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Article

## Trans\* Identities and Politics: Repertoires of Action, Political Cleavages, and Emerging Coalitions

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### Abstract

The current political landscape provides collective actors with new strategies to articulate individual interests, hardships, identities, critiques, and solutions, engage with social mobilisation's conflictual demands, and move towards sustainable practices of collective actions. This article will focus on theoretical challenges surrounding the political action and organization of feminist and trans\* identities in order to provide situated knowledge about the dynamics of the transfeminist activism in the Madrilénian geopolitical context. Throughout LGBT\*Q+ activists' integrated forms of doing politics along different axes of oppression (e.g., class, migration, racialisation, disability, ethnicity, gender diversity), new visibility regimes are trying to expand the repertoires of action by nurturing emerging coalitions and agencies among a variety of hybrid political subjects. This article thus argues that trans\* politics, through nonbinary activism and a new intersectional feminist praxis, may expand the political subject of feminism and our understanding of identity politics and embodied action.

### Keywords

activism; disability; intersectionality; social mobilisation; Spain; transfeminism

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Women's and gender studies acknowledge that the range of social hierarchies and power differentials renders into multiple forms of discrimination, both in the realm of gender and throughout different axes of personal identity. For much of the history of feminist thought about the nature of the self, the personal and intimate concerns of women's lives have been brought to the public stage in order to demonstrate the sex and gender bias in discriminatory practices. Critical feminism has promised to rethink many recent key topics, such as, for example, the relevance of gender to questioning the relationship between the natural and the social, or about the nature of the self.

The understanding of human diversity through the systematic representation of bodily differences interpenetrates different domains of feminist theory. The thorny issue of essentialism (the 'female body') present in dominant feminist epistemology plays a structural role in identitarian mobilization, which relates body politics to the

body's framing in unequal societies. Feminist theorists have engaged in the social and political discussion of the body. Interrogating understandings of the biological and the social body, and the body's role in social and political thought, they brought to light a more intelligible notion of embodiment. In this sense, the lived experience of the body contributes both to the reasoning of subjective experiences of embodiment and the creation of new horizons for resistance, recognizing the constituting entanglement between social attitudes and representational practices in the particularities of embodiment, and the systematics of "injustice and discrimination in the materiality of the world" (Garland-Thomson, 2011, p. 593). Feminist perspectives and other contemporary social-justice movements question varieties of bodily experiences, and their varying visibility. The continuum of bodily experiences, visibility, and awareness results in a continuum of visibility regimes.

The feminist contributions to the theoretical analysis of the body go beyond the dialectic reflection of

models of gendered positionality: They embrace the greater range of possibilities through which different forms of recognition can be placed inside the realm of 'doing politics.' Positionality and belonging are strategically pointed out as means to raise awareness of vulnerabilities, strengthening language against marginalization. As Barad (2011) notes: "Feminist and poststructuralist theorists have emphasized that matters of politics, ethics, and social justice are also at stake in understanding the nature of constitutive exclusions" (p. 2). There are many differences within this continuum of 'feminist perspectives,' but some of them retain the concern with the social constructions inhabiting body utterances into the idea of 'extraordinary bodies,' that is, bodies that are not settled in a prescriptive norm and that are usually socially subjected to discrimination and oppression.

This article emerges from the interpersonal and subjective experiences of feminist, trans\*, and/or non-binary people with or without a disability, and intends to improve our understanding of how strategic self-representation can nurture politically oriented action through the progressive inclusion of different subjects into potential agency. The article results from my analysis of the lived-experience narratives of the above-mentioned subjects based on in-depth interviews. The core of my analysis is to offer a framework that embraces individuals' sense of self as a creative basis for facilitating widespread new forms of doing politics. To do so, I locate the particular political context of (trans\*)feminist situated knowledge within the territories of collective struggles along with the dynamics of belonging and exclusion/inclusion brought in a Madrilénian case study. I thus aim to catch possible paths for integrating trans\* and queer activism and the feminist agenda, and thus strengthen prefigurative forms of identity by showing how dissent about bodily identity can not only provide multiple and relational possibilities for embodied agency, but also mobilise intersubjective solidarity among marginalised communities and/or individuals.

## 2. Feminist Politics and Repertoires for Action

Large-scale political feminist movements, fostered by claims of oppressed social groups, use identity to highlight the politics of power at play in a gendered population, reclaiming the sense of self and community through the collective struggle against vulnerability, marginalization, and stigmatization. When it comes to queer and non-binary feminist coalitions, the identity politics that generated a place for contestation within the feminist agenda are forced to scrutinize not only what identity means but also the prospects of feminist practices and the discretionary locus of these new political subjects of feminism. In other words, for the political world of feminist ideals, queer and non-binary politics state the performative illocutionary acts which may provide collective literacy and territory for the new political subjects.

The sheer range of political actors that recognize themselves as potential agents of feminist struggles (and thus also claim the authoritative agency to construct a 'feminist agenda') already indicates how challenging this is, especially when we consider the intersecting gendered social movements that rely upon actors who may understand themselves very differently (from the essentialist and biological conflation of gender identities, to the denial of situated, fixed gender binaries). Through new 'de-genderization' strategies for social-justice claims in these social movements, new political subjects in the feminist arena are trying to find a balance between eroding of gender categories and binaries and the feminist concerns about the injustices and discrimination that affect particular—and gendered—social groups.

What seems to be in place is a hermeneutics searching for consensus between (a) the historical and germinal statements of identity-focused (and biased regarding gender-binaries) social movements and politics, (b) the new forms of doing politics along with the queer enactment of gender, and (c) the promises of social struggles and coalition building for a non-binary and non-essentialist worldview (which would induce potential alliances against shared social injustices).

We may argue that such a hermeneutics is still based on political identity and established conjectures of the self. Yet these highly diversified subjects organized under the political umbrella of feminism are redefining the matrix through which one can see oneself simultaneously as a political adherent to the 'feminist agenda' and a potential subject for new alliances under the rubric of 'feminist agency.' This re-scripting of feminist agency embraces a new set of conditions for a more inclusive feminism, avoiding undesirable occlusions within social movements or among collective actors who wish to act and be recognized as an active member of 'feminist community.'

A feminist agency that is as inclusive as possible (a matrix in which something new grows or develops) is rooted in both the philosophical history of feminism and current transgender and queer theories and epistemologies, both the bodily existence and the social constructs of sexed differences. This dramatic re-scripting of the feminist agenda and agency has highlighted the central, epistemic relationship between corporeality, subjectivity, and identity markers in the understanding of social injustices, inequalities and discrimination—including inside the arena of activism.

This relationship has been conceptualized in an active conversation between feminist theorists and activists at the intersections of different bodies of knowledge (e.g., critical race theorists, gender diversity and transgender theories, disability activism, crip theory) to pair the evocative politics and theory of gender oppression with practices of resistance. The result has been a powerful relational debate about embodiment and the narratives of lived experience as sources to construct feminist practices that are as multiple as the di-

verse bodies inhabiting society. It is clear that the social and the subjective experience of embodiment constitute different models to acknowledge the sense of our body and the prominence of the body as a living source of vulnerability.

### 3. The Multidimensional Feminist Project in the Madrilenian Context

The Madrilenian context provides a potential scenario to think about the many challenges of committing feminist movements to an intersectional approach which requires new structures for the feminist project. From the vicinity associations (*asociaciones vecinales*) of the 1970s, the city's rise in squatters since the early 1980s, to the remarkable occupy culture (*okupación*) of the 1990s, Madrid's counter-cultures carried out political, cultural, and social activities (*centros sociales okupados y autogestionados*, squatted and self-managed social centers) that represent embryonic versions of the political praxis which flourished in 2011's intense spread of participatory democracy in the public sphere. The 2011 Spanish occupy movement (called 15-M) aimed to practise a prefigurative politics, which led to the creation of thematic assemblies (and also an assembly methodology), not only in public space (as the emblematic *Puerta del Sol square*), but also squatted buildings, public buildings, or municipal properties run by a neighbourhood association.

The Madrilenian occupation of squares involved a horizontal organization and was an experimental form of protest, criticizing the functioning of representative democracy and calling for a diverse form of citizen participation in formulating social and economic policies. The movement's discourse on democracy resonated "with (more traditional) participatory visions, but also with new deliberative conceptions that underline the importance of creating multiple public spaces, egalitarian but plural" (Della Porta, 2012, p. 37), calling for a new collective solidarity and conversation among emerging identities.

The interaction between different notions around the body and sexualities were put forward in different directions along with the diversity of social mobilization. For example, in 2011's 15-M movement, disability politics met with a kind reception, bringing to the stage new understandings of disability-related issues. The committees of functional diversity (*comisiones de diversidad funcional*) created in 15-M encampments (*las acampadas*) on the square also emphasized the centrality of notions such as precarity, the uses of bodies as political instruments towards consensus among activists and participants, and the conviction that vulnerability is universal and transversal (Arenas & Pié Balaguer, 2014). Another example of how different social struggles can interact can be found "by looking at specific, situated feminist practices, such as the marches and events held for the International Women's Day on March 8th and the

International Day of Action for Trans Depathologization, known as 'Trans October'" (Platero & Ortega-Arjonilla, 2016, p. 59). The authors also pay attention to the fact that:

Spanish transfeminism is not simply about feminism learning more about transgenderism. Nor is it only a matter of concern for trans women, so that they incorporate feminism in their personal and political practices. It has more to do with a paradigm shift, so that feminism can go beyond "attending the demands of those affected by the gender system [which would be a direct allusion to women and sexual and gender minorities] to address itself to combating the binary gender system itself," as Cristina Garaizabal stated. (p. 60)

Additionally, austerity politics and the asymmetrical effects of the economic crisis shaped new forms of activism and new solidarities. 'Minorities' activism' and their intersectional coalition and mobilization meanwhile provided new interpretations of a range of issues, from the crisis of representation and the effects of austerity measures to the acknowledgement of how different subjects are differently deprived of social and political existence. Bodies afflicted by precarity, subjected to deprivation and debilitation, and considered without agency, can now claim their existence at the forefront of politics (Butler, 2015).

By following this path, activists are working on an intersectional coalition in the fight against multiplying oppressions, drawing attention to some not-yet-fully visible intersectional struggles in the face of economic and ontological crisis. In coalition building, the variety of personal identities and conflicts involved confers additional complexity to a project that tries to address theoretical and normative concerns within feminist epistemologies (and by consequence, deconstructing the subject of feminism, the gender dichotomy and binaries, and the category of women itself). To instigate intersectional features and synergy in new structures for feminist social movements requires the ethical dimensioning of a broader (and relational) political community on the grounds of plurality and intersectionality.

This is not a simple task, since the theorisation of feminism has long held differences as central to the cause's political project (Lépinard, 2020, p. 27). In addition, the challenges of embedding feminist movements across intersectional synergies require facing the lineages, boundaries, and limits of emancipatory identity and post-identity movements, as they depict social struggles through the dynamics of political beliefs and exclusion/inclusion. We need to acknowledge that social movements committed to fight for equality and against oppression may ignore intersectionality, deny the dynamics among inequalities, and reinforce separatist attitudes based on exclusive identities (Cruells López & García, 2014) or disguised under umbrella identitarian loci. My primary objective in focusing on this debate is to

grasp how some self-identified trans and non-binary feminist activists are developing—amidst a restructuring process of collective mobilisation and amidst the multitude of representation claims—actual claims to more closely represent their constituency and better match the intersections between different political subjectivities and their moral and ethical dispositions.

It is here worth noting the delicate relationship between the feminist and the transgender-rights movement in Spain. The history of these movements—and the concrete circumstances that have connected trans women to feminist activists—has roots in different channels of knowledge production among community-based activists. The many comprehensive discourses operating trans and feminist alliances (or their co-existence) indicate their historically conflictive relationship in Spain. Pérez Navarro (2019) calls attention to way that spatial or territorial politics based on different identitarian frames (p. 160) can produce border conflicts within coalition building, leading to separatism (Navarro, 2019, p. 164). Significant Spanish events, such as national conferences or local marches, and specific collectives and feminist networks (whether by autonomous agents or organised feminist groups) were thus not only loci for the emergence of activist leadership but also the territory for alliance contestation beneath the banner (the agenda) of feminism. The recent history of the relationship between trans activism and feminist thought in Spain can be traced not exclusively but significantly through the impact that feminist fora had on the discussion of trans\* rights and the inclusion of trans\* identity-related issues in the public arena (especially through the presence of lesbian feminists within the movement; Platero & Ortega-Arjonilla, 2016). And one of the most prominent legacies of this is that there is not only “an active presence of trans\* women and trans\* issues in Spanish feminism, but there is also a widespread presence of ‘trans-feminism,’ which needs to be explained in terms of its vernacular nuances, processes, and alliances” (Platero & Ortega-Arjonilla, 2016, p. 47).

As for the recent history of lesbians, gays, and transgender struggles that emerged from the long Francoist dictatorship, the participation of gender non-conforming people was not untroubled. Lesbian, gays, and trans\* activists’ first steps during the transition towards democracy, from clandestine subjectivities to visible bodies occupying the public space of the streets, were marked by the gay movement’s reluctance to accept transgender people as a constituency of the ‘sexual-minorities visibility’ narratives for recognition. As Platero (2011) reminds us, the participation of transvestites in the first rally for sexual liberation in Barcelona (1977) was criticized both “by organizers, who saw in them a threat to their struggle for normalization” (p. 597) and “by a society that almost unanimously favoured the punishment of homosexuality” (p. 598). To face their challenges within the movement—and to establish new strategies to get their demands and needs recognized in the public

arena—transvestites, transgender people, and organizations worked to create public discourses and a collective identity that could project not only more inventive and pluralistic imagery about trans people in society, but also a comprehensive staging of their demands regarding justice, equality, and visibility in the political debate.

This is clear evidence of the ongoing battle that ‘disenfranchised citizens’ (Platero & Ortega-Arjonilla, 2016) have faced when it comes to building coalitions with other collectives, or when other sexual minorities (such as non-binary subjects) look for support in the collectives they believe to be allies in the struggle against discrimination.

The convergence between the feminist agenda and the Madrilenian agenda of the trans movement in the 1970s and 1980s, when its organization and institutionalization began, is still referenced today by trans\*feminist activists in debates on the regulation, legalization, and unionization of sex work—which shows how the genealogy of trans movements has been closely related to the feminist agenda of sexual rights. In this alliance between different actors advocating for sexual rights, activists have found new coalition strategies (for example, between trans\*feminist activists, sex-worker activists, and disabled activists).

Prefigurative forms of identity relate to the forms of political subjectivity—the social or interpersonal relationship which “will make possible the passage from the subject to the actor” (Wieviorka, 2012, p. 6)—in the realm of cultural and social mobilisations and alliances. Moreover, in the context of our discussion, prefiguration defines an advocacy effort to surpass the collective imaginaries that encompass inequality and injustice through regimes of normalcy. An example of such a strategy is replacing the term ‘disabled’ with ‘functionally diverse’ people employed by independent-living activists in Spain and beyond.

Independent-living and disability-rights activists in Spain stress the visibility of disabled people as sexual and autonomous subjects, politicizing functional diversity through the sexualisation of the people with disabilities. In other words, people with a disability are now claiming what Siebers (2012) calls “a sexual culture based on different conceptions of the erotic body, new sexual temporalities, and a variety of gender and sexed identities” (p. 47). By displaying notions such as oppression and social justice around the body, the sexualities and the many possible links between the discourses about ‘minority populations’ and ‘sexual minorities,’ conversation may flow in different directions: From the institutional disability-rights agenda—e.g., accessibility and welfare inclusiveness—to one where intimacy and sexual rights become part of a non-normative culture of resistance beyond the heterosexual matrix (García-Santesmases Fernández, Vergés Bosch, & Samaranch, 2017) along with the politicization of narratives of deviance (Edwards, 2015; Love, 2015).

This transformative politics regarding people with disabilities in Spain is rooted in feminist cultures which re-

sisted sexual repression and the legal and institutional apparatus constraining intimacy and sexual rights. The LGBTTIQA+ struggles likewise underline the significance of this politics to contemporary intersectional feminist cultures. Feminist critiques of the social control of sexual subjectivities are thus highly relevant to activists attempting alliances between different forms of political agency. Consolidating and co-developing a network with a continued and active engagement of people who live embodied situations of discrimination and violence (due to their gender, class, or race, for instance) nurtures the emotional and material negotiation between different subjects living in different social and spatial reaches of society. Feminist researchers in the field of disability studies, for example, are aware of epistemic and restrictive systems of power and privileges that enforce hierarchies of bodies and identities (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Hall, 2011; Wendell, 1989, 1996). They are equally conscious of the power systems that normalise specific bodies as having the ‘privileges of normality’ (Baril & Trevenen, 2016; Masson, 2013) and ‘others’ the bodies outside this system of privileges through a regime of oppression and precariousness.

#### **4. Body Politics, Political Subjectivation, and the Feminist Project**

When studied with an intersectional lens, themes central to the study of social movements, particularly the functioning of power through structural disadvantages in the political sphere (Arenas & Pié Balaguer, 2014; Della Porta, 2012) can help redefine our understanding of the representation of conflicting constituencies and interests within a collective identity (Platero, 2011). It is also important to stress the “power differentials in order to maintain a working alliance” (Cole, 2008, p. 444), including the awareness that heterogeneous coalitions bring together heterogeneous constituencies (Saunders, Roth, & Olcese, 2015), prospects of bodily differences, and different power relations in the framing of political agendas and coalitions.

Along with historical feminist views that project gender and sex onto the mind and body dualism, recent political efforts by feminist actors are endorsing the view that incorporating intersectional feminist epistemologies into a project of undoing ontological narratives of self is also meaningful to body-related issues important to the movement. The separatist attitudes of particular feminist constituencies can (and should) be critiqued for more than their attacks on gender fluidity or transitivity, or their narratives that sustain biologically essentialist notions of sex and gender. Following Hines (2017), we can see how the separatist rhetoric and attitudes of trans-exclusionary radical feminism towards other constituencies of feminist struggles that are interpreted as a threat to ‘women’s causes’ can have ignoble and despicable effects on the struggle against marginalization, oppression and violence.

It should also be said that transfeminism does not mean merely accommodating trans people in feminism, nor is it only a political gesture towards trans bodies and identities (trans\* practices of the self). The integration of the terms ‘trans’ and ‘feminism’ is a political effort to incorporate intersectional feminist epistemologies into a project of undoing ontological narratives of the self. Trans-inclusive feminist social movements are imagining the political project of a contemporary feminist praxis that embraces and acknowledges a myriad of situated discourses on minorities that is irreducible to ‘embodied nonnormativity’ or gender identification, but instead crossed with the interlocking inequalities that shape (shared forms of) discrimination. No less important, bodies in dissent point to rethinking normativity “not in relation to a compulsory, uniform standard, but through an expansive relationality among and within individuals, across and within groups” (Wiegman & Wilson as cited in Edwards, 2015, p. 141). Normativity also points to the reframing of the politicisation of narratives of deviance. As Love (2015) notes:

The concept of deviance thrived, but rather than being a descriptive term, it became prescriptive. Queer critics embraced deviance not as an inevitable counterpart to conforming behaviour and an integral aspect of the social world, but rather as a challenge to the stability and coherence of that world. The shift from a descriptive to a prescriptive view of the world might be understood—and indeed has been understood by queer scholars—as a process of politicization. (p. 77)

When we scrutinize feminism as a collective movement, it is important to acknowledge that many actors who are disputing the meaning of ‘feminism’ and its spheres of action believe intersectionality to be a path to address sexism, sexual oppression, and the perpetuating (and intersecting) practices of exploitation and oppression over the body. In these terms, the future of feminism would depend on (and is a tributary of) its intersectional strands—in other words, on recognizing identity-based belongings within the complex accounts of anti-identitarian politics.

The ontological basis that has characterized identity politics from the 1980s to the present day is disquieting. And the divisions and oblivions identitarian mobilisations strategically perform internally have at least two visible effects. First, they prioritize different spheres of social relationships (focusing on and reinforcing one differentiation marker—or certain interacting markers—to the detriment of others) to enhance the public visibilisation of social inequalities and discrimination that target specific subjects. Second, because of this inclusion-exclusion processes, they enable autonomy claims and demands within included and excluded subjects in terms of their social (in)visibility.

The issue is whether subjects’ autonomy (the ways through which they may or may not perceive the re-

production of discrimination and inequalities) can intervene into the logic that produces inclusion and exclusion zones within identitarian politics (the subjects recognized as legitimate constituencies of a cultural and political struggle), and thus offer opportunities for recognition and visibility within, whether in the margins or outside of the identity markers and identitarian mobilisations. Legitimacy is also constituted by the ways oppressed subjects strategically use their marginalised subjectivities towards action in the realm of transformative identity politics.

Given that the construction of political identities (the clusters of identification) can help explore transformative politics or push for policies that reduce inequalities, the ideas of 'difference' and 'identity' creatively interact with one another in the everyday politics of resistance (Brah, 2007; Viveros Vigoya, 2008). This is because those terms do not necessarily respond to homogeneous internalized identity markers among constituencies presumed to be homogeneous. To think intersectionally means assuming that 'difference' and 'identity' are the axes that structure social identities as both (a) a political investment in the face of powerful systems of identity construction and (b) an emotional resource that more or less consciously envisages the subjective lives' experience in a solidary political praxis.

Transfeminist mobilisation often encompasses LGBT\*Q+ people from different contexts of vulnerability and violence, all calling for greater representation within the feminist social movements. This is even more evident amongst trans\* and non-binary people. Trans people manifest their claims within the arena of women's and gender studies, since transgender subjectivities, their gender identities, and/or their gender expressions were subjected to the enforcing and hierarchical violence of a binary normative gender system. And envisioning trans people as subject to gender discrimination meant acknowledging trans people within the binary model explaining gender inequalities and gaps. Trans people joined women's and gender studies by the back door, however since they were placed in a troubled relationship with some subjects who also were acting in the name of feminism. As Enke (2012) reminds us: "Gender and women's studies is one place where transgender studies have managed to make an institutional home...but it is as yet an ambivalent home" (p. 2). Instead, Enke calls for the integration of feminist and transgender theory and practices in a way that "trans might be central, not marginal, to gender and women's studies" (Enke, 2012, p. 2).

Studying the Madrilénian relationship between the trans movement and the feminist agenda of sexual rights in the 1980s and 1990s, especially their debates on prostitution and the support of transgender women sex workers' struggles against the violence perpetrated by society and the state, is enlightening here. Their convergence then is still reflected in today's debates on people's experiences of sexual repression, sexual autonomy, or the

legal and institutional apparatus that constrains intimacy and sexual rights. In both disability and LGBT\*Q+ struggles, it also left its mark on the debate on desire, sex, and the political struggles about people's bodily and sexual agency. As transgender organizations were having trouble publicizing their concerns, some feminist organizations supported their struggle—as the trans movement's genealogy had been so closely related to the feminist agenda of sexual rights in debates like those on prostitution and support for transgender women sex workers' struggles "to defend themselves from police harassment" (Platero, 2011, p. 598). The relevance of feminist political commitments to trans activism is fundamental to understanding the current horizon for trans activism.

We should thus return to the debate about 'embodied nonnormativity' that frames the politicisation of narratives of deviance. Given that the study of sexuality uses 'normal' and 'deviant' categories to explain social life and individual existences (in other words, both categories persist as metaphors of the social order), the political and the methodological antinormativity of queer theory and critical disability studies (and disciplinary affiliations and methods such as 'crip theory') in turn addressed gendered debates on the grounds of sexuality's complex imbrication with other aspects of social and psychological life (e.g., sexual practices, desires, relationships, intimacy, friendships, affect). Antinormative research thus entered an epistemological battle against the standardization and commodification of concepts in social theory, arguing that knowledge should instead be extracted from the situated and lived experiences of 'marginal subjects.' Sexuality should account for the identification of social marginality and the effects of one's life being located inside the 'margin.' This is partly why feminist and queer movements are modifying their political projects to respond to their subject's commitment to intersectionality.

Feminist, trans\*, and/or non-binary people find ways to turn discursive representations of their identities into political statements about the nature of their political action. The politicization of minority discourses and the intersectional understanding of identities claims and demands have experienced gradual changes in Spain as the existing rules of gender and sex binaries were strategically displaced and put in dialogue with the Spanish "legacy of progressive inclusion of peripheral subjects" (Platero, 2011, p. 610).

Through nonbinary activism and a new intersectional feminist praxis, trans\* politics thus helped to expand the political subject of feminism and our understanding of identity politics, sexual politics, and erotic justice. If we think about this discussion in the current terms of disability activism, we can also suggest that an ableist society—framed in its own set of binary distinctions (including gender)—usually obliterates non-binary and/or disabled people as subjects (bearers) of eroticism and desirability. In this sense, strengthening a shared (trans\*feminist) culture of resistance could be ground-

breaking in maintaining a working alliance among sex workers' and sexual-assistance activists' embodied political agendas. It is through such distinctive rebellious politics of emancipation that many subjects may (re)signify their non-normative bodies and self-expression (including the realms of eroticism, and sexual desires and expressions). Here, a situated intersectional praxis that struggles for new politics of visibility can expand the repertoires of action and nurture emerging coalitions and agencies stemming from a variety of hybrid political subjects.

### 5. Political Subjectivation and Cleavages: What Does Disability Politics Have to Do with Critical Feminism?

By questioning the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, disability activists reflected on the intersections that are constitutive of disabled people's bodies and embodiment in an able-bodied society. To ask about these intersections is to inquire about possible solidarities and mutual recognition between all people (whether disabled or not) who experience suffering because their bodies and/or identities do not fit the hegemonic norm. Following Shakespeare and Watson's (2002) statement:

An embodied ontology would argue instead that there is no qualitative difference between disabled people and non-disabled people because we are all impaired. Impairment is not the core component of disability (as the medical model might suggest), it is the inherent nature of humanity. (p. 25)

Overlapping notions like exclusion, disadvantage, and oppression are key to understanding the relation between gender studies and disability studies. Regarding the many possible analytical interfaces, Sherry (2004) reminds us that:

Feminism's strategy of separating sex from gender—biology from social reactions to biology—was a model for the emerging field of disability studies twenty years ago....Disabled people separated impairment—physical or cognitive difference—from disability—the social reactions to that difference. Queer Theory's social constructionist approach towards sexual orientation is also deeply indebted to feminism. (p. 776)

Strategies that seek to align the terms of resistance to those of dissidence make it viable to think of organizational forms of resistance that integrate struggles in the fields of corporeal and identity dissent. Assuming this point of view, incorporating the queer/'cuir' and feminist repertoire of political action into the logic of mobilization (Trujillo, 2016) is fundamental to understanding how dissidence can help create alliances among autonomous collectives. In this context, the queer critique of identitarian politics provided by transfeminism and non-binary activism (particularly with regards to the inclusionary

and exclusionary effects of representation) goes beyond the simple abjection of an ontology of the self and the naturalisation of binary identities. Instead, these spaces mobilize the notion of identity as a form of resistance and as a political strategy questioning whether identity categories are stable, homogenous, natural (Trujillo, 2016), considering our bodies and lives are interlocked in regimes of oppression instead of predicated on stable oppositions.

The challenges of integrative politics go in multiple directions (Highleyman, 2002). The relationship between trans movements and the feminist agenda of sexual rights helped to shape a new public platform for the disability-rights agenda, innovating activists' alliances along transversal struggles. Disability-politics narratives and practices also reach prefigurative forms of identity that are not necessarily (or not always) associated with debilitating conditions. Thus strengthening the notion of embodiment in its "potential, intentional, intersubjective, active and relational dimension" (Esteban, 2004, p. 21) enables disability and transgender studies to forge an association by bringing together embodiment with the idea of bodily dissidence. This is because both are powerfully constructed around bodily-identity dissent. This strategic (im)balance between the body and the mind is key to the struggle for the rights of both trans and disabled people. Thinking about the body in terms of its absence/presence and invisibility/visibility—i.e., from identity to the nonidentity problem through the conflictual emergence of plural (co)existences and new forms of social agency—will significantly contribute to thinking about human embodiment, and to recognizing the body as "integral to human agency" (Shiling, 2012, p. 13; see also Damasio, 1994; Turner, 2008) in such a way that it becomes "impossible to have an adequate theory of human agency without taking into account the reflexive, thoughtful and practical potentialities facilitated by our embodiment" (Shiling, 2012, p. 13).

Attempting to access this kind of transformative 'social drama' that combines and reconciles queer, trans\*, and disability politics—grappling with the agency of both queer radical mobilization (Shepard, 2010) and the disabled people's rights movement—social agency may finally rely on bodies afflicted by different forms of precarity. Subjected to deprivation, debilitation, and oblivion, these previously considered disposable bodies are now claiming new modes of political struggles and plural (co)existence. Accordingly, new forms of visibility and new narratives around disabling experiences emerged, particularly through new synergies of anti-ableist activists in the field (Clare, 2001; McRuer, 2002, 2006). These new voices were unified in the acknowledgement that hegemonic identities are constructed through a continuous process of 'othering' people excluded from the social spectrum of 'normality.'

Since the new priority of the 'disability agenda' was to redefine the terms and the key themes of inequality and injustice, cultural understandings of disability



were directed toward the social phenomenon of excluding and oppressing disabled people, enforcing a normative understanding of the body based on individual biological and bodily aspects (Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation, 1976). In disability studies, this meant a critique of normativity based on deconstructionist and performative theoretical models relying upon identity politics and minority discourses (Davis, 2002). This brings us to what Kafer (2013) calls the relational/political model of disability, “one that builds on social and minority model frameworks but reads them through feminist and queer critiques of identity” (p. 4). In this sense, disabled people and disability literature (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Clare, 2001) have both been calling for people’s responses to the experiences of marginalization and oppression, and thus developed an innovative form of disability politics.

### **6. Bodily Identity Dissent and the Sources for Collective Mobilisation**

Through the experiences of being trans\* and non-binary, or living with a disability, people enter their transgressive bodies in social spaces (Hines, 2010; McRuer, 2002; Oliver, 2009; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002; Wendell, 1996), demanding a cognitive presence in the public consciousness and in the collective imaginary that recognizes and makes visible the many forms of oppression experienced in their daily lives (Barnes, 2016; Sherry, 2004). That is the reason why some authors (Cole, 2008; Kafer, 2013) call for the importance of integrating ableism—that is disability-based oppression—into our understanding of oppression and, through the myriad of lived bodily differences (Clare, 2001), highlighting experiences of multiple oppressions (Butler, 2015; Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016) by spanning the distance between disability politics and trans experience (Clare, 2001).

Self-determination has confronted the imagery of normalcy, strategically asserting insurrectional positionings for people’s subjectivities and lived vulnerabilities. Following the efforts of political actors, ‘crip theory’ (McRuer, 2002, 2006) emerged intersectionally, stemming from disability studies and allied with feminist and queer scholarship and activism (Ahmed, 2006; Garland-Thomson, 2002; McBean, 2016). It thus calls for an intersectional identity membership where the ‘dysfunctional’ becomes a self-reflected form of resistance against normativity (Davis, 1995) and the regulation of bodies and subjectivities.

Trans\*feminist activism’s intersections with disability-rights agendas in Madrid have resulted in enriching outcomes. LGBT\*Q+ people with and without a disability, especially trans\* (binary and non-binary) and genderqueer activists, are experiencing suffering and translating it into a strategic intersectional subjectivity that gathers trans\*, queer, and disabled peoples’ experiences through the strategic use of concepts such as ‘marginalization,’ ‘normalcy,’ and ‘oppression’ as assets

for political activities. This is because contemplating the imageries that encompass one’s relation to normalcy enables new horizons for the collective struggle against social oppression.

Trans\*feminist autonomous collectives engage in new forms of politics by affirming their particular needs, interests, and identities, framing their struggles for recognition, difference, and identity in potentials for emancipation.

The challenge here is in how the exploratory and normative roles of associative movements (the core of political mobilisation) have engaged with new constituencies. Additionally, we need to ask whether and how these multiple encounters play a role in building common grounds within the myriad of personal differences at the heart of collective encounters.

The main challenge faced by individual subjects gathered together for collective action is that positioning a group as a collective actor needs to result from the aggregation of subjects who may be misrecognized as being unreliable social actors in the sense that they do not share the group’s identity-markers.

Political mobilization happens in a social location where political subjects can dispute moral dispositions in a planned and long-lasting effort to achieve a productive way to critically address questions of identity and difference. In the process, one can become intelligible to their counterparts, yet approval to become a member of the community depends on one’s effective capability to not only regulate one’s ideas or moral efforts, but also one’s behaviour, gestures, and not so mutable nature of self. Once that individual recognition faces a desire for an immutable nature of the self, the individual is an object of others’ self-conception, and this carries consequences for a political mobilisation that aims to build alliances intersecting with other autonomous subjects (selves) aiming for mutual recognition through the very notion of ‘difference.’

### **7. Conclusions: The Intimate Labour of Political Solidarity**

Ideas, representations, identities, emotions: everything is negotiated in the public sphere, and all affects are experienced through the body—a contextual body that is always inscribed with multiple identities; a body that encounters resistance employing its embodied registers. If we understand social movements as critical spaces and pedagogic forms of collective action in defence of common interests (Della Porta, 2012), we need to redefine the semantic territories for action (spatial, symbolic, affective, material) into an inclusive activism, a politics of coalitions, and the articulation of bodies and (multiple) identities.

Following this track, we can analyze how personal feelings (emotion and subjectivity) not only underpin identity changes but also contemporary socio-political mobilizations. The notions of self-care and caregiving in

activist environments and communities are subsidiary to this debate. On the one side, feminist, trans, and queer knowledge about dependency and solidarity stressed a more systematic connection between care work, ethics, and marginalized communities (Marvin, 2019). On the other side, disability activists have called attention to caring networks and assistance clusters (marked by inequalities in incomes and resources) in a spatialized and discriminatory society.

Additionally, acknowledging the relationship between subjectivation and social mobilisation may contribute to the understanding of how and whether the logic of cultural and social mobilisations changes the nature of political alliances in the course of reinventing and transforming social life.

After this discussion, new questions arise: What can socio-psychological attributes do to socio-political transformation? How do psychological outcomes (e.g., anxiety, fear, loneliness, rejection) impact identity change or orient people toward more (or less) inclusive networks? Moreover, in what ways does suffering help shape new forms of individual self-recognition that drive collective solidarities? And most importantly, how all this shape the lives of people as intersectional beings?

While recognizing the advances of identity-based politics in raising awareness of the issues and concerns of marginalized groups, Highleyman (2002) urges a necessary “move beyond identity politics to advance on a broad-based progressive social justice agenda” (p. 119), affirming a ‘queer sensibility’ in the struggles for justice and putting forward the praxis of a prefigurative politics. In such a politics, trans\* (binary and non-binary) people and disability activists approach social vulnerability in conjunction with the oppression experienced by non-normative bodies and identities, assuming a confrontational position in the face of a (instrumental) feminist agenda that resists adding some subjects as actors of feminist struggles (such as trans people or sex workers).

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