Feminism, populism, and local democracy:
the feminist policy agenda of new municipalist governments in Spain

Paloma Caravantes González

Rutgers University

pc489@rutgers.edu

pcaravantesgonzalez@gmail.com

Resumen:

In time of crisis of political representation and exclusionary drift in European democracies, populism is usually interpreted as a threatening project to gender+ equality and feminist agendas. Yet, most research disregards the ideological diversity in populism and the possible alliances between feminist and left populist politics. This paper explores one possible space of alliance: local democratic governance. Through the analysis of the policy agenda of two municipalist governments in Spain, I argue that progressive localism reconciles central commitments of feminist and left populist political projects, such as the promotion of socio-economic alternative models based on a community-oriented ethos, the implementation of mechanisms of democratization with markedly gender perspectives, and the transformation of public institutions.

Nota biográfica:

I am a researcher and lecturer at Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA), my research focuses on gender and politics, especially on the relation of populism and feminist politics; the gendered organizational culture of institutional and party politics; and the implementation of intersectionality and gender equality approaches in public policies. My current project explores processes of democratization at the local level.

Radical right populist forces have surfaced in increasing numbers of Western political systems. Combining nostalgia for a traditional gender order with nativist discourses that demonize 'outsiders', radical right discourses promote majoritarian interpretations of democratic governance and thwart key tenets of liberal democracy such as women's and minorities' rights (Froio 2018, Köttig et al. 2017). Existing gender equality policies are being contested in electoral campaigns and challenged in the courts, characterized as a form of 'gender ideology' imported by foreign intellectuals and professional elites, where gender knowledge is understood as 'indoctrination' rather than science (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, Verloo and Paternotte 2018). Preserving mechanisms designed to protect gender+ equality and democratic inclusion in the face of social and political backlash from authoritarian, traditionalist, and masculinist movements is one of the crucial political challenges of contemporary European politics.

Within this context, populism is interpreted as a threatening project to gender+ equality and feminist agendas. Yet, most research disregards the ideological diversity in populism and the possible alliances between feminist and left populist politics. This paper explores one possible space of alliance: local democratic governance. Through the analysis of the agenda of two municipalist governments in Spain, I argue that progressive localism reconciles key commitments of feminist and left populist political projects, such as the promotion of socio-economic alternative models based on a community-oriented ethos, the implementation of mechanisms of democratization with a markedly gender perspective and the transformation of public institutions. In time of crisis of political representation and exclusionary drift in European democracies, the analysis of left and local forms of populism enables the study of inclusionary and more democratic forms to articulate citizen dissatisfaction with political institutions. Besides, this analysis expands the knowledge on the capacity of local governments to protect of gender+ equality measures, given their extensive jurisdiction over many domains of inequality (Sellers and Lidström 2007).

Left Populism, Feminism and the Local

The notion of populism and the role of populist actors in contemporary politics are central concerns for political science. Due to the relevance of nativist and traditionalist discourses and the role of populist actors in state politics, studies tend to analyze populism as a national and right-wing phenomenon. Less attention has been paid to left-populist actors, and even less, to those who decenter national politics in favor of the local as the locus of popular representation. However, ideological diversity and the level of governance matter in the analysis of populism, especially regarding the relationship to gender and feminism.

Some authors—mostly representative of one of the two theoretical dominant positions in the field of populism studies, the "Laclauian camp" (Maiguashca 2019)—read populism as a potentially empowering tool for leftist agendas, interpreting the investment in the 'people' as a socialist or communist commitment (Dyer-Witheford 2020), arguing for the need of the left to engage populism in order to navigate the current hegemonic crisis of the neoliberal model (Mouffe 2018), and defending left-wing movements and parties as the genuine representation of populism (Stavrakakis et al. 2017). More importantly, this body of literature calls our attention to the political criticism and dissatisfaction that underlie the 'populist moment' and explores the possibilities to articulate this discontent towards more inclusionary and democratic practices (Mouffe 2018).

Despite an initial absence on gender analysis of the populist phenomenon, feminist scholars have increasingly focused their attention on mapping the relationship between populism, gender and feminism (Abi-Hassan 2017, Caravantes 2020, Dietze and Roth 2020, Kantola and Lombardo

2019, Köttig et al. 2017, Norocel 2013). Studies on gender and populism have focused on the centrality of gender relations to right-wing populist parties' ideology, discourses, performances and political objectives (Dietze and Roth 2020, Köttig et al. 2017, Spierings 2020). This literature explores issues such as the reproduction of masculinist identity politics embedded in populist mobilization (Sauer 2020), the discursive strategies of radical right populists to oppose gender equality (Kantola and Lombardo 2020), the homogenizing and essentialist implications in the concept of the 'people' and the 'elite' and the hostility to intersectional ideas and practices (Emejulu 2017). Recent works shift the attention to the ways in which populist radical right parties pose a challenge to democracy through the erosion of established institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks of gender equality (Alonso and Espinosa-Fajardo forthcoming, Krizsan and Roggeband 2019). Yet, most research disregards the ideological diversity in populism and the distinctive relationship of left populist actors to feminist politics and democratic mechanisms.

Building on my previous work on the relationship of populism and feminist politics (Caravantes 2020), I analyze feminist and left-populist politics as two projects of political transformation. Specifically, I explore three dimensions that define these political projects: the diagnosis of the political problem; the proposed solutions concerning the type of leadership, the assessment of representative democracy, and the role of the state and the nation; and the conceptualization of political transformation. I argue that, among these dimensions, some key aspects distinguish left populist from right populist projects and facilitate a productive dialogue with feminist politics (Kantola and Lombardo 2019, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). While both forms of populism establish an antagonism between the elite and the people provoked by the misbehavior of the elite (diagnosis), left populism appeals to socioeconomically subordinated classes and emphasizes internal diversity within the 'people' (Laclau 2007). A more inclusionary construction of the people, rather than right populist appeals to exclusionary ethnic and nation-based identities, resonates better with intersectional and anti-homogenizing feminist commitments. Populism often mobilizes charismatic forms of leadership to *represent* the common people, however, left populism seeks to limit this leadership to align with democratizing and participatory principles (Mouffe 2018). Despite the prioritization of electoral politics, left populist actors commit to enlarge participation to those who are politically marginalized, including reforming institutions to make them more inclusive and democratic (De la Torre 2017). This limitation of individualistic and charismatic leadership and the emphasis on diversifying political participation favor a dialogue with feminist commitments to collective leadership and the radical criticism of the functioning of political institutions. While the homeland is central to populist rhetoric, left populist actors emphasize decentralization and internal plurality within the nation (Schavelzon 2015). Moving away from the centrality of the state and favoring the articulation of popular sovereignty in terms of local democratic control (March 2017) enable a positive relationship of left populist politics to the feminist criticism of centralized institutions and hierarchical regimes of experts (Alabao 2017) and reflect the ideal prototype of some feminist organizations as local in scope and small in scale (Martin 1990, 198).

Political scientists, sociologists, and political geographers have increasingly paid attention to localism as a form of governance that privileges local institutions as key sites of civic engagement and citizen control over public services (Beveridge and Koch 2019, Blanco et al. 2020, Featherstone et al. 2012). Ideals of localism can take multiple and competing meanings. For instance, a technocratic tradition understands municipal governance as a basic cell of economic growth. This approach tends to homogenize the experiences of cities across political differences and cultural contexts (Clarke 2012, Saunier 2002) and has translated into corporate-led "smart

city" plans (Dyer-Witheford 2020). An alternative reading of localism, New Municipalism (NM), emerged after the 2008 crisis as a response to the imposition of neoliberal agendas in urban centers and to the political management of the sovereign debt crisis through austerity politics. New Municipalist movements claim that governing territories in the *people's common interest* is a subversive form of alternative governance (Russell 2020, 99):

> "The municipalist wager is that our relative proximity in our towns and cities - to one another, to flows of capital, to instances of both crisis and opportunity - makes it a privileged starting point for building a new landscape of power. And it is precisely this new landscape of power, the new processes, institutions and methods through which we *begin* to govern our territories in common, that will provide the vital force of any broader counter-hegemonic project" (Russell 2020, 109).

A growing literature suggests that progressive forms of local left populist movements, such as New Municipalism, are a particularly fertile terrain for developing intersectional feminist agendas because both projects seek an equative redistribution of power and resources in reaction to neoliberal logics and democratic deficit in Western societies (Cruells and Alfama 2019, Roth and Baird 2017, Russell 2019). Allegedly, NM actors advance gender+ sensitive policies and 'engender' spaces of democratic participation and governance through the reorganization of political priorities and the inclusion of a diversity of women and marginalized communities in decision-making processes. However, despite the apparent scholarly agreement on the alliance between feminist and progressist localist movements such as NM, so far there has been no effort to examine the implementation of NM policy agendas and the actual possibilities of localism to address recent challenges to equality policies and democratic inclusion[1]. This paper takes the first step of a broader implementation study that will investigate the feminist transformative potential of municipalism (whether and the ways in which local administrations allow for policies and organizational logics that are more conducive to the implementation of feminist and gender+ equality agendas than other levels of governance). Specifically, this paper explores how NM governments frame the feminist agenda within their policy documents and how this feminist agenda relates to a left-populist project of the local.

New Municipalism

> "Municipalism understands that the local scale has characteristics that make it a unique site of social, political and ecological transformation and human emancipation" (Baird 2018).

This paper explores the Spanish case, where a series of New Municipalist platforms secured the governments of the country's most populated cities in 2015. Specifically, I focus on the pioneering feminist agenda of two of these city councils, Barcelona and Madrid, during the period 2015-2019. In 2015, two left populist electoral platforms, *Barcelona en Comú* and *Ahora Madrid*, secured the votes to form minority governments in the city councils of the two largest urban centers in Spain. Despite key differences (e.g., Madrid's status as the national capital and the impact of the Catalan independence movement on Barcelona municipal politics), the two governments adopted similar responses to shared socio-economic challenges and assumed a pioneering role in designing and adopting gender+ equality policies, such as Barcelona's 'Caring City' and 'Madrid, City of Care, and instruments of citizen participation, such as 'We decide Barcelona' and 'Madrid Decides'.

---

[1] Including how to navigate the "local trap" that assumes local and urban spaces to automatically produce more democratic societies than wider or non-urban places (Purcell 2006, 1936-1937).

Spain is a paradigmatic case for three main reasons. First, gender issues have become a central battlefield in the disputes between right- and left-wing parties over the last decade (Cornejo and Pichardo 2017). Second, due to the distribution of responsibilities among regional and local levels of administration, Spanish local institutions have the capacity to design and implement gender+ equality plans. Third, Spanish municipalities have experienced an increasing politicization after decades of technical local governance (Blanco et al. 2018, Roth et al. 2019). This process culminated in 2015 with the electoral victories of NM platforms in the country's main cities, including Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, and Valencia. The newly elected governments made considerable progress in gender+ equality policies during the 2015-2019 cycle. Apart from their pioneering feminist agenda, Barcelona and Madrid are particularly relevant examples of this phenomenon due to their role as demographic, cultural and economic powerhouses in the country.

Feminism and democracy are intertwined pillars in new municipalist discourses and projects. Organized in citizen-led platforms, across activism and institutional politics and transcending traditional party lines, new municipal actors seek to exceed the limitations of electoral politics through the implementation of deliberative and participatory mechanisms. Some of NM movements adopt the language of "feminization of politics" to convey the democratic regeneration in times of crisis of institutional politics. In words of Laura Pérez, the responsible of Feminism and LGTBI in Barcelona City Council, "feminism is the view that enables seeing the world with the eyes of those who have always been left in the margins" and municipalism enables the inclusion of all citizens and the democratization of political practices (Pérez 2018).

The feminist dimension of municipalism is premised upon the idea that local governments are public institutions of *proximity*, a territorial scale that allegedly enables the politization of the personal and quotidian and the implementation of concrete actions to bring about change in the "here and now" of peoples' lives; e.g., through the recognition of the "micro-materiality of life"—including basic needs such as food, housing, streets (urban planning), and waste collection (Cooper 2017, 345). Inspired by feminist reflections on social reproduction and 'politics of the commons', the focus on *everyday politics* would not be limited to solving immediate problems but to articulating mechanisms of social reproduction and reorganizing political power to focus on the sustainability of community life (Russell 2019). NM interprets "politics of the common" (Federici 2018) in two directions: members of a community taking care of a collective good together, e.g., through community wealth building methodologies that redistribute locally the wealth generated locally (Hamilton-Jones and De Groot 2021); and a political response to the neoliberal management of the crisis and the gender governance that austerity measures produce in post-crisis contexts. This political response would address the reduction of the redistributive capacity of the state after the 2008 economic crisis and the reinstatement of the "domestic" gender regime (Walby 2009)—that presumes women responsible to keep an economy of subsistence afloat during times of crisis and to cope with the privatization of public services as a consequence of budget cuts in the public sector (Carastathis 2015, Griffin 2015, Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Thus, the notion of the commons works as a 'spatial imaginary' to prioritize community and social reproduction over extractive production of commodities. New municipalist actors claim the possibilities of local politics to articulate alternative economic paradigms due to the permeability between private and public spheres (Baird 2018).

The notion of *proximity*, rather than an expression of physical closeness or a synonym of smaller politics within the boundaries of the local, would involve a reconceptualization of the public sphere (Thompson 2020). Inspired by autonomous and anarchist traditions, new municipalism premises

the transformative potential of local governments on the redistribution of power (including outside formal institutions) and the construction of alternative forms of democratic governance through the implication of the citizenry in political deliberation and decision-making to foster an encounter of 'ordinary people', i.e., nonprofessional politicians (Russell 2019):

> "The immediate goal of a libertarian municipalist agenda is not to exercise sudden and massive control by representatives and their bureaucratic agents over the existing economy; its immediate goal is to reopen a public sphere in flat opposition to statism, one that allows for maximum democracy in the literal sense of the term, and to create in embryonic form the institutions that can give power to a people generally" (Bookchin 1995).

This formulation involves a populist appeal to the 'ordinary people' oriented towards the "co-production" of policies, "as opposed to the delegation of decision-making to elected officials and experts" (Baird 2018). The notions of *politics of proximity* and the *everyday* tend to uncritically reproduce populist vocabulary that takes for granted the distinction between career politicians and 'ordinary people' and simplifies the definition of basic and immediate needs decontextualizing them from social positions. NM actors combine demotic vocabulary (i.e., people-centered) with anti-elitist rhetoric against privileged minorities that defend 'alien' interests to the people, such as corporate oligarchies. This rhetoric has a profound economic connotation and distinguishes NM from older socialist formulations and right populist emphasis on liberal elites (Dyer-Witheford 2020, 117). NM, thus, seeks to use the local government for "societies to govern themselves" and their own territories in their "common interest" (Russell 2019, 996, 2020, 99).

A prefigurative orientation and the transformation of the institution itself are central commitments to NM projects (Cooper 2020). Prefigurative politics refer to the political practices of an organization or movement that already entail its envisioned politics. In other words, political actors who "practice what they preach" (Teivainen 2016, 24), such as anti-austerity movements implementing forms of direct democracy because they aim at a democratic system that eliminates the vices of representative politics (Day 2005). Unlike other anti-austerity and anti-establishment movements that reject the institutional path, new municipalism pursues a parliamentary strategy that aims to create alternative urban institutions in collaboration with local citizens. Blurring boundaries between state and civil society, acting to 'prefigure' (Cooper 2017, 2020) or 'reimagine' the institution (Cooper et al. 2019) rather than reject it. Mechanisms to wide political participation include neighborhood assemblies and forums, participating budgeting, open-source voting platforms, and mechanisms of scrutiny of public offices (Rubio-Pueyo 2017). Furthermore, new municipalist actors advocate for extra-institutional community organizing, arguing that these forms of self-governance situate women and other politically marginalized voices at the center of political and economic decisions (Roth and Baird 2017, Ubasart 2017).

Methodology

I implement a frame analysis methodology to explore how the governments of Barcelona and Madrid during the period 2015-2019 frame the feminist agenda within five policy documents and how this feminist agenda relates to a left-populist project of the local. The documents include the two municipal plans of both cities and three gender+ equality plans (Barcelona City Council 2016a, b, c, Madrid City Council 2015, 2018):

- MP_BCN: Barcelona's Programa d'Actuació Municipal 2016-2019
- MP_MAD: Madrid's Plan de Gobierno 2015-2019
- GEP_BCN: Barcelona's Plan para la Justicia de Género 2016-2020

- GEP_MAD: Plan Estratégico para la Igualdad de Género de la Ciudad de Madrid 2018-2020
- GSD_BCN: Barcelona's Pla Municipal per la Diversitat Sexual i de Gènere 2016-2020

Building on critical frame analysis (Dombos et al. 2012), I investigate the following questions: What is represented as a problem? Why is it seen as a problem and as the cause? Is the problem related to gender? If so, how? Is gender intersected with other inequalities? Who is seen as responsible to have caused the problem? Whose problem is it seen to be? Where is the problem located? What actions are needed and why? What are the main goals? Is the solution related to gender? If so, how? Does the solution consider the intersection of gender with other inequalities? Who should do what? Who is acted upon? Where is the solution located? The two questions related to the location of the problem and the solution allow me to deepen on how these documents frame the role of the local and the relationship to feminist and democratic commitments.

Specifically, I explore these questions with a focus on feminist and left populist content. I operationalize feminist content as the efforts to dismantle hierarchies of power based on gender and the intersection with other social determinants—such as class, race, ethnicity, age, etc.—and to achieve social transformation (Htun and Weldon 2010). I operationalize left populist content by identifying references to: (i) the 'common people' as the political subject, the recognition of its internal diversity and the antagonism to homogenous elites[2]; (ii) collective leadership, mechanisms to enlarge participation and other forms of popular sovereignty; (iii) decentralization and local governance; and (iv) transformation or reform of political institutions (March 2017).

A general consideration of the plans: The municipal plans of Barcelona (MP_BCN) and Madrid (MP_MAD) have a different balance between diagnosis and prognosis. While MP_BCN is more extensive and dedicates considerable space to the diagnosis of the political problems affecting the city of Barcelona, MP_MAD is more succinct, and the diagnosis is implicit in the formulation of policy goals.

Local Governance as the Locus and Horizon for Feminist and Democratic Politics

The studied policies of Barcelona and Madrid propose the *local* as a collective project to address two main crises: a political crisis of representation and an economic crisis, both of which have profound gendered implications and increase social inequality. Building on the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (ECSHRC), Barcelona policy documents frame the cities as ideal spaces to defend fundamental rights regarding socio-political participation, health, education, culture, leisure housing, environmental protection, etc. (MP_BCN 12, 35, 44; GEP_BCN 61, 62; second axis in GSD_BCN 30-69). Accordingly, the local dimension of the city allows for the implementation of "tools of proximity" to revert these gendered crises (GEP_BCN 13) towards the construction of "a kind and sustainable city" (MP_BCN 29, 31, 172) and a "close, united and habitable city" (one of the for strategic axes of MP_MAD 1-25).

The legislative agenda of both cities emphasize decentralization, within and outside the city, regarding the distribution of administrative powers to neighborhoods but also claiming the role of local administrations within the state governance (MP_BCN 12, 35, 172, 177; MP_MAD 8, 19). Efficiency, fairness, and democratization justify the goal of decentralization: because of the greater capacity of local governments to know about the population's needs and put everyday life at the

---

[2] Populism is defined by both elements: people-centrism and anti-elitism. A people-centric vocabulary is a necessary feature but not sufficient of populist rhetoric; otherwise, it is "demoticism" (March 2017).

center of municipal action (MP_BCN 158, 177; GEP_BCN 18; GEP_MAD 35), and the capacity of citizens to audit the public action (MP_BCN 35). The gender+ equality plan of Madrid also invokes the principle of subsidiarity to justify decentralization, which is defined in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union[3] and prioritizes the proximity of public institutions to take political decisions (GEP_MAD 11). Barcelona's municipal plan recognizes the current limitation of local competences—e.g., the legislative framework does not allow binding participatory processes (MP_BCN 172, 177)—but also claims the capacity of cities to be a source of knowledge for other levels of governance (MP_BCN 192, 193).

A "people-centered city" and the commons

A "people-centered city", one of the four strategic axes of MP_MAD that includes 30% of the total of actions included in the plan, conveys the people-centric conception of municipalism. The gender+ equality plans of both cities make explicit references to the importance of recognizing the population diversity—and the intersection of gender with other axes of inequality, such as age, class, sexual identity and orientation, ethnic origin, etc. (GEP_BCN 59)—as a means of guaranteeing social equity (MP_MAD 28-31). The recognition of this diversity in the diagnosis favors the relationship between left populist and feminist goals. While the people-centric vocabulary is central to all the documents, the antagonism with different sorts of elites is not too present in the studied policies. The only document that clearly identifies the object of anti-elitism is MP_BCN by referring to the interests of a privileged minority that have traditionally organized the city (MP_BCN 12).

MP_BCN diagnoses two main interconnected problems: the increasing economic inequality that manifests through class and territorial differences (MP_BCN 13, 18, 45) and the crisis of representation and democracy that manifests through the delegitimization of public representatives and political institutions (MP_BCN 35, 171-173). Both crises are analyzed through gender lens in the documents of Barcelona and Madrid, first, emphasizing how the economic model relies on the gender division of labor, affecting especially migrant women (MP_BCN 123; GEP_MAD 35); and denouncing the lack of gender equitable distribution of power and decision-making positions (MP_BCN 61; fourth dimension of action in GEP_MAD 37-40). The gender+ equality plans of both cities develop the economic analysis through a targeted diagnosis of the feminization of employment and precariousness (GEP_ BCN 7), the gender unequal distribution of care and the devaluation of labor traditionally done by women (GEP_MAD 35).

The studied policies propose a change of the socioeconomic model to address the increasing inequality. Some of the measures include to incentivize a social economy of proximity that emphasizes collaboration and territorial connections (MP_BCN 116, 123, 126; MP_MAD 52); to promote the culture of the "common good" (MP_MAD 40-43); and the economic recognition, "dignification" and reorganization of care labor (MP_BCN 56, 62, 127; MP_MAD 36-37, 50). In words of the GEP_BCN (56) "a public policy oriented towards socializing and democratizing care responsibilities is needed". The *politics of the common*, which the GEP_BCN frames as "necessarily feminist" (7), also involve the recovery of public spaces for the community, with a particular emphasis on the different gendered experiences and perceptions of urban facilities, public transport, etc. (MP_MAD 19-20; GEP_BCN 85-93).

---

[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/subsidiarity.html

With the people, participatory democracy with gender perspective

Unlike more passive populist constructions of the people, the new municipalist agenda of both cities presents the citizenry as an active collective agent. MP_BCN acknowledges the existing associative fabric in Barcelona neighborhoods and proposes to reinforce the community life by facilitating experiences of self-organization (MP_BCN 172, 182) as well as guaranteeing the conditions of citizen empowerment (MP_BCN 35, 171). MP_MAD (64) refers to the importance of collective citizen participation through the local forums and individual participation through tools such as the online platform *Decide Madrid* (Madrid decides), participatory budgeting, co-management of public services, and deliberative mechanisms such as the Observatory of the City (Janoschka and Mota 2020).

MP_BCN presents enlarging instruments of deliberative and participatory democracy as a fundamental mechanism to reinforce municipal democracy (MP_BCN 171, 177). Social and political participation is one of the four principles of Madrid's gender equality plan—along with human rights, intersectionality and gender mainstreaming, which is explicitly connected to the improvement and democratization of political processes (GEP_MAD 24). The general and gender equality plans of both city councils emphasize the importance to consider the gender dynamics of these participatory politics. Barcelona documents stress the need to make citizen participation inclusive, addressing the gender+ gaps that hinder women's participation in all their diversity (MP_BCN 178-179; GEP_BCN 47); while Madrid documents refer to strategies for counteracting the obstacles that women face to fully participate in the public sphere and the need to promote new forms of leadership (GEP_MAD 23, 37).

Unlike a common emphasis on charismatic leadership within left populist discourses, the MP_BCN promotes a form of public and citizen leadership to decide collectively over city matters, such as the urban model regarding tourism or how to address issues of security (MP_BCN 25, 110, 138). Thus, the municipalist agenda is framed as a "collective project" (MP_BCN 4, 35, 171) based on the "co-responsibility and co-production of policies among technical personnel, politicians and citizens" (MP_BCN 172). In Madrid's gender equality plan, social and political participation is promoted not only for its intrinsic democratic value but its manifest improvement of public policy because of the beneficial role of the collective intelligence (GEP_MAD 23).

Reimagining the Institution

The transformation of the municipal institution is one of the main aspects of all the studied policies: "to guarantee the good government" (one of the five axes of MP_BCN); "a democratic, transparent and effective government" to "manage the local administration in a more rational, fair and transparent way" (one of the four strategic axes and one of the strategic objectives of MP_MAD); "institutional change" (one of the four main axes of GEP_BCN and one of the two axes in GSD_BCN); and "public action with an integrated gender perspective" (one of the four dimensions of action in GEP_MAD).

NM agendas focus on the transformation of the public administration involving a "new" type of public leadership (MP_BCN 128), the "reorganization of management tools" and new forms of "communication towards citizenship" (MP_MAD 58-59). Gender justice is a main goal of the institutional change (MP_BCN 62), as such, the general plans of both cities emphasize the importance of a gender approach in the transformation of municipal action. For instance, MP_BCN (128, 185) includes gender equality and social clauses in the reorganization of the City Council,

and MP_MAD refers to gender mainstreaming in relation to the training for the personnel and the criteria for municipal hiring (MP_MAD 65-66).

The gender+ equality plans of both cities narrow down the commitment to the reorganization of political priorities through intersectional[4] lens ("Feminist Barcelona", GEP_BCN 14 and "Towards a feminist Madrid", GEP_MAD 6). GEP_ BCN identifies a series of common problems in institutional settings: lack of gender diagnosis, evaluation and limited exploitation of disaggregated data (GEP_ BCN 35), reduced use of gender analysis reports and different understandings of "gender equality" (GEP_ BCN 36), fragmented structures or lack of structures that hinder the implementation of gender mainstreaming (GEP_ BCN 36-38), lack of training on gender perspectives (GEP_ BCN 39), lack of gender perspectives in budgeting, hiring clauses and labor policy (GEP_ BCN 40-42), or lack of consideration of women's collectives in mechanisms of participation (GEP_ BCN 47). To address these limitations, the gender+ equality plans of both cities propose a restructuration of the municipal institution, creating gender mainstream department and structures, such as Barcelona's Department of Feminism and LGBTI and Madrid's Department of Gender Politics and Diversity (GEP_MAD 14), as well as implementing gender-specific training and a gender strategy to develop budgeting (GEP_BCN 25-47).

Conclusion

A series of key elements in the agenda of new municipalism reconcile central commitments of left populist and feminist politics. The promotion of socio-economic alternative models based on a community-oriented ethos, mostly exemplified in the notion of the "commons", convey feminist commitments to put everyday life at the centre of public action, thus, recentring political attention on issues that disproportionately affect a diversity of women and marginalized communities, and promote the reorganization of care and community responsibilities. Likewise, it also reflects the left populist goal to centre politics on a diverse 'people', using political institutions to solve citizen daily concerns instead of at the service of privileged elites. The "politics of the common" address the economic inequalities diagnosed by both projects, including the feminization of precariousness, the gender unequal division of labor and the consequences of neoliberal dogmas and the political management of the debt crisis.

The commitment to implement direct mechanisms of democratization at the local level, such as participatory and deliberative processes, and the presentation of the municipalist agenda as a collective project reflect feminist intersectional commitments to enlarge the diversity of political participation and to reduce the gender+ gaps that hinder women's participation, as well as left populist promises to return politics to a plural people and articulate a collective leadership. Besides, the use of a gender perspective addresses the unbalanced distribution of power that feminist politics diagnose, and the crisis of representational politics diagnosed by left populist actors after the 2008 crisis. The commitment to modify institutional settings and structures at a local level reflect a common concern of feminist and left populist politics to transform the public institution and overcome the limitations of representational politics, integrating intersectional gender lens to the organization and logics of the municipality as well as beyond the institution, in dialogue with feminist movements.

The present analysis of policy documents is a first step in the study of the local as a distinctive level of governance that potentially offers alternatives to socio-economic and democratic crises in

---

[4] Intersectionality is explicitly invoked in the equality plans of both cities (GEP_BCN 16; GEP_MAD 7, 24).

contemporary European politics. Further investigation is required on the implementation of this policies and their practical consequences.

Literature

Abi-Hassan, Sahar. 2017. "Populism and Gender". In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 426-444.

Alabao, Nuria. 2017. "Feminizar la política: ¿ganar primarias o cuestionar el poder?" *CTXT*, August 9. Accessed May 29, 2018. http://ctxt.es/es/20170809/Culturas/14083/CTXT-feminismo-politica-primarias-poder-cuotas-nuria-alabao.htm.

Alonso, Alba and Julia Espinosa-Fajardo. forthcoming. "Blitzkrieg Against Democracy: Gender Equality and the Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Spain".

Baird, Kate Shea. 2018. "Municipalism: an Icarian warning." *Kate Shea Baird*. https://katesheabaird.wordpress.com/2018/06/14/municipalism-an-icarian-warning/.

Barcelona City Council. 2016a. "Pla Municipal per la Diversitat Sexual i de Gènere 2016-2020 ". https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bcnvsodi/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PLA-M_LGTBI_2016-2020.pdf.

Barcelona City Council. 2016b. "Plan para la Justicia de Género 2016-2020." Accessed July 16, 2020. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dones/es/plan-para-la-justicia-de-genero-2016-2020-0.

Barcelona City Council. 2016c. "Programa d'Actuació Municipal 2016-2019 ". https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/mercats/sites/default/files/pam2016.pdf.

Blanco, Ismael, Ricard Gomá and Joan Subirats. 2018. "El nuevo municipalismo: derecho a la ciudad y comunes urbanos". *Gestión Y Análisis De Políticas Públicas* 20: 14-28.

Bookchin, Murray. 1995. *From Urbanization to Cities*. London: Casell.

Carastathis, Anna. 2015. "The politics of austerity and the affective economy of hostility: racialised gendered violence and crises of belonging in Greece". *Feminist Review* 109: 73-95.

Caravantes, Paloma. 2020. "Tensions between populist and feminist politics: The case of the Spanish left populist party Podemos". *International Political Science Review*: 1-17.

Clarke, Nick. 2012. "Urban policy mobility, anti-politics, and histories of the transnational municipal movement". *Progress in Human Geography* 36(1): 25-43.

Cooper, Davina. 2017. "Prefiguring the State". *Antipode* 49(2): 335-356.

Cooper, Davina. 2020. "Towards an adventurous institutional politics: The prefigurative 'as if' and the reposing of what's real". *The Sociological Review* 68(5): 893-916.

Cooper, Davina, Nikita Dhawan and Janet Newman. 2019. *Reimagining the State. Theoretical Challenges and Transformative Possibilities*: Routledge.

Cornejo, Mónica and J. Ignacio Pichardo. 2017. "From the Pulpit to the Streets: Ultra-Conservative Religious Positions against Gender in Spain". In. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 233-251.

Cruells, Marta and Eva Alfama. 2019. "El feminismo en el municipalismo. Propuestas de políticas públicas hacia la equidad". In *Ciudades Democráticas. La Revuelta Municipalista en el Ciclo Post-15M*, edited by Laura Roth, Arnau Monterde and Antonio Calleja-López. Barcelona: Icaria, 209-227.

Day, Richard J.F. 2005. *Gramsci is Dead. Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.

De La Torre, Carlos. 2017. *Populismos. Una inmersión rápida*. Barcelona: Tibidabo Audiciones.

Dietze, Gabriele and Julia Roth, eds. 2020. *Right-wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag.

Dombos, Tamas, Andrea Krizsan, Mieke Verloo and Violetta Zentai. 2012. "Critical Frame Analysis: A Comparative Methodology for the 'Qualitative in Gender+ Equality Policies' (QUING) project". *Working Paper Series. Center for Policy Studies*.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick. 2020. "Left Populism and Platform Capitalism". *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 18(1): 116-131.

Emejulu, Akwugo. 2017. "Feminism for the 99%: towards a populist feminism?: Can Feminism for the 99% succeed as a new kind of populism?". *A Journal of Politics and Culture*(66): 63-67.

Federici, Silvia. 2018. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland and Brooklyn: PM Press and Kairos.

Froio, Caterina. 2018. "Race, Religion, or Culture? Framing Islam between Racism and Neo-Racism in the Online Network of the French Far Right". *Perspectives on Politics* 16(3): 696-709.

Griffin, Penny. 2015. "Crisis, Austerity and Gendered Governance: A Feminist Perspective". *Feminist Review* 109(1): 49-72.

Hamilton-Jones, Imogen and Thomas De Groot. 2021. "For Amsterdam's experiment in new municipalism to succeed, it must put vague terms into practice." *Minim*, June 14, 2021. Accessed June 29, 2021. https://minim-municipalism.org/magazine/for-amsterdams-experiment-in-new-municipalism-to-succeed-it-must-put-vague-terms-into-practice.

Htun, Mala and Laurel Weldon. 2010. "When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy". *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1): 207-216.

Janoschka, Michael and Fabiola Mota. 2020. "New municipalism in action or urban neoliberalisation reloaded? An analysis of governance change, stability and path dependence in Madrid (2015–2019)". *Urban Studies*: 1-17.

Kantola, Johanna and Emanuela Lombardo. 2017. "Gender and the Politics of the Economic Crisis in Europe". In *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe*, edited by Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-25.

Kantola, Johanna and Emanuela Lombardo. 2019. "Populism and Feminist Politics: The Cases of Finland and Spain". *European Journal of Political Research* 58: 1108-1128.

Kantola, Johanna and Emanuela Lombardo. 2020. "Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarized European Parliament". *International Political Science Review*(1-15).

Köttig, Michaela, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, eds. 2017. *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Krizsan, Andrea and Conny Roggeband. 2019. *Gendering Democratic Backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe. A comparative agenda*. Budapest: Central European University.

Kuhar, Roman and David Paternotte, eds. 2017. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2007. *On populist reason*. London and New York: Verso.

Madrid City Council. 2015. "Plan de Gobierno 2015-2019 ". https://datos.madrid.es/FWProjects/egob/Catalogo/SectorPublico/Ficheros/Plan_de_Gobierno.pdf.

Madrid City Council. 2018. "Plan Estratégico para la Igualdad de Género de la ciudad de Madrid 2018-2020." http://asociacioncauces.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/PlanEstrategicoIgualdadGenero2018_20.pdf.

Maiguashca, Bice. 2019. "Resisting the 'populist hype': a feminist critique of a globalising concept". *Review of International Studies* 45(5): 768-785.

March, Luke. 2017. "Left and right populism compared: The British case". *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19(2): 282-303.

Martin, Patricia Yancey. 1990. "Rethinking Feminist Organizations". *Gender & Society* 4(2): 182-206.

Mouffe, Chantal. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso Books.

Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal R. Kaltwasser. 2013. "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America". *Government and Opposition* 48(4): 147-174.

Norocel, Ov Cristian. 2013. ""Give Us Back Sweden!" A Feminist Reading of the (Re)Interpretations of the Folkhem Conceptual Metaphor in Swedish Radical Right Populist Discourse". *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 21(1): 4-20.

Pérez, Laura. 2018. "El devenir feminista de las instituciones." *Catalunya plural*, February 27. Accessed April 21, 2018. http://catalunyaplural.cat/es/devenir-feminista-las-instituciones/.

Purcell, Mark. 2006. "Urban Democracy and the Local Trap". *Urban Studies* 43(11): 1921-1941.

Roth, Laura and Kate Shea Baird. 2017. "Municipalism and the Feminization of Politics." *ROAR Magazine*. 6. Accessed April 22, 2018. https://roarmag.org/magazine/municipalism-feminization-urban-politics/.

Roth, Laura, Arnau Monterde and Antonio Calleja-López. 2019. *Ciudades Democráticas. La Revuelta Municipalista en el Ciclo Post-15M*. Barcelona: Icaria.

Rubio-Pueyo, Vicente. 2017. "Municipalism in Spain. From Barcelona to Madrid, and Beyond". *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. New York Office*.

Russell, Bertie. 2019. "Beyond the Local Trap: New Municipalism and the Rise of the Fearless Cities". *Antipode* 51(3): 989-1010.

Russell, Bertie. 2020. "Making power emerge: municipalism and the right to the city". *Soundings: A journal of politics and culture* 74: 95-111.

Sauer, Birgit. 2020. "Authoritarian Right-Wing Populism as Masculinist Identity Politics. The Role of Affects". In *Right-wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, edited by Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 23-40.

Saunier, Pierre-Yves. 2002. "Taking Up the Bet on Connections: a Municipal Contribution". *Contemporary European History* 11(4): 507-527.

Schavelzon, Salvador. 2015. ""Podemos", Sudamérica, y la república plurinacional de España." *Rebelión*, February 4. Accessed July 17, 2018. http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=195069.

Sellers, Jeffrey and Anders Lidström. 2007. "Decentralization, Local Government, and the Welfare State". *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 20(4): 609-632.

Spierings, Niels. 2020. "Why Gender and Sexuality are both Trivial and Pivotal in Populist Radical Right Politics". In *Right-wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, edited by Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 41-58.

Stavrakakis, Yannis, Giorgos Katsambekis, Nikos Nikisianos, Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Siomos. Thomas. 2017. "Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: Revisiting a reified association'". *Critical Discourse Studies* 14(4): 420-439.

Teivainen, Teivo. 2016. "Occupy representation and democratise prefiguration: Speaking for others in global justice movements". *Capital & Class* 40(1): 19-36.

Thompson, Matthew. 2020. "What's so new about New Municipalism?". *Progress in Human Geography*: 1-26.

Ubasart, Gemma. 2017. "¿Feminización de la política local? Nuevo municipalismo e igualdad". *Boletín Ecos* 38(Mar-May).

Verloo, Mieke and David Paternotte. 2018. "The Feminist Project under Threat in Europe". *Politics and Governance* 6(3).

Walby, Sylvia. 2009. *Globalization and Inequalitites. Complxity and Contested Modernity*. London: Sage.