signifying link in Ahora Madrid's chain of equivalence, to risk seeking re-election with anyone else.

The *Mesa* continued meeting, though Carmena never once returned. Business was mostly limited to deciding, 'for example, whether or not to organise an anniversary party.'<sup>856</sup> The dream of a new form of horizontalist municipal democracy would find some expression in limited participatory budgeting and the *Foros Locales* (Local Forums), but the vision of Ahora Madrid as an institutionalisation of prefigurative populism was stillborn, let alone as a 'constituent candidature' that would thoroughly radically the relationship between representative and represented.<sup>857</sup> All meaningful political discussions occurred in the *Junta de Gobierno* (Government Committee), the council's executive organ appointed by Carmena, which included some unelected figures and only a selection of councillors. According to P5, Manuela would seek to build consensus for policy decisions within the *Grupo Municipal* (Municipal Group), where all Ahora Madrid's councillors would meet, allowing some democratic oversight of municipal decision-making in the form of whatever each

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<sup>855</sup> In her own words, Carmena describes her project as one of good management and personal relationships, in contrast to 'acting like political parties', which she has consistently criticised and distanced herself from (Hermoso 2016). Sometimes she speaks of reimagining management, as a feminist and humanist project of care (Martín 2017), and of involving citizens in management through participatory processes, but under her preferred, top-down mantra 'govern by listening', as opposed to Ganemos' bottom-up motto 'lead by obeying'.

<sup>856</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>857</sup> Rodríguez 2013: 297.

councillor submitted themselves to via their own party or *familia*: the three Ganemos councillors to the Ganemos structures (local Ganemos branches delegating to the *Coordinadora*, which all continued their functions after the election); the three councillors who would soon split from Ganemos to form Madrid129 would discuss key decisions with a group of Madrid129 activists in closed assemblies, where they would try to find consensus; the three IU councillors were directed by the IU-Madrid party structures; I believe the five Podemos councillors had relative autonomy to act on their own initiative, but in practice tended to follow Carmena's lead; and the independent councillors Pablo Soto and Nacho Murgui also, of course, had complete nominal autonomy from any grassroots base, but were generally considered Manuelistas in that they were perceived to usually go along with Carmena on key decisions.

For some Ganemos activists, like P1, this was the end of the project they had signed up to, and so the end of their active involvement: 'My idea why I entered in Ganemos and participated in Ahora Madrid is completely dead.'<sup>858</sup> To P1, this violently reinforced a binary understanding of the project, a binary that had become completely antagonistic, and an antagonism that had now resulted in the clear supremacy of one political logic over the other.

Manuela Carmena and Podemos, they have a populist conception of politics, with clear, vertical leaderships; and there are other sectors, from Madrid129 to Traficantes, who have a different way of understanding political action: more *asambleario*, more horizontalist, and these understandings of political action are completely distinct. I think it's very difficult to unite them in a single candidacy, without one of the two parts losing. At the moment, the part that is clearly losing ... is the part that is more *asambleario*, more horizontal, more about radical, grassroots democracy; and representative democracy is winning. This is one of the reasons I've distanced myself from Ahora Madrid. Because I don't share that understanding of politics.<sup>859</sup>

Haro sees things slightly differently, not in terms of colonisation by the logic of populism, but of the failure to constrain, the failure even to predict the full force of what he describes as 'personalism', and crucially the ways in which the governmental apparatus that Ahora Madrid sought to infiltrate prioritises that personalist logic. Not so much a process of colonisation, then, but almost a problem of naivety. Haro explains first how the convergence with Podemos was a necessary part of the project, then how Carmena's role disrupted the project, in the process offering an alternative understanding of Ahora Madrid to P1's described above.

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<sup>858</sup> P1 interview 6 February 2018.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid.



What allowed for the confluence is basically a question of citizen demand and an almost historic obligation, to confront an unprecedented social emergency. ... We had to react by joining forces, because time after time we see that if we don't join together, we don't win. It is a unification, in order to win, of a whole political spectrum of the left, which prefers to be read more from bottom to top, instead of left to right. To me that seems perfect. ... And that is what defines the spectrum that stands in the elections and that gives birth to Ahora Madrid. ... The problem is what is added later, at the last moment, which is Manuela and what she implies. That was a view of institutional dynamics that centres, let's say, gives all the power to the figure of the mayor – in legal terms, but it also focuses on personalisms and feeds them in a perverse way. This, I think, we have not managed to resist, and it has changed everything. ... I think Manuela came practically to do us a favour, to put her image at our service, thinking we were going to lose; and when it becomes clear that we have won, ... she decides to take charge. ... But, I insist, this must be read logically, with an important trajectory between the pre and the post. The post has to do with how personalisms are fed and how power is distributed; and then what comes into play are certain logics of representation that, by not having a clear instrument, gradually generate an image of similitude between city council and party, that becomes confused with the populist logic, and that in turn also becomes confused with a horizontal logic of doing things; and I say it is confused because it is not real. Neither are things being done horizontally, nor is this a populist project as such. It is a *personalist* project, which is something else.<sup>860</sup>

Personalism is a broader concept than that discussed previously under the label 'hyperleadership', but a perfectly compatible one. The city council creates its own form of hyperleadership in the figure of the mayor, which may have a limited term and be subject to re-election, but in the interim enjoys an immense centralisation of legal power. For P2, this was always the key problem, and it was a constitutional problem that Ahora Madrid could, in theory, have avoided:

No tools were put in place to prevent that in the end Manuela would accumulate all the power. The communicative power that she had been given was transformed into an executive power. That can be avoided, of course it can be avoided. It can be avoided with strict internal regulations ... Legally, all decisions are made by the mayor. The mayor has all the power, and she delegates it to the councillors. In the municipal governments they are not actually called councillors, they are called area delegates.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> José Haro interview 20 June 2018.

<sup>861</sup> P2 interview 27 June 2018.

P2 also provides us with a critical framework for how they see Podemos' logic of populism feeding and transforming into the dominance of personalism.

What is the political strategy of Podemos? Accumulate votes, at any cost. [Manuela is] a figurehead, [and the structure follows from this centralisation of leadership:] the most vertical structure possible. There is no mechanism – none – in which the decision to be taken by the City Council of Madrid is debated. ... [Podemos] created a *Mesa de Coordinación* that has never worked. Why? [Because] Podemos only thinks in terms of votes; and who provides them the votes? Manuela Carmena. Which means they aren't going to oppose any decision that Manuela Carmena makes, because she wins them votes. ... I'm sure Podemos believes in the electoral program, but since they have created Manuela Carmena as a figurehead whose power cannot be disputed, the *Mesa de Coordinación* is nullified.<sup>862</sup>

At a slightly more abstract level, P2 provides what seems an apt summary of early Podemos' Laclauian-Errejonista strategy, and its limitations: 'in Podemos, the communicative strategy comes first, and the political strategy is subordinated to the communicative.'<sup>863</sup>

P5, our representative of Manuelismo, unsurprisingly offers a very different reading of events. To them, it was not only inevitable but perfectly justifiable that Carmena's unexpected success brought with it a new political axis, because Mayor Carmena now represented a large group of citizens who had voted for Ahora Madrid, but who were neither activists nor members of either Ganemos or Podemos, and so were not represented on Ahora Madrid's *Mesa de Coordinación*:

That *Mesa*, the first day it is constituted, begins to dictate rules of the game that Manuela never signed up to, which say, 'The important decisions are made here, and you execute them,' and Manuela says, 'No way. It is the councillors who have been elected. In the *Junta de Gobierno* and in the *Grupo Municipal*, that's where we make the decisions. Here, at best, we seek an endorsement, we seek information, outreach; but here is not where the political decisions are made, they are made in the *Grupo Municipal*. And therefore, from the political point of view, this *Mesa* should be dissolved.' That generates an authentic horror among some people, whose political project is much more *asambleario*, and who see this as a classic institutionalist posture. ... Manuela begins to fly solo, making things work; and she has to do that with councillors from very different tendencies – because the primary system meant that people with ridiculous votes, like 50 votes, entered number 20 on the list – with that ridiculous representation they enter a list that later wins the support of the people of

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<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid.

Madrid, in large part carried by the aggregate of the list, not by any of them alone. This meagre representation tried to puff itself up when it came time to determine the municipal policies. But things soon begin to get going. Investiture agreements were made with PSOE, and budgets and policies began to be implemented. In Ahora Madrid's council, the politics, the internal debates, the great ideological battles, the big agreements and commitments, have not happened in the *Mesa* of Ahora Madrid. They have happened in the *Grupo Municipal* of Ahora Madrid. ... The model has been to generate a candidacy that is very permeable to the street, in which anyone has easy access to the people in government, but the decisions are made in the *Grupo Municipal* and in the plenary of the city council, and not in the *Mesa*.<sup>864</sup>

P5 describes Ahora Madrid as 'an artificial, instrumental construction for standing in the elections, which was never rebalanced according to the real weights of who had swept up which votes.' Ultimately, for P5, the *asambleario* vision of 'a new institutional architecture', a bottom-up vision of political representation centred around 'public control' by the grassroots of the representatives via the *Mesa* and other organs, was simply 'incompatible with the management of the city.' P5's political instincts immediately kick in, correcting themselves: 'OK, not incompatible, it's that they are different models.' But further explanation confirms the former framing of incompatibility more than the latter framing of difference: 'For the mayor and the municipal management to be continually subject to votes, to majorities and minorities or pacts or agreements between the different families, in my opinion that would have paralysed the city.' P5 points quite reasonably to the fact that the *Mesa* 'was created at a time when no one thought the project was going to actually govern,' concluding that in victory it is only reasonable that 'the *Mesa* should have to readjust their expectations':

The ideal solution would have been to rebalance the *Mesa*. ... At least a third of them had to be Manuelistas, ... and the *Mesa* would have had to readjust its expectations, instead of trying to boss others around. ... It needed readjustment, but that was not done.<sup>865</sup>

Ultimately P5 believes Ahora Madrid has produced an effective balance of participatory democracy, through the *Foros Locales* and *Decide Madrid*, and good governance, with a degree of verticalisation allowing for efficiency while the *Grupo Municipal* has made a strength out of Ahora Madrid's

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<sup>864</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018. Obviously, P5 is not quoting Carmena directly but loosely paraphrasing. Note also that P5 makes a highly exaggerated, somewhat disingenuous claim about the primary elections. Number 20 on the Ahora Madrid election list, as per the initial primary results before adjustment for interleaved gender parity, received 633.92 points under the Dowdall system. That is equivalent to 633.92 first preference votes (though in reality it is of course composed of a much greater number of lower preference votes).

<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

diversity, as Carmena has sought consensus there and listened to the ‘infinite capacity for negotiation’ of more radical councillors like Arce, Carmona and Galcerán. P5 sees these debates as much more democratic than the more top-down, authoritarian decision-making in traditional parties, a view put forward in even more radical, ‘horizontal’ terms by Carmena herself, when discussing her management style in a 2019 interview:

You cannot run a city council through assemblies. In a management team there has to be someone who takes the reins because they have the responsibility. First, because institutionally that’s how it is. The mayor is responsible for everything that happens in city hall. That’s the model. The councillors are delegates of the mayor, for whom the mayor is responsible. But my way of managing is not vertical, it is horizontal. ... Today management cannot be vertical, not in any company, nor in politics. You have to go in horizontal directions, because the world is too complex to be summarised in a single proposal.<sup>866</sup>

P5 also offers us something approaching a positive definition of Manuelismo, emerging first in contrast with Ganemos. The project of the three Ganemos councillors was one of building counterpower, being within-and-against the institution, typified in their desire to implement an illegal budget in deliberate, provocative contravention of the austerity-era *Ley Montoro*. In contrast, P5 argues that ‘the most important thing is to change the law, not to break it,’ because the role of the representative in the institutions relies on respect for the rule of law. No matter how radical, as long as one wishes to express their politics in legislation then they are relying on citizens complying with the law, and so it is counterproductively hypocritical to seek to break the law from inside the institution:

You cannot be activist and institution at the same time. ... Either you are an activist and you force social change, or you manage with legality; because if you break with legality, everyone has the right not to do what you say. ... As institution, you have to comply with the institution. It is a different thing to try to change it, change the rules. ... The best way to change society is from within, not from without.<sup>867</sup>

P5 also points to a further contradiction between Ganemos’ illegal budget proposal and their obsession with process inside their own assemblies; an interesting point to consider, raising issues of institutional and procedural legitimacy that unfortunately we do not have space to explore here.

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<sup>866</sup> Escolar and Caballero 2019. Clearly this is the kind of language José Haro had in mind when he said that the populist and personalist logics also become ‘confused with a horizontal logic ... and I say it is confused because it is not real. Neither are things being done horizontally, nor is this a populist project as such. It is a personalista project, which is something else’ (José Haro interview 20 June 2018).

<sup>867</sup> P5 interview 11 July 2018.

P5 echoes P1 in seeing a sharp distinction between two very 'different models' of understanding politics. P5 astutely identified the *asambleario* aspiration to 'collective intelligence, more than the cunning of the elite,' but argued that this comes 'with an enormous risk of frustration.' By which they mean, essentially, that assembly decisions are made by those who have time to attend endless assemblies: 'Those who have time to go to the assembly monopolise the political representation, and it ends up being enormously contested by those who do not feel represented in that assembly'.<sup>868</sup>

P5 characterises their own politics (somewhat echoing Jesús Montero, as discussed in Chapter 3), as 'the mixture of processes of direct democracy with representative democracy', arguing for an evolutionary approach to direct democracy that accounts for the fact that 'representative democracy has been around for 150 years, direct democracy only three in Madrid'. Direct democracy will take time to improve and develop, but will always, in P5's view, need to be 'complemented by representative democracy'. Pure direct democracy is problematic because public opinion can be manipulated, and today this is accelerating massively online (P5 cites fake news, Russian hackers, etc). Experts are necessary to combat disinformation, and representatives are necessary to control the experts and their vested interests. Good decisions require a degree of responsibility and accountability that necessitates individual representatives, not multitudinous assemblies or online voters. Transparency is key, so that participation is well-informed. P5 is not, of course, Carmena herself, but that they share a similar political worldview is confirmed by quotes from Carmena, such as 'You cannot run a city council through assemblies.'<sup>869</sup>

Perhaps the most profound words to come from Carmena herself, for our purposes, appeared on 8 July 2016. When asked about Ahora Madrid Moratalaz (a local Ahora Madrid group) and their message of solidarity with Distrito 14, an antifascist group accused of a violent assault, Carmena distanced herself and her government from both the statement and the local Ahora Madrid activists themselves, with the now infamous words, 'Ahora Madrid does not exist.'<sup>870</sup> The full quote is a little more nuanced: Ahora Madrid 'does not exist as a political party, it does not exist as

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<sup>868</sup> Ibid. Montero echoed this idea, saying: 'I want critical, virtuous citizens, but ... I don't think people want to participate every day, and I don't want to participate every day. I want to have spaces for participation, but I place my trust in people who represent me, because ... the representative function relates to both activists and non-activists, and the knowledge obtained from this dialogue with non-activists is very valuable' (Jesús Montero interview 13 July 2018). Ganemos activists have directly countered these kinds of criticisms of *asamblearismo*. Montserrat Galcerán, for example: 'The feedback between the three spaces – the territorial assembly, the mediatic and the virtual – is one of the keys to our way of doing things. ... The "Ganemos method" ... is respectful of all those who do not want or who cannot allow politics to absorb an important part of their time, but it strives to offer to each and every person a greater scope for participation in public affairs' (Galcerán 2016b).

<sup>869</sup> Escolar and Caballero 2019.

<sup>870</sup> EFE 2016.

such'; but it was 'Ahora Madrid does not exist' that reverberated across the media.<sup>871</sup> Zapata was the first councillor to comment publicly, tweeting 'Not only does @AhoraMadrid exist, but it can exist more and better. Confluence, citizen power, imagination, new institutions.'<sup>872</sup> It would be later the same month, on 28 July 2016, that the first post was uploaded to the website of Madrid129, the new municipalist space formed by Zapata and others as a split from Ganemos, partially with the purpose precisely of trying to make it the case that Ahora Madrid 'can exist more and better'.

Montero had also foreshadowed this idea in March 2016, telling *El País* that 'Ahora Madrid does not exist as a political party nor was it intended to', adding the additional historical claim that could at best be described as only tendentiously true.<sup>873</sup> By March 2017, the failure to make good on the promise of Ahora Madrid as an active space of activist and citizen participation had 'crystalised' to the point that a much-discussed article declared: 'Ahora Madrid is Dead. Long Live Municipalism.'<sup>874</sup> Fernández and Rodríguez claimed that 'In Ahora Madrid ... there has crystalised a logic of factions and cliques in permanent rivalry over their own position that, except in the most critical sectors, can be summarised as seeing "who has more influence over Manuela".' They criticise Carmena's marginalisation of the municipalist activists who propelled her into power, in favour of 'the most moderate sectors of the group, ... continual complicity with the PSOE and at times with the PP;' and they argue Carmena has governed in the interests of 'the old functions of the city, as engine of business focused on tourism, real estate and urban development.' Cited examples of the latter include traveling to the City of London to seek post-Brexit investment from finance capital, and the infamous urban redevelopment plan *Operación Chamartín*, rebranded by Carmena as *Madrid Nuevo Norte*. They further criticise the limited ambition of the *Decide Madrid* participatory budgeting process, that 'despite its good intentions, ignores the fundamental issues: the remunicipalisation of important services, debt audit or the central questions related to the urban model.'<sup>875</sup> But, they ask, 'is it that Ahora Madrid has died? That would presuppose that it was once alive, at least as a transformative municipal project, that is, as a real experience of the democratisation of local politics.'<sup>876</sup>

What we see in the figure of Mayor Carmena, similarly to the long term trajectories of Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón, is the progressive exaggeration of the logic of hyperleadership. As argued above, the *synonymity* of the hyperleader and their party leads to the former's *indispensability*, which leads then to a hollowing out of the party's procedural mechanisms of democratic control, but

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid.

<sup>872</sup> Bécarea 2016; the tweet itself is in the bibliography as Zapata 2016.

<sup>873</sup> García Gallo 2016.

<sup>874</sup> Fernández and Rodríguez 2017.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

also to a weakening of the libidinal 'democratic' accountability that Laclau attributes to the figure of the charismatic leader. In the case of Podemos specifically, we saw precisely the power of the interaction between the latter two processes, where the hyperleader can call their own 'recall' vote in order to shore up their position, thereby marginalising critics and, crucially, delegitimising the basis of their critique. That is, the hyperleader can find ways to manipulate the very shared values and characteristics that might, Laclau suggests, provide some democratic accountability in lieu of more formal constitutional mechanisms. Carmena took a somewhat different route towards a similar end. She had no need to use party democracy to reinforce her hyperleadership when she could so easily argue that she never agreed to be controlled by the *Mesa de Coordinación* in the first place, and that regardless the electoral victory changed everything.<sup>877</sup> Many Ganemos participants I spoke to characterised Carmena's approach as governing for the people of Madrid, not its collectives, not its social movements. She was everyone's Mayor and so it would be unjust to be controlled by the sectoral interests of the movements and parties that made up Ahora Madrid. Jesús Montero summarised this conception of governance succinctly while explaining to *El País* in March 2016 why, although he wanted Ahora Madrid to be the municipalist candidature again in 2019, he believed that until then its structures should remain 'dormant'; because for one, 'we are not looking to create another party, for that we already have Podemos, IU and Equo,' and furthermore, 'the citizens now rule through Carmena'.<sup>878</sup> Not only is Carmena the Mayor of everyone in Madrid, in this model we are approaching an extremely radical populism or personalism, in which the individual figure of Carmena is the sole guarantor of the general will, in which Carmena, in a manner only possible within an extreme logic of representation, effectively *is* the people of Madrid. In terms of our analysis of hyperleadership, Carmena has gone even further than Iglesias and his use of plebiscites by radically redefining the group she is leading. An impressively elegant solution. There is of course no need to submit oneself to either the procedural mechanisms or the libidinal identification of the activists of Ahora Madrid if 'Ahora Madrid does not exist', and therefore the leader-led relationship does not apply. Rather Carmena has managed to magic into existence her own group to lead, on her own libidinal terms, in the form of the people of Madrid. Of course in reality it is not magic but rather a careful construction, a powerful example of the interoperability of political and communicative strategy under logics of populism, personalism or hyperleadership. For in hindsight, this bold move to construct her own relation of leadership was clearly prefigured during

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<sup>877</sup> Recall P5's words: 'That Mesa, the first day it is constituted, begins to dictate rules of the game that Manuela never signed up to' (P5 interview 11 July 2018).

<sup>878</sup> García Gallo 2016.

the election campaign, where Carmena repeatedly emphasised in interviews that Ahora Madrid is not a party but a candidature of citizens.<sup>879</sup>

The fullest expression of Carmena's trend towards *monstrous leadership* came in 2018, when she presented her candidature for the 2019 municipal elections, not as Ahora Madrid but as a new platform taking its name from Carmena's list in the Ahora Madrid primaries: Más Madrid. Joining her was her inner circle of Manuelistas, as well as independents Nacho Murgui and Pablo Soto, but also a selection of Podemos members, leading to their suspension from their former party.<sup>880</sup> This would catalyse wider events, with Errejón then announcing in January 2019 that he would not be standing with Podemos for the presidency of the regional government of the Comunidad de Madrid, as was the result of the Podemos primary elections, but would rather lead an expanded regional Más Madrid platform. Más Madrid then held primary elections in March 2019. Here Carmena managed to have her cake and eat it too, by employing two different voting systems. The last 21 positions in the Más Madrid candidature, who if elected would become councillors but not part of the municipal cabinet with specific areas of responsibility, would be elected using the highly proportional Dowdall system. However, this group of 21 has very little chance of being elected at all. The top 24 positions, which would form the *Equipo de Gobierno* (governing team, the municipal cabinet), would rather be elected using the Borda count, and with closed lists such that Carmena could be assured that, should she govern Madrid for four more years, it would be with a loyal team of her choosing. As a 'municipal source' told *El Diario*:

It's so that the result is a unitary team, so that it does not happen again that someone uses their right to vote to express a veto; it is unfair. These kinds of situations cannot happen again. Manuela Carmena needs a loyal government.<sup>881</sup>

5302 members of the new platform voted in the primaries, 65% of its membership. The headline results were frankly farcical: 95% in favour of Carmena and Errejón.<sup>882</sup> A result that would be the envy of many dictators, if you will forgive a moment of facetiousness. Further details of the primaries are now difficult to determine, including the makeup of any alternative lists that ran against those of Carmena and Errejón, because it seems that all mainstream media coverage of the primaries, both before and after, understood well enough that it was a mere process of 'ratification' (precisely the word used in the previously cited article, where one would normally expect to find the word 'election').

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<sup>879</sup> As cited earlier, 'In practically every interview, Manuela Carmena tried to make it clear that it was a candidacy of people and not parties. She has even gone so far as to say that "parties are becoming obsolete"' (Gil and Jurado Gilabert 2015).

<sup>880</sup> Specifically: Rita Maestre, José Manuel Calvo, Jorge García Castaño, Marta Gómez, Esther Gómez and Paco Pérez.

<sup>881</sup> Caballero 2019.

<sup>882</sup> EFE 2019.



Where hyperleadership was characterised by a mere *tendency to begin* to shake off the libidinal constraints that the charismatic leader might be held to by their group, the full realisation of *monstrous leadership* represents the complete inversion of that relationship: rather than be accountable to your group, simply create your own group. In which case, if anything, it is the *group* that must be accountable to the values of the *leader*, who chooses who is allowed into this artificial new group and who is not. To be thoroughly provocative about it, this is precisely the framing that some authors apply only to the logic of fascism. For example:

The fundamental fact is that this following represents or reflects the will of the leader and not that the leader represents or reflects the will of the following. If there is representation, it is inverse representation, proceeding downwards from the leader.<sup>883</sup>

Note, however, that Laclau cites Barker on this issue precisely in order to refute the idea that such a dynamic is uniquely fascist, arguing rather that it is part of the dual dynamics of any process of representation. It serves, however to emphasise how far Carmena's monstrous leadership ultimately travelled along that spectrum. Despite the melodramatic framing above, used to enforce the theoretical importance of the point, it must be emphasised that the label 'monstrous leadership' does not in fact mean to label Carmena herself as a monster, or some kind of immoral authoritarian or anti-democrat. There are sensible reasons for Carmena to have conducted herself as she has during her brief time in the political limelight. At least, reasons that make some sense from her political perspective, and deserve at least to be taken seriously on their own terms. What the idea of monstrous leadership rather seeks to define is a problem that exists specifically *from the perspective of radical democracy*.

#### 4.2.3 Leadership and the Multitude

How, then, to more constructively approach the problem of leadership from the perspective of radical democracy? Laclau's project of radical democracy, as we have seen, does not take use very far. Laclau rather establishes the primacy of discourse that Errejón took so literally as to develop his own theory of the mediatic hyperleader, not as a problem for radical democracy to wrestle with but as a necessary prerequisite for a revitalisation of popular mobilisation. At least, that was Errejón's vision in 2014. It would now seem that the secondary step of mobilising the base has fallen away completely, the political becoming solely the terrain of the mediatic hyperleader and their rhetorical interventions. After the awkward attempt to portray Más Madrid's 2019 primaries as a 'participatory

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<sup>883</sup> Ernest Barker, cited in Laclau 2005: 157.

process',<sup>884</sup> for May 2021's Madrid regional elections Más Madrid has done away even with the formality of primaries or indeed any consultation with the membership whatsoever, the electoral list simply having been decided by Errejón and the leadership of what is now the national party Más País (presenting as Más Madrid for these regional elections) and sent out to members in the form of a communiqué.<sup>885</sup> Let us now approach leadership from the perspective of constituent *asamblarismo* and radical prefiguration, a task made a lot easier by Hardt and Negri's latest collaboration, *Assembly*.

Hardt and Negri define the 21<sup>st</sup> century cycle of struggle, which led to 15M and the presence of *asamblarismo* as a key strategic presence within Ahora Madrid, as fundamentally grounded in a rejection of leadership; sometimes implicitly through its direct-democratic practices, often explicitly in its rhetoric and in swift moves by activists to refuse any attempted assertion of leadership from within, or imposition from outwith by journalists struggling to comprehend the new leaderless model.<sup>886</sup> Hardt and Negri celebrate the leaderless impulse as 'a function of both the crisis of representation and a deep aspiration to democracy', but nevertheless see problems emerging.<sup>887</sup> They implore that 'the opposition to centralized authority not be equated with the rejection of all organizational and institutional forms',<sup>888</sup> and locate the two core tasks of a reimagined leadership in 1) *decision-making*, and 2) *assembly*:

To guard against the cacophony of individual voices and the paralysis of the political process, the thinking goes, leaders must be able to bring people together in a coherent whole and make the difficult choices necessary to sustain the movement and ultimately to transform society. The fact that leadership is defined by a decision-making capacity presents a paradox for modern conceptions of democracy: leaders make decisions at a distance, in relative solitude, but those decisions must in some sense be connected to the multitude and represent its will and desires. This tension or contradiction gives rise to a series of anomalies of modern democratic thought. The ability of leaders to assemble the multitude demonstrates this same tension. They must be political entrepreneurs who gather people, create new social combinations, and discipline them to cooperate with one another. Those who assemble people in this way, however, stand apart from the assembly itself, inevitably

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<sup>884</sup> These were the words used in the title of the primary election regulations published by Más Madrid in 2019 (Caballero 2019).

<sup>885</sup> Costantini 2021.

<sup>886</sup> Recall, for example, the early days of Tahrir Square, when the global media were declaring a new supposed 'leader' of the movement every few days (Hardt and Negri 2012: 7).

<sup>887</sup> Hardt and Negri 2017: 8.

<sup>888</sup> Ibid: 6.

creating a dynamic between leaders and followers, rulers and ruled. Democratic leadership ultimately appears as an oxymoron.<sup>889</sup>

Hardt and Negri's reimagining of democratic *decision-making* calls, in abstract terms, for an end to sovereignty and representation and the creation of 'nonsovereign institutions', in which "'the one" should never decide. The many must make decisions'.<sup>890</sup> More concretely, this means reversing the traditional division of labour between leadership and movement around strategy and tactics. 'Only the few, the thinking goes, have the intelligence, knowledge, and vision needed for strategic planning and therefore vertical, centralized decision-making structures are required.'<sup>891</sup> They call for an inversion of these roles: 'strategy to the movements and tactics to leadership,' transforming 'the entire political paradigm,' and resulting in leadership as 'a weapon' for the strategic multitude 'to wield and dispose of as the occasion dictates'.<sup>892</sup> They also discuss 'constituent initiative',<sup>893</sup> which is not as clearly defined but seeks to establish a kind of strategic executive function of the multitude.<sup>894</sup>

The power of *assembly* refers to the role of leaders as 'political entrepreneurs who gather people, create new social combinations, and discipline them to cooperate with one another'.<sup>895</sup> Helpful as ever, Hardt and Negri 'do not offer a theory of assembly or a detailed analysis of any specific practice of assembly'. Rather they 'approach the concept transversally', claiming resonance 'with a broad web of political principles and practices':

from the general assemblies instituted by contemporary social movements to the legislative assemblies of modern politics, from the right to assemble asserted in legal traditions to the freedom of association central to labor organizing, and from the various forms of congregation in religious communities to the philosophical notion of machinic assemblage that constitutes new subjectivities.<sup>896</sup>

This 'transversal' approach can be tied to the 'entrepreneurship of the multitude', which, passing through Deleuze and Schumpeter, results in 'a constituent project of subjectivation,' or 'the

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<sup>889</sup> Ibid: xiv.

<sup>890</sup> Ibid: 25.

<sup>891</sup> Recall McDougall's argument that 'the intellectual disadvantages of the group can be overcome "by withdrawing the performance of intellectual tasks from the group and reserving them for individual members of it"' (cited in Laclau 2005: 57).

<sup>892</sup> Hardt and Negri 2017: 18-19.

<sup>893</sup> Ibid: 234.

<sup>894</sup> Tangential to this discussion, but the final crucial part of Hardt and Negri's model of constituent decision-making, first established in the chapter 'Against the Autonomy of the Political', is that decision-making cannot be fully democratic while constricted by a regime of private property, that democratic decision-making must involve the management of the commons to be meaningfully democratic at all. Commons and commoning have in fact been important currents in Spanish municipalism, and this forms the basis of an important Negrian, materialist critique of Laclau's discursive political ontology.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid: xiv.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid: xxi.

construction of machinic assemblages to produce alternative subjectivities'.<sup>897</sup> But still we are left only with either vague examples or tangential theorisation of revolutionary potential. There is no *useful* (i.e. constitutional) theory of *how* groups assemble and stay assembled, nor of how groups assemble specifically into multitudes,<sup>898</sup> nor how an autonomous constituent process is to be constituted. From our constitutional perspective, *Assembly* does not progress very far at all beyond the preface and its vague exhortations for leadership to be 'constantly subordinated to the multitude, deployed and dismissed as occasion dictates':

If leaders are still necessary and possible in this context, it is only because they serve the productive multitude. This is not an elimination of leadership, then, but an inversion of the political relationship that constitutes it, a reversal of the polarity that links horizontal movements and vertical leadership.<sup>899</sup>

*Assembly's* (re)theorisation of leadership is woefully incomplete, even on its own terms, but the experience of Ahora Madrid presents a whole new scale of difficulty for those *15Mayistas* who, not content with marginal autonomy and exodus, want to take and horizontalise state institutions: how to radically reimagine leadership, retaining its organisational benefits of strategic decision-making (as is Hardt and Negri's project in *Assembly*) as well as assembly and internal cohesion, *and* its populist, counter-hegemonic electoral benefits, primarily in terms of the symbolic identification that centres and binds the chain of equivalence. For this, we need to continue to move beyond both Negri and Laclau.

## 4.3 Constitution and Becoming: Towards a Viable Prefigurative-Populist Constitutionality

### 4.3.1 Consolidation and Fragmentation

The period from Ahora Madrid's election victory in 2015 until the present day can be characterised on the one hand by a steady consolidation of *Manuelismo* (until its electoral defeat in 2019 in the form of Más Madrid, and Carmena's immediate resignation from Madrid city council), and on the other by the continued fragmentation of other forces. Madrid city hall settled into the relatively familiar process of decision-making via the *Junta de Gobierno*, the city council's executive body, with Ahora Madrid's *Mesa* relegated (as discussed) to deciding, 'for example, whether or not to organise

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<sup>897</sup> Ibid: 223.

<sup>898</sup> This is a common criticism, often along the lines of 'how do we know whether *movement x* is a multitude or something else? Are authoritarian or nationalist movements multitudes? Are the most politically heterogeneous movements like Gilet Jaunes multitudes?' etc. To their credit, Hardt and Negri do in many places distinguish the multitude from the People, which is helpful; it could also inform a reading of how to constitute a multitude, but only negatively and partially.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid: xv.

an anniversary party.<sup>900</sup> Nevertheless, Ahora Madrid did implement some of the plans developed by Ganemos for city-wide participatory democracy.<sup>901</sup> *Decide Madrid*, the participatory budgeting process, was largely a success, if a limited one from more radical perspectives.<sup>902</sup> *Decide Madrid* collected citizen proposals online as well as offline, through the *Foros Locales*, which provided a physical space of citizen participation and deliberation. Another such space was the local *Vocalía Vecinal* (neighbourhood spokescouncils). These already existed, but their members were traditionally assigned by political parties, in proportion to their seats in the city council. Ahora Madrid's innovation would be to hold open primaries for their portion of those seats on the *Vocalías Vecinales*. One of the central planks of Ganemos' plan to decentralise municipal power was the creation of Zapatista-inspired *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Good Governance Committees), promoted especially by the Madrid en Movimiento list during the Ahora Madrid primaries. It was hoped they would become 'spaces of citizen participation for each district, that could be a counterweight to the operation of the traditional representative institutions.'<sup>903</sup> The *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* did not come to fruition. Nevertheless, the progress made in terms of participatory democracy was not at all inconsequential, especially considering that most of Ahora Madrid's plans required support from PSOE.

Carmena, meanwhile, was not afraid to make use of her substantial institutional power to impose discipline on the project where she deemed it necessary. Carmena fired Carlos Sánchez Mato from his position as head of economy after his party, IU-Madrid, decided that he should abstain in a vote on the city budget that he himself helped to draft, because it was deemed to concede too much to the central government's austerity demands. Carmena's action was reprimanded in strongly worded statements from the other *familias* of Ahora Madrid, trying to draw their own battles lines and make their own demands of the confluence going forward, but this did not come to much (beyond, we might imagine, further hardening Carmena's desire that if she were to stand for re-election in 2019 it would have to be with a loyal, pre-assembled government team; as indeed she ensured through the ratificatory Más Madrid 'primaries'). Later, Carmena fired Toño Hernández (member of IU) as Coordinator of Ahora Madrid's *Grupo Municipal*. He was paid for this job by the council, giving Carmena the legal right, but it was done with clear disdain for what remained of Ahora Madrid's democratic structures. This led Hernández to draft an analysis of his experience working in the council for the *Mesa de Coordinación*, which was leaked to the press, and which gives us some insight into the inner workings of Carmena's government. A government that, in

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<sup>900</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

<sup>901</sup> For a focused study of Ahora Madrid's participatory policies, see Nez and Ganuza 2020.

<sup>902</sup> As quoted above: 'despite its good intentions, [Decide Madrid] ignores the fundamental issues: the remunicipalisation of important services, debt audit or the central questions related to the urban model' (Fernández and Rodríguez 2017).

<sup>903</sup> Arce and García 2015.

Hernández's view, was characterised by the 'hijacking' of the project of collective participatory democracy by a logic of personalism.<sup>904</sup>

Hernández struggled to define his team's role at first, but settled on the idea that it would be 'a kind of interface between the government and our base and the neighbourhood spokescouncils, and also between the government and the citizens, both individual and organised.' They struggled to meet with Carmena and her inner circle, and would ultimately meet with Carmena only four times in the three years before Hernández was fired. The role of the Coordination Team, as they saw it, to bring proposals from the grassroots to the *Grupo Municipal*, was immediately blocked by Carmena's priority to form good relations with PSOE, because she would not entertain any ideas that PSOE would not support, and so the possibility dissipated to realise any 'policy proposals more in line with the organisations and the social base that supported us in the process of creating the candidacy.'<sup>905</sup> Hernández further criticises a general 'verticality and lack of internal democracy,' due to the extreme centralisation of decision-making in the *Junta de Gobierno*. Thus, 'the issues of government are not even debated by the full body of councillors' (the *Grupo Municipal*). When the *Grupo Municipal* did meet, it encountered two key debilitating problems: first that Carmena and her inner circle often did not attend, and second that 'when, in said meetings, a position was agreed that later did not satisfy the Mayor, the decision was reversed and left inoperative without any new collective debate.' Hernández laments that Ahora Madrid's activist base has been continually disillusioned by the government's lack of responsiveness, with many simply abandoning the project altogether, citing as an example Ahora Madrid's district assemblies, which just after the election would each attract 200 to 500 assorted activists and citizens, but which consisted three years later almost solely of people with some official role in Ahora Madrid. The document concludes that 'projects based on the cult of personality, even when they begin democratically, do not tend to succeed.'<sup>906</sup>

A key moment of fragmentation came in July 2016 when a number of activists left Ganemos to form a new group, Madrid129 (M129), named after the 129 official neighbourhoods (*barrios*) of Madrid. This largely consisted of the Ganemos members that supported the Más Madrid list in Ahora Madrid's primaries, including councillors Guillermo Zapata, Celia Mayer and Javier Barbero, as well as research participants P6 and Alejandra de Diego Baciero (both active members of M129), as well as P1 (who associated themselves with M129 but was not highly active after the 2015 election). This moment of fragmentation offers us a useful internal critique of both Ganemos and Podemos, with

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<sup>904</sup> Hernández, cited in Gil 2018.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid.

M129 situating itself in between the two as an explicitly municipalist project (as opposed to Podemos), seeking to ‘develop Ahora Madrid as a municipalist project, as a tool of social and political participation that further promotes the so-called “new politics”,’<sup>907</sup> but playing a more constructive, less antagonistic role than that of the remaining Ganemos councillors.<sup>908</sup>

As P6 saw it, ‘both Ganemos and Podemos are in a sum-zero political game’: Podemos did not want Ahora Madrid to fully exist, either as a structure or as a political actor, ‘because they want to be the only political organisation,’ but it seemed to P6 that neither did Ganemos, ‘because they thought that any organisation will be controlled by Podemos.’<sup>909</sup> Carmena, meanwhile, ‘didn’t want Ahora Madrid to exist because basically she doesn’t want to have any organisation to tell anything to her, because she is a Leviathan.’ For P6, M129 expressed a fundamental disagreement with Podemos over ‘their blockade of any kind of organisational development, the distrust of social movements, and their overall paternalism ... towards also municipalism and the social movements;’ and with the remnants of Ganemos over their antagonistic approach to acting as a counterpower within-and-against the institution.<sup>910</sup> P6 did not feel ‘part of Ganemos in this counterpower, critical, leftist-purist situation,’ but also lamented the binary frame of Podemos versus Ganemos itself:

Ganemos versus Podemos leaves out the most interesting part of the confluence. ... This fight is overrepresented in the *Mesa* that never gets anything done. ... It’s always this negotiation. There is never articulation, there is never agreement. There is always confrontation and negotiation.<sup>911</sup>

The task for M129 was to serve precisely that function of ‘articulation’: ‘You have to articulate. You have to be in this middle space; and Ganemos didn’t want to be in a middle space. It wanted to be a counterpower.’ Concretely, M129 sought to become the productive motor force that could rejuvenate Ahora Madrid’s structure and agency: ‘we cannot exist without an organisation. ... we

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<sup>907</sup> Madrid129 2016.

<sup>908</sup> The three remaining Ganemos councillors were Pablo Carmona, Rommy Arce and Montserrat Galcerán, all of whom stood on the Madrid en Movimiento primary list. While discussing M129, ‘Ganemos’ refers to these councillors and the remaining Ganemos structures, a smaller and less diverse entity than that discussed in Chapter 2, now that M129 had separated and much of the wider municipalist movement was demobilising.

<sup>909</sup> P6 interview 10 July 2018. Regarding the Podemos position, recall Jesús Montero’s words, discussed earlier: ‘Ahora Madrid does not exist as a political party nor was it intended to. ... We want Ahora Madrid to remain dormant, we are not looking to create another party, for that we already have Podemos, IU and Equo’ (García Gallo 2016).

<sup>910</sup> ‘Very negative, all the time. That’s very leftist. ... We are better people, better politics, better everything because we are criticising everything that is bad. So it must be that we are good. It’s a strange logic. ... Ganemos didn’t try to be in a space that could somehow articulate with the institution or looking at the openings that the situation was creating in order to deepen them and make them wider’ (P6 interview 10 July 2018).

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

wanted to create an Ahora Madrid that is not Ahora Madrid'. However, this was not successful: 'this doesn't work. ... It's just not possible to be Ahora Madrid without being Ahora Madrid.'<sup>912</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Towards a Viable Prefigurative-Populist Constitutionality

Ganemos failed, or at least it did not have time to radically reimagine leadership in a way that could guard the rest of their plans for municipal participatory democracy and public control of representatives from subordination to the logics of hyperleadership and personalism. This, more than anything else, seems to be the most crucial missing link in the Ganemos project of bringing radically prefigurative democracy into the electoral and institutional arenas. It is precisely the commitment to winning that not only brought Ganemos and Podemos into contact, but placed them on the same terrain. Podemos had their own solution to the problem of leadership, at this stage the specifically Laclauian-*Errejonista* model of the mediatic hyperleader as asset rather than as dangerous liability, as catalyst of grassroots mobilisation rather than parasite on grassroots mobilisation. This model takes Laclau's discursive ontology of the social somewhat literally, subordinating everything to the communicative strategy of recognition and rhetoric. We have seen how this logic of hyperleadership has hollowed out Podemos' internal democracy through the instrumentalist elements of its populist prefigurative constitutionality, and how it obliterated Ahora Madrid as radically democratic project.

This raises the broader question: are populism and radical democracy actually compatible? Laclauian 'radical democracy' is the end that justifies instrumentalised populist means. It is a steady deepening and radicalisation of liberal-democratic state institutions, achieved through counter-hegemonic struggle over the social imaginary, not (necessarily) through democratic, constituent prefiguration. Laclau's theory clearly tends towards prioritising leadership, homogeneity and efficiency, though we might question whether that necessarily must be taken as far as Errejón's theory of mediatic hyperleadership. Is this a matter of fundamental contradiction or only of focus, emphasis and priorities, or even of content, which could in theory be changed and still qualify in the most important senses as Laclauian-populist? That is, does Laclau *necessitate* instrumentalist constitutionalism, or only encourage it? I believe it is the latter. The problem of populist hyperleadership is that it represents the path of least resistance in two important ways. First, the hyperleader's constitutional role inside the party, tending towards tight command and control, allows for a level of strategic and discursive coherence unmatched by more democratic methods, which of course lends itself to a politics that sees its task primarily as one of communication, identification and the careful crafting of equivalence. Second, the populist counter-hegemonic

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<sup>912</sup> Ibid.



project requires, as Laclau is right to argue, an empty signifier that centres and coheres the wider, social chain of equivalence; and individuals can often be the very best of empty signifiers. Laclau gives us a theoretical framework for understanding this, even if it comes only in passing and with caveats. While responding to common tropes within the literature on populism, he addresses the question of ‘the centrality of the leader.’ Here he introduces concepts that he expands on later in the book, in particular *singularity* and *naming*. Naming becomes crucial to the logic of populism: ‘the unity of the equivalential ensemble, of the irreducibly new collective will in which particular equivalences crystallize, depends entirely on the social productivity of a name.’<sup>913</sup> A name becomes a ‘singularity’ when it ceases to refer only to the essence of a particular sectoral agent, and begins to refer to ‘a concrete social agent, whose only essence is the specific articulation of heterogeneous elements which, through that name, crystallize in a unified collective will.’ Laclau gives the example of a trade union (typically a particularist sectoral agent) that takes up an anti-racist struggle:

Let us suppose ... that this connection between anti-racist and trade union struggles continues for a certain time: in that case, people will start to feel that there is a natural link between the two types of struggle. So the relation of *contiguity* will start to shade into one of *analogy*, the *metonymy* into a *metaphor*. [This creates] a certain equivalential homogeneity between them. [Thus] the term ‘trade union’ becomes the name of a singularity.<sup>914</sup>

This provides sufficient grounds for making sense of Laclau’s analysis of the populist centrality of the individual name of the leader:

the extreme form of singularity is an individuality. In this way, almost imperceptibly, the equivalential logic leads to singularity, and singularity to identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader. To some extent, we are in a situation comparable to that of Hobbes’s sovereign: in principle there is no reason why a corporate body could not fulfil the functions of the Leviathan; but its very plurality shows that it is at odds with the indivisible nature of sovereignty. So the only ‘natural’ sovereign could be, for Hobbes, an individual. The difference between that situation and the one we are discussing is that Hobbes is talking about actual ruling, while we are talking about constituting a signifying totality, and the latter does not lead automatically to the former. ... However, the symbolic

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<sup>913</sup> Laclau 2005: 108.

<sup>914</sup> Ibid: 109-10, emphasis Laclau’s.

unification of the group around an individuality — and here I agree with Freud — is inherent to the formation of a ‘people’.<sup>915</sup>

Laclau’s caveat that he is working at the level of hegemonic social totality, and that this does not necessarily generate conclusions about ‘actual ruling’, does not prevent the reading that this passage portrays the individual hyperleader as populist path of least resistance, and such a conclusion seems to be borne out by the experience of Podemos’ early surge as well as the municipalist victories in Madrid, Barcelona, and elsewhere, which all relied heavily on the individual hyperleader’s function as empty signifier.

However, Laclau emphasises again and again that virtually any name could potentially serve the function of the empty signifier, be it Pablo Iglesias, Manuela, Podemos, trade union, democracy, or whatever. One central challenge for any kind of counter-hegemonic project, then, if it wishes to avoid the pitfalls of hyper- or monstrous leadership, is to attempt to forge the more difficult path of establishing as the primary empty signifier not an individual but an idea. Or, perhaps, a practice. Laclau hints at this latter idea, in a rare acknowledgement of the materiality of popular subjectivation:

The articulation between universality and particularity which is constitutively inherent to the construction of a ‘people’ is not something which takes place just at the level of words and images: it is also sedimented in practices and institutions. ... our notion of ‘discourse’ — which is close to Wittgenstein’s ‘language games’ — involves the articulation of words and actions, so that the quilting function is never a merely verbal operation but is embedded in material practices which can acquire institutional fixity.<sup>916</sup>

As Laclau, Mouffe and Errejón rightly identify, one name still stands out above all others as identifying precisely the overlap between symbolic and material liberation: democracy. The greatest strength of 15M as counter-hegemonic force was its cooption and radical redefinition of the idea of democracy. The very name of one of the central organisations within the 15M ecosystem expresses this perfectly: *¡Democracia Real Ya!* (real democracy now!). This simple name and slogan encapsulates at once the deligitimisation of the two party system as undemocratic, and the self-legitimisation of the 15M encampments and assemblies as the sites of ‘real democracy’, dichotomising the political space between truly democratic people and undemocratic elite. Crucially,

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<sup>915</sup> Ibid: 100.

<sup>916</sup> Ibid: 106. Note that in 2011 Errejón also, briefly, emphasised the material, constituent side of popular subjectivation: ‘The next step is the manifestation of the *people*: the social majority that claims the authentic political community as its own, in contrast to the elites. ... This operation ... constructs it, in the streets and squares, in *deliberation*’ (Errejón 2011: 137, emphasis added).

however, democracy also implies practice, incorporating the material aspect of subjectivation that, with only brief exceptions, goes largely ignored by Laclau, Errejón, Iglesias and Carmena.

In Spain today the Laclauian terrain is arguably being abandoned. Errejón left Podemos precisely because Iglesias was departing from the Laclauian populist strategy to adopt a more explicitly left wing identity by forming an electoral coalition with IU (Unidas Podemos). A partial return to Iglesias' Gramscianism, it would seem. Meanwhile the rightward (or more generously, the transversal) moves of Errejón, via his new party Más País, are often characterised theoretically as a move from Laclau to Mouffe, from popular antagonism to democratic agonism, which implies, to Errejón at least, the need for a more conciliatory approach to PSOE and the wider political centre ground.<sup>917</sup> Which is all to emphasise that the theoretical common link is now Gramsci rather than Laclau. Yet even Iglesias' Gramscian relapse continues to overlook a crucial aspect of Gramsci's theory, or perhaps we could say a crucial period of Gramsci's theory: left populism suffers from over-reliance on the *Prison Notebooks*, at the expense of Gramsci's early writings in *L'Ordine Nuovo*. The former does not pay much attention to the prefigurative struggle of the Turin factory councils, though neither does it renounce them; the early writings, however, strongly emphasise their importance as material sites of democratic subjectivation, constituent prefiguration and dual power. Gramsci may have been critical, in part, of the prefigurative function of the factory occupations, but that critique was founded precisely on recognition of their central importance, on the belief that prefiguration must therefore not be frivolous but taken deadly seriously as motor force of the war of position. As Boggs summarises for us:

[Gramsci] argued strongly for the councils and other 'dual power' structures as counterweights to the Bonapartist tendencies inherent in any centralized organization. Here Gramsci insisted that it would be necessary to build 'new forms of state life' that could organically transform social and authority relations as part of the 'war of position', rather than produce another 'government by functionaries'. The appearance of such popular institutions would minimize the dangers of reproducing hegemonic ideologies and social relations under a new political banner.<sup>918</sup> ... Not the *conquest* of power, but a *process* of revolutionary development rooted in the ongoing struggles of workers and culminating in a qualitatively new 'network of proletarian institutions', was the basic premise of Gramsci's theory. Any movement that looks to the old state apparatus in whatever form only succeeds in yielding itself up to the laws of capitalism; it necessarily abandons the autonomous power

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<sup>917</sup> It is somewhat ironic for Errejón that it is only after Iglesias' leftward repositioning, along with what seemed a disastrous downward trend in both polling and election results (initially validating Errejón's new strategy), that Unidas Podemos would enter national government in 2019 as junior coalition partners with PSOE.

<sup>918</sup> Boggs 1976: 86.

of the working class itself. Instead of building new forms, it ends up reproducing old ones. ... The factory councils ... were ... affecting through their growth other institutions such as unions and parties, which now had the potential to become the organic representation of popular struggles rather than mechanical impositions of bureaucratic structures. Because of their small size and the democratic involvement of all workers, regardless of skill or union affiliation, the councils could emerge as the primary agencies of collectivity and unity that would make it concretely possible for the proletariat to recover its subjectivity; in Gramsci's words, 'the whole mass participates in the life of the council and feels itself to be something through this activity'. The workers, striving to take control over all aspects of their existence, begin to replace step by step the bourgeois concept of 'citizen' with the revolutionary concept of 'comrade'; the proletariat thereby overcomes its fragmentation, 'acquiring a consciousness of its organic unity and counterposing itself as a whole to capitalism'. The factory councils and the principles it embodies unite dialectically structure and consciousness in such a fashion that a previously subdued and divided class is transformed into an active 'single organism'. From a strictly political point of view, the factory councils would in Gramsci's opinion represent an advance beyond the party in terms of three contributions: (1) they would counter the tendencies towards bureaucratization and Jacobinism in any large-scale organization; (2) they would more effectively preserve the autonomy and identity of the revolutionary movement vis-à-vis bourgeois institutions, and thus help to offset the possibilities of deradicalization that such diverse theorists as Michels, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Sorel had already analysed in Social Democracy; and (3) they would prefigure in their own development the future socialist state, which 'already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the working class'.<sup>919</sup>

Unpacking this one step at a time, we see first a prescient description of precisely what has occurred within Podemos, where the weakening of the Circles has left no "dual power" structures as counterweights to the Bonapartist tendencies inherent in any centralized organization.' Implicit in the second sentence is Gramsci's critique of the capitalist state, expressed elsewhere as the claim that 'the socialist state cannot form itself in the institutions of the capitalist state, but is a fundamentally new creation with respect to them.'<sup>920</sup> This claim is coloured by the remnants of Gramsci's Marxist economism, but the experience of Ahora Madrid points to the conclusion that Gramsci's claim (that socialism cannot emerge from within the capitalist institutions) can be translated to the claim that we cannot expect the constituted power of the capitalist state to be easily and directly transmutable

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<sup>919</sup> Ibid: 92-94. All Boggs' quotes are of Gramsci's *L'Ordine Nuovo* writings.

<sup>920</sup> Gramsci 1919.

into institutions of radical democracy. Boggs then describes how, in Gramsci's early writings, the prefigurative force of autonomous working class institutions serves two parallel and interdependent purposes. Firstly, *constituent prefiguration*: as socialism (or radical democracy) cannot emerge entirely from within the capitalist state, alternative models of both procedural and economic democracy must be developed outside of it. Otherwise any socialist or radically democratic future has no connection to the present, its worldline squeezed out of existence by the trundling inertia of capitalist, hierarchical path dependency. Secondly, *hegemonic articulation*: the above text sets out many of the key (counter-)hegemonic functions that Laclau takes from Gramsci ('agencies of collectivity and unity', subjectivation, the overcoming of fragmentation). Just as Laclau manages to divorce these concepts from Gramsci's class essentialism at the discursive level of social totality, can we not also divorce them from Gramsci's residual economism at the material level of local democracy? Was this hegemonic function of direct democracy and constituent prefiguration not one of the key strengths of 15M, the reason why the encampments specifically marked the transition from forgettable one-off protest to counter-hegemonic popular subjectivity?<sup>921</sup>

This seems to be both a strategic weakness of left populism as well as a theoretical weakness for Laclau, who rarely speaks of material factors, or even concrete agency. Hegemonic articulation is clearly, if perhaps only partially an agential process, but it is a thoroughly abstract process. Laclauian subjectivation tends to appear as a process that happens *to* the subject, rather than as a product of individual and collective self-valorisation. Laclau at times emphasises the materiality of discourse, but its implications are not seriously explored. Any potential role for constituent prefiguration vanishes in Laclau's work, which leads so easily in implementation to populist hyperleadership and all of its problems. Laclau's discursive ontology, regardless of its philosophical value on its own terms, easily leads in practice to a hollow political praxis that ignores that at the root of discursive entities are physical bodies, agential desiring machines, physical spaces of deliberation, contestation, intersubjective recognition and autonomous self-valorisation. On the other hand, prefigurative struggle, especially its hegemonic unifying function, works best at a small scale and under reasonable homogeneity of identities and goals; so there is a large gap between the small scale production of collective unity through constituent prefiguration and large scale collective unity at the level of the social, which does of course require a more abstract, symbolic approach. For Gramsci this gap was to be bridged by the authority of the Communist Party. Laclau helps to identify the need to find something that today fill that void left by the great twentieth century Communist Parties.

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<sup>921</sup> Flesher Fominaya 2020a.

This is also where Negri fails us: insofar as he provides no useful mechanism for how to articulate a multitude as majoritarian popular subject, his theory effectively collapses into a naïve spontaneism. Multitudes either happen or they do not; and so politics all but disappears from the equation. That horizontalist, radically prefigurative politics requires a populist element is not only a theoretical claim but also as a pragmatic one. Negri did not seriously or explicitly address the dual power implications of his autonomous constituent process, but as argued in Chapter 2 it would seem to be a necessary consequence. Yet a purely autonomous dual power strategy would require levels of popular mobilisation and radicalisation the likes of which have not been seen in Europe since 1917. Even the phenomenal scale of Spanish anarchism in the 1930s was insufficient. One might argue that the Zapatistas of Chiapas and the Kurds of Rojava show that fully autonomous dual power is still possible today, but the circumstances that allowed those societies to form are hardly replicable in Spain today, which is our focus here, nor Europe or virtually anywhere in the developed world. To think dual power in twenty-first century Europe would seem to necessitate Ganemos' Bookchinian strategy of winning elections and catalysing dual power from within state institutions: not a fully autonomous strategy of dual power but a dual power of relative autonomy. Yet winning elections, especially with absolute majorities that allow for sweeping changes, is no mean feat, requiring or at least greatly incentivising certain populist or personalist logics, as seen in the experience of municipalism in Spain.

If we agree with the basic claims of the ontological prefigurative function (as discussed in Chapter 2), such as those of the well-established and perfectly convincing theory of path dependency, then we must take seriously the possibility that a populist strategy that lacks an element of radical constituent prefiguration, such as that of Podemos, is therefore prefiguring (i.e. concretely generating) future systems of hierarchy, political cultures of homogeneity and instrumental constitutionalities. Which is to say that Laclauian 'radical democracy' may be a self-refuting idea, if populism is not combined with radical constituent prefiguration. Where will the radically new democratic subjectivities be forged, where will alternative democratic constitutionalities be developed and tested, if the entire party machinery is subjected only to the temporal discipline of time-as-measure, to the organisational discipline of constituted power, to the libidinal manipulation of hyperleadership, if there is no room for autonomous self-valorisation? It would seem that prefigurative populism is not merely one political possibility among many, but rather a logical fulfillment of the promise of both prefigurative, *asambleario* politics and left populism.

We now transition to a more speculative proposal for a way forward, a promising ground on which future research might more fully develop the requisite models of horizontalised leadership

that could support a more viable prefigurative populism; leading, potentially, towards the possibility of a unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony. We have seen how a return to Gramsci's early writings can provide some grounds for reconciliation between populist counter-hegemony and radical prefiguration, but Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Gramsci still stands. Gramsci's theories of both hegemony and prefiguration are too deeply rooted in class essentialism to be the sole basis for what today must surely be an *anti-essentialist* theory of prefiguration and hegemony. A particularly promising basis for such a theory is the work of Alex Williams, who draws on complexity theory in order to develop a conception of hegemony not as purely agential, Machiavellian political conspiracy, nor as a purely structural phenomenon, but as emergent property of complex political systems.<sup>922</sup> A deep appraisal of the complexity theory that grounds Williams' reconceptualisation of hegemony is beyond the scope of this thesis, but his conclusions can nevertheless be engaged with on the thesis' own terms, as it is precisely the striking compatibility of our conclusions that suggests a deeper theoretical compatibility. Williams' complexity theory approach may be the proper basis for a theory of the *asambleario* constitution of distributed leadership as key element in a prefigurative-populist strategy informed by an anti-essentialist unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony. Hence we will first introduce Williams' theory by way of an attempt to begin the development of a constitutional theory of distributed leadership, which has emerged from our analysis as a key element if radical democracy is to be practically prefigured within a prefigurative-populist framework, as it seems it must.

### *Leadership without a Leader: The Constitution of Distributed Leadership*

One of the central challenges for prefigurative populism as transformative strategy of radical democracy is to find an alternative to the dangerous path of least resistance that is hyperleadership. This can be further divided into two subordinate tasks: replacing the individual leader as hegemonic empty signifier with an idea (or what Laclau might call an impersonal nominal singularity); and replacing the hyperleader's centralising constitutional function with a model that horizontally distributes leadership functions, at first within the party, but also in such a way as to prefigure such forms of distributed leadership as could be employed in democratised state institutions and, perhaps as if not even more importantly, in relatively autonomous institutions of dual power. The former is a strategic issue, the content of which is to be debated outside this thesis.<sup>923</sup> The latter is a constitutional issue, and in fact precisely the constitutional issue around which the entirety of this project converges.

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<sup>922</sup> Williams 2020.

<sup>923</sup> Though, as stated, 'democracy' still seems the prime candidate for a non-individualised empty signifier.

To theorise distributed leadership within a prefigurative-populist framework, we turn to the work of Alex Williams. Williams elaborates a conception of hegemony informed by complexity theory, that improves upon that of Laclau and Mouffe, he argues, in being better able to ‘capture the full richness of the concept and practice of hegemony’ as it brings ‘into temporary harmony the resonances of fields of meaning and identity with the brute objective universe.’<sup>924</sup> Williams specifies four key elements to his theory of ‘complex hegemony’. First, ‘Hegemony as an *emergent* property: emerging from the intersections of agency and structural determinations, possessing its own dynamics,’ an idea that should be reasonably self-explanatory now that the concept of emergence has become so popular far beyond the specific confines of complexity theory literature. Already we see resonances with my own critique of Laclau for failing to sufficiently account for concrete agential aspects of subjectivation, in that case specifically in terms of the role of constituent prefiguration in the construction of radical identities. Second, ‘Hegemony as a vector of *guided self-organisation*’, which describes the ‘downward causatory impacts’ of hegemony’s emergence, providing a framework amenable to further consideration *prefigurative self-organisation*. Third, ‘Hegemony considered from the standpoint of *phase space* and dynamical systems theory: where achieved hegemony consists of a point of *metastable equilibrium* or an *attractor*, within a phase space, and where hegemonic projects consist of work to either navigate *within* the existing phase space regime, or to transform it.’ This reflects my own attempts to account for a hegemonic logic within the thesis’ methodology, in addressing the hegemonic reduction of the complexity of Ahora Madrid into the Ganemos-Podemos binary, while also trying, at times, to offer disruptive alternative readings of Ahora Madrid’s internal hegemonic structure. Fourth, ‘Hegemonic power as a form of *generative entrenchment*,’ reflecting onto hegemony the generative ontological logic of path dependency that we discussed in terms of prefiguration in Chapter 2.<sup>925</sup>

The key aspect for the present purpose of rethinking the constitution of prefiguration and leadership is where Williams turns to the question of hegemonic strategy. If hegemony is an emergent property of complex systems, posing profound epistemic limitations for our capacity to predict our way towards effective hegemonic rearticulation, Williams asks rhetorically: ‘How is strategic action possible if we can never fully predict the results of our actions? How is it that massively complex systems can apparently be effectively shaped, manipulated, and fought over?’<sup>926</sup> The answer is that hegemonic strategy must be conceived in the space between the perfect command of the omniscient strategist and the demoralising randomness of pure contingency. Rather,

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<sup>924</sup> Ibid: 130.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid: 138, emphasis Williams’.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid: 180.



We should imagine actually existing (and successful) strategy as requiring an evolution between a series of states, with room allowed for modification and improvement of the original strategy in terms of means and ends as it proceeds towards actualisation.<sup>927</sup>

Such a conception of strategy, as both partially intentional and relatively autonomous, i.e. as itself an emergent property of complex systems, means that strategy need not be associated solely with the image of ‘the strategist themselves as either an individual or collective body capable of centrally processing information and acting on that basis.’<sup>928</sup> Strategy itself can be conceptualised as a distributed process that emerges ‘*across* an ecology of different kinds of organisation, where coordination could come about partially via explicit plans and projects, but also from non-intentional run-away processes.’<sup>929</sup> Williams then gestures towards a vague but enticing vision for a model of ‘complex hegemonic strategy “from below”,’<sup>930</sup> having a ‘relatively distributed organisational form,’ and citing, as incipient examples, certain interpretations of alterglobal social movements, as well as ‘the social movement-party hybrids developed of late in Venezuela, Spain, and Greece.’<sup>931</sup>

Williams neatly summarises this model of strategy in the title of an article, ‘Strategy without a Strategiser,’ which helps to consolidate the resolution of a number of issues in this thesis.<sup>932</sup> For one, it presents a much more compelling vision of the strategic-temporal relationship between means and ends than can be found in much of the literature on prefiguration. Viewing transformative prefiguration as itself a form of complex hegemonic strategy is more compelling than Negri’s asymptotic model of disutopian prefiguration discussed in Chapter 2. It also brings prefiguration and hegemony into a relationship that approaches tautology, and this is only further exaggerated once we notice the intensely prefigurative character of Williams’ theory of complex hegemonic strategy, very explicitly in terms of two of the four prefigurative functions discussed in Chapter 2: the *temporal-ontological* and *counter-hegemonic* functions. Williams does not address what the thesis has labelled *constituent prefiguration*, but my above arguments for its indispensability seem perfectly compatible with Williams’ theory. Thus we have something of a groundwork for a potential unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony. Furthermore, the idea of strategy without a strategist is already tantalisingly close to the idea of *leadership without a leader*.

One of the key shortcomings in the full realisation of both Ganemos’ original constituent vision and a productive prefigurative-populist synergy was the failure, within the time allowed by the

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<sup>927</sup> Ibid.

<sup>928</sup> Ibid: 182.

<sup>929</sup> Ibid, emphasis Williams’.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid: 183.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid: 184.

<sup>932</sup> Williams 2019.

electoral temporality, to develop a radical reimagining of leadership. It is also important to bear in mind that such a reimagining of leadership applies differently to the different functions of the different stages of Ganemos (and/or Ahora Madrid), pre-election and post-election, and also applies differently, to a more subtle degree, between post-election in opposition, versus post-election in government. Pre-election, Ganemos and Ahora Madrid were electoral war machines, if of a very different, *asambleario* type to that of Podemos, which is more commonly known in those terms (indeed which explicitly thinks of itself in those terms, for the most part). The task of Ganemos-as-electoral-war-machine was to develop and implement the necessary strategy and tactics for standing in and perhaps even winning the election: develop a policy programme, choose candidates, negotiate the political space of allies and competitors (all perfectly standard electoral tasks) and, more innovatively, to prefigure elements of the ‘new institutional architecture.’ Ganemos post-election is rather an institutional interface, the central organisational node in between the institutions of municipal government, Madrid’s social movement ecology, and the mass of citizens. This is equally true, if in slightly different ways, whether in opposition or in government. Being in government, however, adds greater complexity – and higher stakes – as then the movements and citizens interface with government not solely via the nodal systems of Ganemos or Ahora Madrid’s movement-party structures, but also through new interfaces created by government, such as the *Foros Locales* and the *Decide Madrid* online platform, and potentially through institutions of relatively autonomous dual power like the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. Thus it is necessary to consider the question of horizontalising leadership separately, and we will focus on the two limits cases: Ganemos as *asambleario* electoral war machine, and Ganemos in government as new institutional architecture.

Ganemos as electoral war machine developed a highly successful model of ‘collective intelligence’, which I discussed with P6 in terms of *distributed leadership* (see Chapter 4.2.1). In the terms provided by leadership literature, however, this phase can be better understood as a form of *emergent leadership*. Much of the literature treats emergent leadership as the process in which leaders of a traditional type emerge in more organic ways than that of *assigned* or *distributed leadership*. Uhl-Bien and Marion, however, offer an account of emergent leadership specifically based on complexity theory, which is more apt to our discussion of collective intelligence. The foundations of Uhl-Bien and Marion’s field, known as Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), are as follows:

[CLT] assumes that leadership is not generated in authority and control (i.e., the formal managerial structure) but in the interconnected actions of individuals acting out of personal values or vision, and engaging with one another through dialogue. From this perspective,

order is not designed and directed, but emergent from the combinations of many individual actions: Local actions that occur simultaneously around the system link up with one another to produce powerful emergent phenomena. In this way, complexity suggests very much a shared, or distributed, view of leadership.<sup>933</sup>

Uhl-Bien and Marion are concerned with a complexity-based model that can account, in different ways, for all forms of leadership, including a more complex and accurate account of the efficacy of traditional forms of leadership.<sup>934</sup> We can therefore conceive of Ganemos' radical, *asambleario* valorisation of collective intelligence as generating a tendentially *pure* form of emergent leadership, in which 'the formal managerial structure' is minimised to vanishing point, leaving *only* (again, tendentially) 'the interconnected actions of individuals acting out of personal values or vision, and engaging with one another through dialogue.'<sup>935</sup> As P6 put it, 'Self-organisation ... not non-organisation,' and 'distributed leadership [that recognises] that there are people in different fields for different tasks' while remaining horizontal in power distribution.<sup>936</sup> Of course, to the extent that both formal and informal hierarchies and 'managerial structures' were either accidentally or necessarily in place, Ganemos' collective intelligence was rather a model of leadership's *becoming* purely emergent.

The literature on *distributed leadership* is older, and therefore unsurprisingly more diverse than that on *emergent leadership*. Distributed leadership was originally defined by Gibb, who argued that 'Leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group'.<sup>937</sup> More recently, Spillane et al, for example, treat the concept as a fairly simple question of quantity: where 'leadership practice is undertaken by multiple leaders.'<sup>938</sup> Burke et al describe tendencies in the literature towards, on the one hand, 'shared leadership as co-leadership,' and on the other, shared or distributed leadership as 'the leadership role or function

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<sup>933</sup> Uhl-Bien and Marion 2011: 473.

<sup>934</sup> Hence the loose, metaphorical use of the word 'distributed', which will be used more precisely in the subsequent analysis.

<sup>935</sup> Ibid.

<sup>936</sup> P6's full comments on collective intelligence and distributed leadership again, for convenience: 'Ganemos had a certain kind of intelligence that's in the organisation that made this horizontalism possible. ... I think that it gave everybody the opportunity to do things, but it also gave everybody a frame so that what you were doing was contributing to ... a collective endeavour. ... Self-organisation is not non-organisation. ... The horizontal model allows for collective intelligence, and collective intelligence is always better than the brightest of the intelligence alone. ... Distributed leadership, in my opinion, is not that everybody's a leader. I think that a distributed leadership means that you recognise that there are people in different fields for different tasks for different areas and different situations – that should be taken into account as the leadership. It's not that everybody in every moment could do whatever. I think that's a mistake. ... There is different levels of knowledge, there is different levels of information, there is different levels of experience, there is different levels of power, but those are different levels of capacity. The question is how you can take this diversity and make it so that it's not one person that is supposed to know everything and decide everything and have all the responsibilities, but that this is distributed' (P6 interview 10 July 2018).

<sup>937</sup> Gibb 1954: 884.

<sup>938</sup> Spillane et al 2004: 8.

switching between members based on needs and capabilities.<sup>939</sup> Meanwhile Gronn attempts to stretch the concept of distributed leadership to include what was described above as emergent leadership from collective intelligence.<sup>940</sup> For our purposes we should consider distributed leadership to the deliberate, constitutional definition of multiple, dispersed leadership roles and functions.

Considering Ganemos from this perspective, we can interpret instances of pernicious informal hierarchy (as described earlier, especially via P1's interview data), of the 'tyranny of structurelessness',<sup>941</sup> to be where Ganemos veered to close towards purely emergent leadership. In its best moments, however, Ganemos often succeeded in building a horizontal *asambleario* structure that produced a kind of a nuanced topology of horizontality and verticality, a powerful concatenation of freely emergent leadership functions (the open working groups that worked on organisation, movement-building, programme, campaign, transversal feminisms, etc; the general framework of collective intelligence) alongside more deliberately constituted forms of distributed leadership (the *Coordinadora*, the multiple spokespersons, the assigned roles for facilitating assemblies, etc). This hybrid *asambleario* model of leadership, as seeking to take the best of both from emergent and distributed leadership, holds the promise of maintaining a fundamental horizontality of power relations while avoiding the tyranny of structurelessness, balanced between the formalisation of certain verticalities and the flourishing of other informally distributed leadership functions. In this way those with knowledge and interest (and time) are free to gravitate to the groups and individual roles best suited to their skills and where they will feel most fulfilled.<sup>942</sup> In some crucial ways a *more* efficient use of creative human resources than a more hierarchical system with closed roles.

We can interpret the horizontal structure, of working groups and *Coordinadora* working within the strategic remit of plenary consensus, as a system of checks and balances, a radically multitudinous separation of powers. Furthermore, in Ganemos' *eight* spokespeople we see what

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<sup>939</sup> Burke et al 2011.

<sup>940</sup> Gronn 2011.

<sup>941</sup> Freeman 1972-73.

<sup>942</sup> The issue of time is an important one, though not something that can be explored in vast detail here. Recall P5 and Montero's critiques of *asamblearismo*, discussed earlier, that it can tend to be dominated by an informal tyranny of those with enough time. Recall also Galcerán's counterargument that Ganemos, she believes, succeeded in striking a balance between ongoing, slow, time-intensive deliberation, while also opening spaces (online and in the less frequent plenary assemblies) for those the time-poor to also participate as much as they could, or even for those who simply did not *want* to participate every day (Galcerán 2016b). The role of confidence is another potential weakness of such a horizontal system, another potential informal hierarchy, but one that can be overcome to an extent by incorporating pedagogical aspects into the horizontal methods, as is very often the case in such organisations. A 15M text on assemblyism makes explicit its inherently pedagogical function: 'One of the fundamental values of the assembly of equals, often ignored, is that of providing an educational space for the development of interpersonal relations' (Política a Largo Plazo 2013). In this sense the pedagogy of the assembly becomes a form of subjectivation; but we can also consider the more mundane pedagogical tasks of training assembly members to take on organisational roles like facilitator, minute taker, etc.

must be an essential element in trying to combine multitudinous leadership with situations that demand formal verticality and that are usually resolved into the most hierarchical form of verticality: the pyramidal power structure that terminates in a singularity. The electoral war machine required spokespeople in order to interface with the media ecosystem that is the core terrain of the electoral contest. The spokesperson is unavoidably a position of power. There are two key ways in which that position of power can be limited, and prevented from becoming a position of ‘focused’ leadership.<sup>943</sup> First, a logic of *delegation* rather than representation, and the institutional infrastructure to enforce that relationship, i.e. remove from the role any initiative, limiting it to literally re-presenting (presenting again) the will of the many as expressed in the consensus of the plenary, with powers of recall to enforce that limited role. Second, *dilution through multiplication*: this is especially crucial for a public relations role such as spokesperson, because even if that role is constituted as delegative rather than representative, a single spokesperson would quickly become the face of the group, their name would become synonymous with the group, they would begin to play the role of empty signifier and in so doing begin to take on characteristics of the hyperleader, primarily *indispensability* and the many forms of power that reflect back from that indispensability to reshape the hyperleader’s relationship with the group. Ganemos implemented a relatively extreme form of dilution by having eight spokespeople. Many other groups and parties implement a minimum version of this by having two spokespeople or two leaders. For example, IU does this at a number of organisational levels, and numerous green parties across Europe have two leaders. Often the primary concern is gender parity, but it has the important side effect of the *dilution of leadership through multiplication*. Could this apply beyond spokespeople? Could it have applied to the candidature or to municipal government? This was an idea that crossed my mind during fieldwork, and I even raised it in an interview, but it was quickly dismissed as infeasible simply because it could not possibly be accommodated within the existing state institutions. Mayor and Councillor are legally defined singularities. It is literally, legally, impossible to have two (or more) Mayors of Madrid. And so the idea was quickly forgotten, until the felicitous moment in which I learned of the remarkable implementation of the dilution of power through multiplication in Brazil: the rise of ‘collective candidacies’.<sup>944</sup>

This experimental electoral model has been developing in Brazil since the 1990s, but only in the last few years has it seen some significant electoral success.<sup>945</sup> Groups such as Bancada Ativista (Activist Caucus) and Muitas / Gabinetona (Many / Big Office) now collectively hold seats in

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<sup>943</sup> As it is sometimes referred to in the leadership literature.

<sup>944</sup> Sometimes also known as ‘collective and shared mandates’, and various combinations of those terms. My immense gratitude goes to Cintia Martins Freitas, who introduced me to these collective candidacies, and those at [minim-municipalism.org](http://minim-municipalism.org), who organised the seminar at which this happy discovery was made.

<sup>945</sup> Dias 2020.

municipal, regional and even national legislatures. Ronderos, Chicarino and Segurado offer a rare English-language academic account of one of these experimental collective candidacies, in this case Bancada Ativista, which they describe as ‘a prefigurative progressive experience,’ which in the specific electoral campaign they focus on, ‘comprised of nine co-candidates running for a single seat in the State Chamber of Sao Paulo during the 2018 Brazilian elections.’<sup>946</sup> Although the rapid rise of collective candidacies prompted an attempt to regulate them in 2017, this has not yet become law, and so Brazil’s collective candidacies remain completely extralegal forms of experimentation in the dilution of leadership through multiplication.<sup>947</sup> Ronderos et al identify collective candidacies as seeking to counter ‘the personalistic character of elections and its adverse effects on the accountability of democratic institutions and political mandates,’ connecting very precisely with the concerns of this thesis.<sup>948</sup> The collective candidacy method involves the legal presentation of a single candidate for a single seat, but on the express understanding that this official, de jure representative is in fact part of a de facto horizontal collective that will informally share the seat. In the case of Bancada Ativista’s successful 2018 campaign in the state of Sao Paulo, Monica Seixas was the official candidate, and her eight co-candidates were officially hired as advisers, but de facto shared the responsibilities of the office as equally as possible. Official salaries varied, and so were informally redistributed through a shared bank account to achieve egalitarian equilibrium between the collective candidates. The collective takes communal responsibility for all representative tasks, such as drafting bills and amendments, while Seixas represents the collective on the floor of the legislature. Of course, these experiments are immensely fragile in precisely the same ways as Ganemos’ plans for ‘public control’ of representatives via party and citizen institutional interfaces: the law trumps the party, and all the legal power is invested in the official candidate. So the long term aspiration for such models that seek to inject *asambleario* logics of emergent and distributed leadership into state government must be to eventually do so at the level of legislation. In the meantime, however, Brazil’s collective candidacies and Ganemos’ *asambleario* infrastructure of collective intelligence offer promising, if not unproblematic, suggestions for the constitution of radical, prefigurative becoming, the dilution and distribution of leadership, the contradictory use of the state to foster dual power, and the possibility of the constitution of a novel prefigurative-populist politics that can achieve all these things at scale by winning the battle for hegemony.

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<sup>946</sup> Ronderos, Chicarino and Segurado 2021: 1.

<sup>947</sup> Dias 2020.

<sup>948</sup> Ronderos, Chicarino and Segurado 2021: 3.

## 5 Conclusion

Perhaps it is simply their nature that organising methods should be outgrown, overtaken by new material realities, new ideological priorities, new modes of self-valorisation.<sup>949</sup> This seemed especially true in London in the 2010s, where the weaknesses of established organising methods was becoming painfully apparent. In 2011, Occupy had injected both a renewed energy and a rich horizontalist methodology into the autonomous social movement milieu.<sup>950</sup> But this horizontalist methodology, primarily defined by absolute consensus, came with its own limitations. In my experience of London-based social movements in this period, there was a general lack of capacity for further methodological development. Meanwhile the hierarchical bureaucracies of political parties seemed utterly stultifying, trapped in their own inertia, incapable of fully adapting to the twenty-first century.<sup>951</sup> Horizontal methods seemed much more potent for organising direct action, but the methods themselves limited capacity for political impact beyond direct action.<sup>952</sup>

The early roots of this doctoral project lie in the observation during this period that processes of prefiguration and constitutionalisation seemed necessarily complementary in theory, and potentially so in practice; but seemed utterly divorced in the political reality of that time and place. Traditional parties were thinking somewhat constitutionally about their internal organisation, but not prefiguratively. The more anarchic movements were prefiguring exhilaratingly radical democratic futures, and finding ways to constitute that prefigurative process, but surreptitiously.<sup>953</sup> By rejecting constituted power (and often rejecting the notion of power itself), these movements seemed to be self-constrained, self-imposing limits on their own ability to fully conceptualise, deploy and control their own power. Any notion of prefigurative constitutionality seemed simply unrealistic in this context. Capacity to theorise a way out of the apparent organisational impasse was, in hindsight, being constrained by a lack of practical examples that might evidence the political feasibility of such a theoretical confluence (while seeming applicable to that European context).

The emergence of Podemos and new municipalism in Spain marked a profound turning point. The unprecedented success of these attempts to carry the horizontal, constituent logic of the assembly into the halls of government, and to constitute a more nuanced mixture of horizontality

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<sup>949</sup> 'We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy' (Jefferson 2007 [1816]: 73).

<sup>950</sup> Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Occupy greatly *accelerated* a process that was already occurring, but quite slowly: the infusion into UK activism of influences from the wider alterglobal movement.

<sup>951</sup> The concept of Pasokification is highly relevant here, not always nor even very often discussed in terms of party organisation, but nevertheless depending in many respects on how organisational immobility is linked with ideological stagnation.

<sup>952</sup> This was essentially the UK equivalent of the post-2011 movement malaise experienced in Spain.

<sup>953</sup> See Thorpe 2013 for an analysis of the proto-constitutional functions of Occupy London's 'Safer Spaces Policy' and of the assembly consensus process itself as a kind of living constitution.

and verticality, demanded attention. This seemed to be precisely the example of the constitutionalisation of prefiguration that the political moment was calling for. Ahora Madrid specifically made an even more fascinating proposal. It was the point where the two alternate paths out of 15M and into the *asalto institucional*, Podemos and *asambleario* municipalism, re-joined in the formal equilibrium of the *Marco Común*.<sup>954</sup> This posed the constitutionalisation of not only prefigurative assembly politics but also left populism, and then the tantalising conundrum of their attempted constitutional synthesis.

Inspired by the very diversity of the case study, the iterative research process has ultimately produced so much more than a mere analysis of the constitutionalisation of prefigurative politics. Careful study of the idea of prefiguration – of the subterranean diversity of its practical and theoretical genealogies, and of the profound complexity of its rigorous elaboration as strategic and philosophical concept – has produced a bespoke understanding of prefiguration itself. By treating prefiguration not as the defining characteristic of a single tradition ('prefigurative politics') but rather as a transversal complex of political functions and types, early ruminations on the constitutionalisation of prefigurative politics have transformed into the powerful concept of *prefigurative constitutionality*. Prefigurative constitutionality presents a novel approach to the production of constitutional and political theory and the study of non-state political actors in the context of strategies for radical democracy. It opens constitutional theory to the constitutive, self-valorising practices of movements and parties, wherein the lens of prefigurative constitutionality allows for the discovery of implicit critiques of mainstream constitutionalism, and emergent constitutional models of future democracies to come. It poses the vital challenge for prefigurative political practices to recognise and refine their constitutional practices, by making clear the necessity of constituent prefiguration to strategies for radical democracy. It reflects back onto questions of methodology, demanding a novel adaptation of grounded theory methods within a critical theoretical framework. The application of the general prefigurative-constitutional lens produces novel sub-concepts or micro-theories by precisely defining, for example, Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality and Podemos' populist constitutionality. This in turn produces a richer understanding of those strategies. By analysing how both means and ends are constitutionalised in movement-party organisation, and how that constitutionalisation expresses a conception of the temporal-strategic relationship between means and ends, prefigurative constitutionality reveals new insights into how political strategies function. The complex case study of Ahora Madrid provides the further opportunity to study how divergent political strategies constitutionally interact.

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<sup>954</sup> Ahora Madrid January 2015.



In Ganemos' *asambleario* constitutionality we found both pragmatic reasons for assembly democracy (as most effective way to cohere a diverse confluence of movements and parties) and more explicitly prefigurative understandings of its significance. Ganemos was partly an instance of what Chapter 2 defined as intermediary prefiguration, to the extent that its structures were seen to prefigure 'new forms of democratic city government.'<sup>955</sup> But it can also be read as an instance of real utopia, prefiguring a radically delegatised, non-representative direct democracy. Negri provided the theoretical framework for understanding the implications and challenges of Ganemos' attempts to constitute *asamblearismo* as a radically prefigurative constituent process. Ganemos' consensus-based, *15Mayista* assembly democracy sought to implement what Negri called 'the will of all', as opposed to the general will. In Ganemos, through the constituent plenary assembly, this seems to have worked relatively well. The *asambleario* constitutionality offered an enticing prefiguration of horizontal, federalised, to some extent scalable structure, with the constituent plenary articulating the plural will of all through consensus. Plenary agreements would in turn set priorities and broad limits on the autonomy of the working groups, and with the executive function of the *Coordinadora* limited, at least in theory, to mere coordination of and tactical manoeuvres within the strategic decisions taken by the plenary. The democratic inversion of both the executive function and the production of strategy reflects Bookchin's vision of confederalism, in which 'Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy,' which send delegates to 'administrative councils' whose function is strictly the 'coordination and execution of adopted policies' – an inverted pyramid structure with power concentrated at the base and steadily weakening towards the top.<sup>956</sup> It also reflects Hardt and Negri's call of 'strategy to the movements and tactics to leadership.'<sup>957</sup> It is a system with some similarities to parliamentary sovereignty, in the plenary's status as primary decision-making body, and as 'the space of greatest legitimacy.'<sup>958</sup> Yet sovereignty was found to be an inadequate descriptor of the power of the plenary. The plenary was not the representative mediatory of the constituent power of Ganemos activists. In being open to all, both formally (anyone could attend) and substantively (consensus decision-making sought to actively include all members, expressing the 'will of all'), the plenary quite literally was the living constitution of the members themselves, the direct expression of their constituent power, a kind of permanent constituent assembly. Yet to view *asamblearismo* as therefore expressing *only* constituent power obscures and confuses the relationship between the plenary and the other organs and individuals of the organisation. The

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<sup>955</sup> Ganemos Madrid 15 July 2014 [15 June 2014].

<sup>956</sup> Bookchin 1989.

<sup>957</sup> Hardt and Negri 2017: 18-19.

<sup>958</sup> Ganemos Madrid 26 September 2014 [23 September 2014].

binding nature of plenary decisions over working groups, spokespersons, etc, demands a more nuanced understanding of democratic constituted power than Negri can provide.

In seeking to reimagine political representation, the Zapatista-inspired Ganemos principle 'lead by obeying (and disobeying)' sought to combine the flattening of institutional hierarchies (the delegatisation of representation), with 'processes of institutional disobedience when regulations, interests and hierarchies of power collide with the democratising mandate of the movements'.<sup>959</sup> This implied two key mechanisms: the power of recall, to impose discipline on representatives from below, and the positive mandatory power of citizens to initiate municipal democratic processes themselves. The problem was that Madrid's municipal institutions had no such legal mechanisms, and creating them was not one of Carmena's priorities. This left only Ahora Madrid's own movement-party structures with which to enforce 'the democratising mandate of the movements'. These structures were weakly and ambiguously constituted, and were immediately nullified by Carmena. In the case of recall, however, a principle so highly valorised by Ganemos, it is difficult to imagine it being implemented even if it had somehow been an attainable option. Ahora Madrid were in government, and thus in the limelight. They were subject to constant attacks in the media while having to survive under hostile right wing national and regional governments. They were also a minority government. The victory was indeed fragile, and so recalling one's own councillor, let alone one's own mayor, would be an unaffordable democratic luxury, cutting off the nose to spite the face. If they did vacate their seat, that would trigger a by-election, jeopardising the infinitesimally small majority of Ahora Madrid plus PSOE. This reveals an immense problem for the entire project of radically democratising representative democracy, at least in the short to medium term. How many political victories are not fragile, especially for the left or the grassroots? Here we see, in part, the brutal temporal discipline of what Negri called 'time-as-measure', in which the strict urgencies of the electoral and news cycles crowd out capacity for the long, slow processes of democratic deliberation and accountability, just as they also subdue through quantisation the unpredictable accelerative dynamics of revolt and mobilisation. That is, electoral time-as-measure denies the radical-democratic necessity of what in Chapter 2 we called autonomous and constitutive temporalities, massively impeding the potential of radical democratic strategy in a multitude of ways.

The difficulties encountered by Ganemos and Ahora Madrid reflect, first, perfectly mundane and contingent factors, such as a lack of time to fully develop such a radically innovative project, the timing of Podemos' peak of popularity that conditioned the confluence, the wildcard that was Carmena's politics and personality, the expectation of entering opposition being confounded by

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<sup>959</sup> Ganemos Madrid 23 July 2014a.

surprise victory, etc. But they also reflect the theoretical difficulties we encountered in our study of Negri. Primarily, the lack of a theory of radically democratic constituted power, and the limitations of Hardt and Negri's theorisation of multitudinous leadership in *Assembly*. In fact, in the narrative of Ganemos and Ahora Madrid, the former issue is subsumed under the latter. As described by participants, even before the formation of Ahora Madrid, Ganemos' leaderless assembly processes were somewhat susceptible to the classic problem of the tyranny of structurelessness, in which the lack of formalisation of leadership functions through the democratic implementation of constituted power leads to much more nefarious forms of informal leadership, subterranean power relations that are in many ways less democratic than transparently constituted, constitutionally malleable relations of verticality. Things managed to proceed largely due to trust (though an increasingly scarce resource as time went on), and the cohesiveness of the shared Ganemos vision. The municipal scale may hold advantages over the national scale when it comes to experimenting with radical democracy, but it is clearly too large a scale for municipal democracy to rely forever on trust and a shared vision; and indeed those bonds began to disintegrate from the negotiations with Podemos onwards. Democratic politics must, sooner rather than later, find a way to be trustless – the fundamental constitutional challenge.

Abstracting from vague conceptions of 'prefigurative politics' to construct a set of three concrete prefigurative *functions* (as well as a categorisation of distinct *types*) allows the thesis to address the prefigurative constitutionality found in the organisation of Podemos' 'digital movement-party' structures. The *temporal-ontological* prefigurative function specifically served two primary purposes. For the tradition of 'prefigurative politics' it militates against presentism by enforcing the need for a conception of the temporal-ontological relationship between present and future, i.e. the need for prefigurative *strategy*. For left populism, it problematises its tendentially instrumentalist prefigurative constitutionality, which serves to prefigure not radical democracy but hierarchy, centralisation and homogeneity. The *counter-hegemonic* prefigurative function began the process that culminated in Chapter 4: drawing the concepts of prefiguration and hegemony ever closer towards a relationship of complementarity, and at least partial tautology. This process emerged from and was facilitated by our critique of Negri and Laclau, a return to the early Gramsci of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, and a tentative gesture forwards by way of Williams' complex rethinking of the concept of hegemony. The *constituent* prefigurative function, referring to the prefigurative construction of alternative institutions and democratic processes, served to define the key element of strategies for radical democracy that is lacking in both Podemos' left populism and in presentist, anti-institutional, anti-power forms of prefigurative politics. Ultimately, strategic constituent prefiguration becomes virtually synonymous with the strategy of dual power, with all the difficulties that brings.

Applying the prefigurative-constitutional lens to Podemos, we found a complex mixture of instrumentalism and prefiguration. Podemos' internal democracy is in many respects instrumentally subordinated to its symbolic, communicative counter-hegemonic strategy; and not necessarily without good reason. Both Chapters 2 and 4 made clear how the post-15M malaise demanded strategic novelty in order to remobilise the movements. The municipalist wager was one such attempt; Podemos' populist wager was another, hinging especially on Errejón's reading of Laclau that prioritised the power of a mediatic hyperleadership to revitalise and cohere the activist base while simultaneously refining the popular subjectivation initiated by 15M. A keen solution to the problem, but not without its contradictions: the very remobilisation inspired by Podemos' mediatic hyperleadership eventually fell victim to the same critique of hyperleadership that Monedero had expressed, regarding Hugo Chavez, back in 2009: that it 'deactivates popular participation by creating an over-reliance on the heroic abilities of leadership'.<sup>960</sup> The temporal-ontological prefigurative function – the claims of path dependency and the anarchist critique of instrumentalism – suggest that this subordination of internal party democracy to the dictates of mediatic hyperleadership poses a significant problem for populist roads to radical democracy that do not seek to dilute the power of leadership by distributing it more widely. This point is further underlined by the fact that Podemos has constituted an intensely radical form of becoming in its Jeffersonian principle of constitutional change, and yet this has not facilitated the expression of constituent power or absolute democracy, as its potential for radical innovation has been entirely subsumed under the logic of hyperleadership. The prefiguration of the people through the populist framing of Podemos' own Citizen Assembly highlights a form of intermediary prefiguration that has been more successful, at least on its own terms; but the ever vanishing space for constituent prefiguration poses a severe limitation on purely populist strategies for radical democracy.

If Ahora Madrid's constitutionality prefigured anything, it was its own demise. However, in seeking to explain, both practically and theoretically, that 'sad ... difficult day' after the election,<sup>961</sup> leadership emerges as a third fundamental concept of the thesis. Beyond its explanatory function, leadership constructs the ground on which prefiguration and hegemony, Negri and Laclau, Ganemos and Podemos all most productively intersect. The analysis of leadership accentuates the need for a more prefigurative model of populism, a more counter-hegemonic form of prefigurative politics, and a more democratic model of leadership itself that further refines the balance between emergent collective intelligence, the constitutional distribution of verticality, and the power of the empty signifier. Furthermore, however, the theoretical development of the political need for 'leadership

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<sup>960</sup> Ciudad CCS 2011.

<sup>961</sup> José Haro interview 10 July 2018.

without a leader' leads to the discovery of prefiguration and hegemony's complementarity and, especially via Williams' theory of complex hegemony, their partial relationship of tautology. The route forward seems to demand a unified theory of prefiguration and hegemony, but the apparent complementarity of Negri and Laclau can only take us so far. Williams' work on complex hegemony is an extremely promising basis for such a theory, in its implicitly prefigurative and more horizontal understanding of the distributed emergence of strategy, hegemony, and by implication leadership. The promise of Ahora Madrid as new model of prefigurative populism ultimately requires for its realisation a move beyond either prefigurative strategies of pure constituent power or populist strategies subordinated entirely to hyperleadership, beyond either Negri or Laclau and beyond even their complementarity. Their critical application to the case study of Ahora Madrid, its genealogy and its constituent parts, however, serves to not only establish prefigurative constitutionality as a productive mode of analysis, but also to signpost its way forward, to further research on democratic leadership, the deeper relationships between prefiguration and hegemony, and further lessons for constitutional theory from diverse fields such as complexity theory, systems theory, cybernetics or Guattari's conception of transversality as constitutional principle.

Ahora Madrid may not quite have fulfilled the promise of a fully agonistic construction of a novel prefigurative populism, but it produced a more participatory municipal government than Madrid had ever seen. By succeeding in 'taking the city' – and not just any city, but the capital of Spain – it played a vital role in the dynamisation of what is now a vibrant global municipalist movement. One example, discussed in Chapter 4, is Brazil's Bancada Ativista. They took great inspiration and motivation from the successes of municipalism in Spain in 2015. Now the Spanish movements and the electoral expressions of the *asalto institucional* are in a period of retrenchment, but the global municipalist movement they inspired is developing its own novel solutions to the same problems faced in Spain, such as the problem of hyperleadership and the potential solution of collective candidacies. Clearly the 2019 electoral defeats of municipalists in Spain do not mean that municipalism is dead. Municipalism is just getting started.

## 6 Appendices

### 6.1 Glossary of People and Groups

#### 6.1.1 Participants

Jesús Montero: General Secretary of Podemos Madrid during formation of Ahora Madrid, and one of Podemos Madrid's negotiators.

José Haro: advisor to Ahora Madrid city councillor Javier Barbero; active in Ganemos pre-Ahora Madrid.

Guillermo Zapata: Ahora Madrid city councillor; stood on Más Madrid primary list; activist in Ganemos and later formed Madrid129.

Jorge García Castaño: Ahora Madrid city councillor; member of Podemos, and later the 2019 Más Madrid electoral platform.

Miguel Arana Catania: Participation Project Director in Madrid City Council; early Podemos collaborator; seen as an independent.

José Enrique García Blanco: Ganemos activist; member of Izquierda Unida Madrid.

Alejandra de Diego Baciero: Ganemos activist; supported the Más Madrid primary list; now associated with Madrid129.

Participant 1: Ganemos activist; supported the Más Madrid primary list; now loosely associated with Madrid129, but ceased active engagement with Ahora Madrid after the election.

Participant 2: Ahora Madrid city councillor.

Participant 3: One of Ganemos' negotiators in the formation of Ahora Madrid.

Participant 4: Ganemos activist; member of the Ganemos *Coordinadora*; stood on the Toma Madrid primary list.

Participant 5: Worked in the mayor's office of Madrid City Council with Manuela Carmena.

Participant 6: Advisor to one of Madrid City Council's departments; activist in Ganemos and later Madrid129.

Participant 7: Advisor in Madrid City Council; Ganemos activist who stood on the Madrid en Movimiento primary list.

Participant 8: Member of Podemos Madrid's first Citizen Council; with a role in the City Council.

Participant 9: Advisor in Madrid City Council; Ganemos activist, associated with the Madrid en Movimiento primary list.

Participant 10: One of Podemos' negotiators in the formation of Ahora Madrid.

Participant 11: Ganemos activist and member of Equo.

### 6.1.2 Other Individuals

Rommy Arce: Ahora Madrid City Councillor, stood on the Madrid en Movimiento primary list.

Manuela Carmena: Ahora Madrid mayoral candidate; stood on the Más Madrid primary list; Mayor of Madrid 2015-2019; contested 2019 municipal elections with new electoral platform, also called Más Madrid.

Pablo Carmona: Ahora Madrid City Councillor, stood on the Madrid en Movimiento primary list.

Ada Colau: Mayor of Barcelona, with municipalist citizen platform Barcelona en Comú.

Montserrat Galcerán: Ahora Madrid City Councillor, stood on the Madrid en Movimiento primary list.

Íñigo Errejón: Podemos' primary strategist until around 2017, when a rift formed between Errejón and Iglesias; now leader of new party Más País.

Pablo Iglesias: General Secretary of Podemos from inception until May 2021.

Rita Maestre: Ahora Madrid City Councillor, member of Podemos and then Carmena's Más Madrid electoral platform in 2019. Maestre was in charge of the official election campaign team in 2015.

Juan Carlos Monedero: Founding member of Podemos' inner circle of Complutense University academics. Monedero resigned from his official roles in Podemos on 30 April 2015, saying that Podemos had already ventured too far from its *15Mayista* roots.

Emmanuel Rodríguez: Ganemos activist and theorist associated with Traficantes de Sueños and the Madrid en Movimiento primary list. One of the most explicitly Negrian figures associated with Ahora Madrid.

### 6.1.3 Groups

Acampadasol: the 15M encampment in Puerta del Sol, Madrid.

Ahora Madrid: 'instrumental party' (the legal form) created as a product of negotiations between Ganemos Madrid and Podemos Madrid to contest the 2015 municipal elections.

Alternativas desde Abajo (AdA): important group in fostering debates around the *asalto institucional* in Spain from 2013. Closely associated with Anticapitalistas.

Anticapitalistas: Trotskyist party, more *asambleario* and movementist than IU, broadly speaking. Split from IU in 1995 as Espacio Alternativo. Became Izquierda Anticapitalista in 2009, and Anticapitalistas in 2014. Founding component of Podemos, but formally withdrew from Podemos in 2020.

A por Ellos: Ahora Madrid primary list associated with Izquierda Unida Madrid.

Barcelona en Comú (BComú): Barcelona's municipalist platform, Bcomú has governed Barcelona since 2015 and is the heart of the international municipalist movement, via its highly active international working group.

Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP): anticapitalist, *asambleario* Catalan independence party. First stood in local Catalan elections in 2003. An important influence on the emergence of new municipalism 2013-2014.

Centro Social Seco: *asambleario* social centre in Madrid. Research participants José Haro and P10 were at one point associated with Seco.

Ciudadanos: Spanish centre-right liberal party that rose drastically in popularity from around 2015, once Podemos had begun to disrupt the old party duopoly of PP and PSOE.

Claro que Podemos: also known as 'team Pablo Iglesias' in Podemos' first National Citizen Assembly.

enRed: important group in fostering debates around the *asalto institucional* in Spain from 2013. More autonomist, broadly speaking, than AdA.

Errejonistas: Podemos members who supported Íñigo Errejón once he came into conflict with Iglesias.

Ganemos Madrid (Ganemos): the original municipalist platform in Madrid, formed in 2014 out of the Municipalia assemblies.

Guanyem Barcelona: original name of BComú.

Izquierda Unida: 'United Left', the Spanish traditional party of the old left. The PCE plays a particularly important role.



Izquierda Unida Comunidad de Madrid: Madrid regional branch of IU, embroiled in the *tarjetas black* scandal and then a great deal of drama around Ahora Madrid. Discussed in Chapter 4.1.1.

Izquierda Unida Madrid: Madrid municipal Branch of IU.

Madrid129: a group of Madrid municipalists that splintered from Ganemos in 2016.

Madrid en Movimiento: Ahora Madrid primary list associated with, inter alia, the Traficantes milieu.

Madrid Incluye: Ahora Madrid primary list associated with the small political party Por Un Mundo Más Justo.

Manuelistas: those in Ahora Madrid and Madrid City Council (2015-19) most closely associated with Manuela Carmena herself, forming a new *familia* in Ahora Madrid that had not been foreseen or accounted for before the election.

Más Madrid (primary list): Ahora Madrid primary list containing a mixture of Podemos and Ganemos members.

Más Madrid (party): Carmena's electoral platform in 2019, leading to Errejón leaving Podemos to form a regional Más Madrid platform, and later the national party Más País.

Más País: Íñigo Errejón's current party, formed in September 2019.

Municipalia: a sequence of assemblies in Madrid during 2014 that led to the formation of Ganemos Madrid.

Pablistas: Podemos members seen as supporters of Pablo Iglesias.

Partido Comunista de España (PCE): Communist Party of Spain, key player in IU.

Partido Popular (PP): Spain's established centre-right party.

Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE): Spain's established centre-left party.

Partido X: first electoral expression of 15M, strongly influenced by technopolitics.

Patio Maravillas: *asambleario* Madrid social centre. Early political home for research participant Guillermo Zapata.

Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH): Platform for People Affected by Mortgages. Highly successful Spanish housing movement, saw a great upsurge of activity and support following 15M. The rejection of the PAH's proposed ILP was an important catalyst for the *asalto institucional*.

Podemos: national left-populist party led, until May 2021, by Pablo Iglesias.

Podemos Madrid: municipal branch of Podemos.

Podemos Comunidad de Madrid: regional branch of Podemos.

Podremos Madrid: Ahora Madrid primary list, associated with Podemos.

Suma: IU's failed attempt to mobilise the spirit of 15M as a new electoral initiative in 2012.

Sumando Podemos: the name used by Anticapitalistas when presenting their Organisation Document to Podemos' first National Citizen Assembly.

Toma Madrid: Ahora Madrid primary list.

Traficantes de Sueños (Trafis/Traficantes): radical publisher and bookshop in Madrid, particularly associated with autonomist politics, including Emmanuel Rodríguez.

Unidas Podemos: electoral coalition formed by Podemos and IU in March 2019, currently junior partner in coalition with PSOE.

#### 6.1.4 Spanish Terms

Some concepts are referred to in Spanish, to emphasise local particularities whose connotation would be lost in translation. Below they are listed and either defined or the location of their definition in the thesis indicated.

*Asalto institucional*: 'storming of the institutions', Spanish term used to refer specifically to the electoral debates that emerged from 15M from ~2012, and collectively to the electoral projects that emerged from those debates (Partido X, Podemos, municipalism, etc).

*Asamblearismo*: 'assemblyism', see footnote 11 for detailed discussion.

*Asambleario*: 'assembly-based', see footnote 11 for detailed discussion.

*Casta*: 'the caste' or 'the establishment', a crucial weapon in Podemos' discursive arsenal for dichotomising the political space in its early years.

*Código Ético*: Ahora Madrid's 'code of ethics' that electoral candidates and members of its internal organs were expected to comply with.

*Coordinadora*: 'coordinator', Ganemos' executive coordinating committee.

*Decide Madrid*: 'Madrid Decides', Madrid City Council's participatory budgeting platform under Ahora Madrid.

*Desborde*: ‘overflow’, used to refer to the logics of overflow and confluence that characterised the more spontaneous, citizen-led aspects of Ahora Madrid’s 2015 municipal election campaign (*la campaña de desborde*).

*Familia*: ‘family’, the preferred euphemism for ‘faction’ among most activists in Madrid.

*Foros Locales*: ‘local forums’, part of Madrid City Council’s implementation of participatory democracy under Ahora Madrid.

*Grupo Municipal*: the term *Grupos Políticos* (political groups, plural) is used officially to designate the councillors of Madrid city council, as grouped by party affiliation. *Grupo Municipal* (municipal group, singular) is used officially to refer to one of those groups (*grupo municipal Ahora Madrid*, *grupo municipal Partido Popular*, etc). Where *Grupo Municipal* appears in the thesis, it refers specifically to the *Grupo Municipal Ahora Madrid*.

*Grupos Mixtos*: ‘mixed groups’ of Podemos and Ganemos members within Ahora Madrid.

*Grupos Técnicos*: policy development groups within Ahora Madrid (see Chapter 4.1.2).

*Junta de Gobierno*: Madrid city council’s ‘government committee’, an executive organ appointed by the mayor. Appointees may be elected councillors or unelected figures; the number of members cannot exceed one third of the total number of Madrid city councillors.

*La nueva política*: ‘the new politics’, a term widely used in Spain from ~2014 to refer to the electoral expressions of the *asalto institucional*.

*Mesa de Coordinación*: ‘coordination committee’, Ahora Madrid’s executive coordinating committee; *Mesa* for short.

*Mesas Distritales*: like Ahora Madrid’s *Mesa de Coordinación* but at the district level. Madrid is administratively divided into 21 districts, which are further subdivided into *barrios* (neighbourhoods).

*Oficinas de Derechos Sociales*: ‘Offices of Social Rights’, part of Spain’s modern social syndicalism movement. See Chapter 2.2.2.

Vistalegre I: Podemos’ first National Citizen Assembly, held at the end of 2014 with a physical assembly at Palacio Vistalegre, Madrid.

Vistalegre II: Podemos’ second National Citizen Assembly, held in 2017, with a physical assembly at Palacio Vistalegre, Madrid.

## 6.2 Abbreviations

Note: list of abbreviations best used (where relevant) in conjunction with the glossary of groups (Appendix 6.1.3).

AdA: Alternativas desde Abajo.

Anticapis: Anticapitalistas.

BComú: Barcelona en Comú.

CLT: Complexity Leadership Theory.

CNT: Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.

CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular.

CWG: Ganemos' Candidatures Working Group (*Grupo de Trabajo Candidaturas*).

H&SS: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985].

GTM: Grounded Theory Method.

IA: Izquierda Anticapitalista, former name of Anticapitalistas.

ILP: Iniciativa Legislativa Popular (Popular Legislative Initiative).

IU: Izquierda Unida.

IUCM: Izquierda Unida Comunidad de Madrid.

IUM: Izquierda Unida Madrid.

IWMA: International Workingmen's Association.

IWW: International Workers of the World.

LGM: Movimiento de Liberación Gráfica de Madrid (Madrid Graphic Liberation Movement).

M129: Madrid129.

MMWG: Ganemos' Municipalist Movement Working Group (*Grupo de Trabajo Movimiento Municipalista*).

ODS: Oficinas de Derechos Sociales.

PAH: Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca.

PCE: Partido Comunista de España.

PP: Partido Popular

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español

SANE: National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

SDS: Students for a Democratic Society.

SNCC: Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

TMWG: Ganemos' Tools and Methodology Working Group (*Grupo de Trabajo Herramientas y Metodologías*).

Trafis/Traficantes: Traficantes de Sueños.

WSP: Women Strike for Peace.

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