International Journal of the Commons

No Commons Without Micropolitics. Learning with Feminist and Municipalist Movements in Spain

ADVANCING THE COMMONSVERSE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE COMMONS (GUEST EDITORS: H. WAGENAAR & K. BARTELS)

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ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

This article emphasizes the importance of micropolitical and feminist research into the commons, particularly for understanding and developing forms of articulation between the public and the commons. It draws on experiences of autonomist-feminist and municipalist commons in Barcelona, presenting a case study on childcare commoning, based on engaged and situated research conducted between 2015–20. Those years were a lively period of city based commons experimentation that coincides with the first mandate of the municipalist Barcelona en Comú government. Emphasizing feminist and micropolitical understandings for commons research as a matter of going beyond technical visions of commons, based in Spanish and Latin American commons thinking, this text emphasizes the contribution of micropolitics as activist analytical lens that places a focus on knowledge production across social movements and institutions, and on the role of the invisible others of organization. To do so, it analyzes childcare commons through three micropolitical-feminist terms: care, community and resurgence. It points to possible ways of thinking alliances across grassroots and public institutions, as a matter of micropolitical articulation between claims to self-governance and claims to universality, and between autonomy and interdependence. Feminism and micropolitics feature as indispensable lenses for developing lively and lasting commons practices here.

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KEYWORDS:
commons; micropolitics; care; municipalism; feminism; barcelona; community; resurgence

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Zechner, M. (2023). No Commons Without Micropolitics. Learning with Feminist and Municipalist Movements in Spain. *International Journal of the Commons*, 17(1), pp. 447–461. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1232

INTRODUCTION

The following pages articulate feminist micropolitical analysis with the politics of the commons, giving glimpses into phases of micropolitical learning as I have followed it in Spain between 2013–2020.[1] Drawing on Spanish-language commons thought that emerges at the interface of movements and institutions in the first decades of the 2000s, similar to how micropolitical thought emerged at this same intersection after the 1960s, I follow the specifically feminist terms and knowledges created in the context of Spanish commons municipalism after 2014. The continuity of micropolitical and feminist commons thinking and practice here leads me to present a case study of childcare commoning, via the terms *care, community* and *resurgence*, as fields where micropolitical knowledges lead to the invention of commons from below, in tension with public institutions. *Care* refers to the capacity of commons to look after and sustain themselves and their environments, *community* refers to their capacity to build collective subjects and forms of organization, and *resurgence* refers to their capacity to resurface after periods of dormancy, pause or generational change.

For context: following the 15M movement of 2011 that demanded real democracy and an end to austerity and corruption in Spain, occupying squares all over the country, in 2014 a wave of grassroots municipalist candidatures emerged and soon won elections in a considerable number of cities. This has implied vast changes for the political, social and urban landscape. My attempt here, based on engaged research during 2005–20 (Zechner 2021, 2022b) is to offer a micropolitical reading that rethinks the relations between social movements and institutions, traces learning processes and transformations of subjectivity, by way of offering some tools for analysing commons – across the dimensions of autonomy and interdependence. I provide the example of childcare commons in Barcelona as a way to give account of micropolitical knowledge production and feminist challenges to building commons based institutions. This feminist-autonomist perspective on commons builds on theories and practices of social reproduction and care commons, particularly prolific in the Spanish speaking world (Zechner, 2021; Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan and Paredes Chauca, 2018; Gutierrez 2008, 2017, 2017a). This text thus also aims to offer a partial and situated translation, through an analysis of practice as well as some key concepts of this feminist school of commons thinking, of feminist micropolitical commons thinking towards English speaking contexts.

I contribute this paper on the back of my situated and engaged research – as feminist co-researching mother and municipalist activist in Barcelona. These pages give an account of what I have found to be key to lively, open and diverse commons: an attention to micropolitics as the dimension of relational, collective learning. My learning has grown through key impulses from the work on the micropolitics of groups (Vercauteren, Crabbé and Mueller, 2007) and on the role of care and militant research in feminist and activist networks (Precarias a la Deriva, 2003; Casas Cortes 2009; Zechner 2013).

Those grassroots-driven knowledges are less interested in theories of good commons management as articulated from the outside (and thus less grounded in academic debates on commons, from the important work of Ostrom to the racist ideas of Hardin,[2] and beyond), and more intent on narrating and activating commons discourses in relation to specific contexts, through what we may call situated and engaged militant research. As will become clear in my account of childcare commons, this micropolitical approach to commons thinking is steeped in a processual understanding of politics, emphasising singular processes of learning and the formation not just of political subjects or identities but crucially also of subjectivities (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007).

The approach I outline here is an experimental and situated one, where commons cannot be disarticulated from community (Mies, 2014) and care (Vega Solis, Paredes Buchan and Paredes Chauca, 2018). Indeed these terms – care, community, commons – have been key to Spanish language feminist commons debates, which spring from experiences of self-governance rather than policy making, and have been subject to translation into commons policy in municipalist Spain (2015–20 is the period I focus on here). The relation between commons, care and community is a micropolitical matter, meaning it hinges on the fine tuning of relations, protocols, negotiations, synergies, articulations, rhythms, tonalities and imaginaries in collective process. Micropolitics offers no overarching formula, best practice or guiding principles: every commons experience must develop its own rigorous micropolitical learning and knowledge, in order to thrive (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007). This type of commons knowledge crystallizes in accounts, narrations and genealogies more than in best practices.

While micropolitical knowledge does not lend itself to encapsulation in formulas and recipes – key forms of knowledge in institutional governance – it however does very much exist in institutional contexts. Across the dimensions of social movements, grassroots institution building and municipal institutions, micropolitical intelligence a key factor to understanding and enabling commons. As Silke Helfrich points out, there is no single formula for commons, and indeed commons always need to ask: "how do we relate" – an inherently micropolitical question (Helfrich et

al, 2012). My argument here will be that we had better see and grasp micropolitics, as it enables us to build forms of organization and institution that are not only more just, but also more sustainable and ecological. These may be less easy to grasp and replicate than commons formulas (of commons-public partnerships for instance), yet they are key to enabling the kind of processual intelligence needed for commons to persist and transform.

Concretely, this means that commons that are privy to micropolitics can defend their own democratic – and moreover *caretizen* – forms of organization and life. *Caretizen* is a concept that the influential feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva casually contributed to the questioning of subjectivity in politics (Precarias a la Deriva, 2010). In displacing the subject of politics from the autonomous individual male to the interdependent feminized subject, they propose to replace *citizenship* with *caretizenship*, as a way of reformulating the basis of who we consider to be the subjects of democracy (from citizens to caretizens, meaning all the *others* that exist and work to sustain our lives, locally and globally) (Zechner 2016). Here we find the kind sensitivity to non-citizen or migrant realities that a micropolitics of commons and public institutions must imply if it is to be rigorous: a critique of the very limited notion of 'citizens' and institutional democracy. Micropolitics imagines political subjects as based on their relations and collectivities, rather than based on their formal status (citizenship, age, employment status) – it enables us to go beyond the sociological gaze towards redefinitions of subjecthood as connected to (individual as well as collective) subjectivity (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007).

In what follows below, you first find a brief genealogy of micropolitical thinking following on from 1968, then a section on how this thinking is situated within recent Spanish movements of the commons via the lenses of precarity, militant research, feminism, and commons institutions. A further section outlines the micropolitics of commons municipalism via two brief examples: public-commons partnerships and neighbourhood childcare commons in Barcelona. I close this text with reflections on three key dimensions of micropolitical commons thinking – care, community and resurgence – and a series of conclusions.

MICROPOLITICS: SOME GENEALOGY, THEORY AND KEY CONCEPTS

1968 AND AFTER: AGAINST IDEOLOGY, AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHY

Micropolitical analysis is key to understanding social movements and institutions. Hierarchies, dynamics of power and desire, relationships and conflicts, modes of communication and care – understanding these is what makes forms of organization and institution sustainable. 'Micro' here does not merely refer to small scale or to an individual psychological dimension, but to subjective, somatic, affective and relational dimensions that run across the individual and collective dimensions. Felix Guattari, who most prominently shaped the term, insisted that 'The problematics of micropolitics don't involve the level of representation but the level of the production of subjectivity' (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007, 39), whereby crucially subjectivity is not to be understood as a matter of individuals but also of collective agents of enunciation.

Guattari was interested in how micropolitical practices shape desire as well as organizational and institutional cultures. An example of such analysis is the book 'Molecular Revolution in Brasil' by Felix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, which traces conversations and visits to different political groups, unions, and movements in 1982 in Brasil, to analyze 'micro' or 'molecular' dimensions of politics and movement in a dictatorship context (Guattari and Rolnik, 1986/2007). As such, micropolitics implies a series of dimensions beyond the strategic, legal or strictly organizational dimension: such as the (co-)production of subjectivity, desire, collectivity, relationality, care and reproduction, divisions of labour, embodiment and affect. Seen micropolitically, institutionality is a compositional socio-ecological matter, concerning embeddedness and interdependence within larger social and more-than-social systems (Guattari 2000).

Micropolitical analysis – and its sibling institutional analysis (linked closely to antipsychiatry and pedagogy, as in the work of Jean Oury and Fernand Oury, Célestine Freinet and Guattari himself) – emerged in the 1960s, during a time of socio-political upheaval that entailed a push to transform institutions and organisations from below – the 68 revolutions inEurope brought a refusal of party-line, macro-political approaches and posited relationality as key site of politics, but also beyond Europe subversive movements emerged to micropolitically undermine dictatorship regimes such as in Spain or Brasil. Micropolitical struggles set out to overcome traditional politics as linked to authoritarianism, rigid structure, hierarchy and repression – identifying them as a problem not just of the political right but also of parts of the left – as well as to empower social struggles to build better process, and open up to experimentation with new ways of relating and organising. Guattari and Deleuze were concerned with the microfascisms inherent in capitalism and residual in group and institutional culture (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983), leading them to place emphasis on subjectivity rather than ideology.

AFTER THE MILLENIUM: AGAINST NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTIVATION AND GOVERNMENTALITY

While the rejection of ideological politics is no longer as relevant as it was today, in a context of neoliberal fluidity (Holmes 2002, Rolnik 2019), the incipient sensitivity to care, ecology and the post-normative that we find in this early micropolitical thought is today more relevant than ever. Guattari worked in post-psychiatric institutions (Dosse 2011, Guattari 2012) and dwelled on non-prohibitive approaches to otherness and madness: the importance of escaping modernist rationality, the collectivization and democratization of care, as well as the experimental and affective dimensions of politics came to be carried forth into workerist thought (Franco Bifo Berardi, Maurizio Lazaratto, Brian Holmes), feminist thought (Precarias a la Deriva, Rosi Braidotti), decolonial and indigenous thought (Suely Rolnik, Barbara Gloczewski, Ailton Krenak) to mention but a few of its becomings.

Crucially, micropolitics was at the same time taken up by movements. Feminism pushed micropolitical analysis to engage with gendered power and exploitation (Malo de Molina 2007, Casas Cortes 2009). Shifting from a politicization of man as more-than-rational, feminists posited a non-male subject of politics and thus worked the dimension of care work, reproduction and feminist collective care into micropolitics in powerful ways. This work has been very lively in Spain at the beginning of the millenium, in feminist struggles around precarity and care (via the collective Precarias a la Deriva) as well as groups in the UK (the Micropolitics research group), in political collectives in Belgium (see Vercauteren, Crabbé and Mueller, 2007) and beyond (see Zechner, 2013). As such, micropolitical analysis fed into many social movements around the 2010s, amongst them the 15M and commons experimentations in Spain, coming to be incorporated in everyday language and practice of movements.

In this way, and particularly in articulation with feminist claims, micropolitical sensibilities also informed the early institution-building of commons-municipalist candidacies, as we shall see below. A key aspect of this is the attention to forms of relation, communication, knowledge production, affective and care work, community building and situatedness – Spanish municipalisms at this time showed high sensitivity to those when negotiating commons policy and pilot projects with social movements, as well as (though less successfully) in their internal institutional work (Zechner 2021).

This micropolitical commons thinking comes close to the kinds of sensibilities and roles that Helfrich and Bollier propose (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019) and have called *patterns of commoning* (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015 and Mustersprache Commoning Wiki, undated). Their work and vocabulary on togetherness, self-organisation and autonomous caring economies articulates patterns or rules of commoning that are useful both for analysis and practice (in the form of a card game, for instance). Whilst this work on commons, and the necessary ontological shift they imply, shares the micropolitical intelligence referenced in this text, and partakes in overlapping struggles, Bollier and Helfrich's more pattern-oriented work also differs from micropolitical analysis in that the latter focuses less on forms, vocabularies and principles and more on processes, whose narration and analysis emerges from situated and tactical knowledge production processes. This way of thinking commons puts less emphasis on abstracting principles of commons or commoning and works more with the singularity of specific struggles, inserting itself into quasi-oral, activist forms of giving account, tracing processes of becoming and genealogy that function as open histories or working documents (Gutierrez Aguilar 2010).

Micropolitical commons thinking implies working on affects, desires, tensions, contradictions and inventions within a specific tactical field of political tension between the grassroots and the state. A key hypothesis of micropolitical commons thinking is, we may say, that commons are only interesting and effective in so far as they do something specific in relation to social struggles and the state: whether that is defending public infrastructures from privatization or defending commons from the state or market, whether it is challenging governance and power or opening spaces of autonomy for popular resistance and counter-hegemony, escaping control and regulation, etc. Commons that fail to position themselves in this sense remain islands, perhaps utopian but not political in the way micropolitics implies: the 'micro' here does not refer to small or personal but to forms of subversiveness to power that pass through affects, bodies, relations, subjectivity, forms of instituting (see Transversal 2007).

What all these forms and currents in micropolitical thinking have in common is that they all look for other ways of relating, or in different words, of ways of relating to *others* that overcome fear, stereotypes, classes and hierarchies. Therein lies the complicity between micropolitics, feminism, anti-racism and anti-speciesism. There is an ecological sensitivity that already underpinned Guattari's 'Three Ecologies' (1989), where he argues that psychic, social and natural processes must always be seen as intertwined.

Another important precedent and referent of the commons thinking and research that I draw on here lies in recent Latin American movements. A lot can be learned from how movements, political actors and scholar-activists have reflected the tensions and negoations between movements, governments and institutions there. The feminist strand of this current has produced harsh critiques (for striking documents see Galindo and

García Linera, 2014; Galindo and Brunner, 2019) but also shifted attention away from macropolitics by promoting analyses of commons as focused on *community, care and social reproduction* (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan and Paredes Chauca, 2018, Federici 2004, Gutierrez Aguilar 2008). Those theoretical-political currents are rich sources of micropolitical knowledge as they reflect processes and situated knowledges of commons-building, steeped in care, community and resurgence.

These feminist commons politics deal with the political field of tension that commons are set within: between the private and the public, the state and the market, but also the communitarian and the institutional. They don't try to be descriptive or normative, rather they are situated and partisan (Haraway 1988). Their loci of knowledge production lie between the spaces of movements, the streets and public sphere more broadly, touching upon the institutions of the state and questions of public institutions (more so than in the academy). In this they resemble the constellations within which micropolitical thinking emerged in the 1960s and beyond. Having briefly traced some of the key genealogies and concepts of a micropolitics of the commons, let me now give more context about the concrete genalogy of Spanish commons movements.

COMMONS MOVEMENTS IN SPAIN: AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE IN RESONANT TENSION

A BRIEF MOVEMENT GENEALOGY

Spanish commons movements have their base in autonomous movements of the 2000s, where right-to-the-city movements, occupied social centres and anti-copyright hacking and what was then called *procomún* counterculture (pro-commons, literally) provided a strong frame for a radical politics of the commons. Autonomist movements in Spain had been the first to introduce the horizon of the commons via the notion and practice of a new type of social center as 'institutions of the commons,' a political practice and vision of institutions that care for all those excluded from citizens or unwilling to fit the template of the 'normal' citizen as wage-labouring, consuming, middle-class aspiring and nationally proud subject. Occupied social centres functioned (and still function) as commons institutions that harboured migrant cantines, feminist and queer/trans groups, undocumented people's self-employment projects, hacker spaces, and other groups that refused or were excluded from the trinity of citizenship, property and wage labour. Those commons institutions initially inspired municipalism, with radical councilors setting out to make public institutions more accessible and open to all those traditionally excluded subjects of liberal democracy (in a spirit of undercommons, see Harney and Moten, 2013).

Taken up and subverted by feminists some years later, complicating but not refusing the horizon of autonomy, commons came to be articulated with feminised precarity, care and social reproduction (Precarias a la Deriva, 2003; Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan and Paredes Chauca, 2018). As a feminist revolution came into full swing during the 2010 decade, it moved from pro-choice and anti-austerity to radical motherhood and care commons, to the fight against sexual violence and femicide, always in synergy with movements to defend public healthcare, education, and social rights for all. The powerful feminist turn affected every dimension of life, and raised a generation of women with a strong consciousness of the importance of care and interdependence. Feminist economics and the politics of care provided a strong analytical frame that emphasised the sustainability of life (Pérez Orozco, 2022) and vulnerability (Gil, 2011) as matters we all have in common. In the air was an affirmation of struggling for autonomous infrastructures (as commons) and public provision (as institutions) at the same time, refusing any binary or opposition between public and commons.

The time was ripe for reconfiguring political imaginaries in favour of transforming institutions, changing cities and towns, commoning governance. This is, in a nutshell (for more detailed accounts see for instance Rubio Pueyo 2017, Zechner 2021), the background to the commons based municipalist candidacies that emerged across Spain in 2014, leading many of those newly formed parties into political office. It is important to note that the idea of movement-institutions – later often termed 'institutions of the commons' (Radio Reina Sofia, 2011) – informed the municipalist turn towards re-making institutions from below, based on the claim that institutions and cities could be for everyone: municipalism thus in good part emerges out of an imaginary of grassroots institutions. Inevitably, with elections and time in office, municipalist politics came to turn from the principle of radical transversality, based in an affirmation of the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004), to a more populist interpellation of the people as a unitary subject, involving interpellations of 'citizens' that let go some of those *others* of their former movement micropolitics. Rather than present a story of failure here however, I wish to give an account of ways of struggling for autonomy and interdependence at the same time, for building strength from vulnerability and care, as a matter of micropolitical rigor.

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO THE RELATION BETWEEN MOVEMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Vulnerability is, as we again learn from feminists, the core of our common condition, what often opens doors

to other possibilities, and as such something we must connect to (Zechner, 2022a). I've shown how, in commons municipalism in Spain, different feminist tendencies compete as well as mix, when it comes to the politics of care and interdependence. The relation between movements and institutions is not a peripheral or anecdotal matter to political projects like those of municipalism. Rather, it lies at the very core of their possibility of existence. Following the mixed lineage of autonomous and feminist movements, municipalist instantiations of commons institutions rely on what we might at times identify as three distinct currents:

1) autonomous-feminist politics – as in the work of Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar or Silvia Federici, see also Galindo and García-Linera (2014) and Lugano and Gutiérrez (2016)
2) an ethics and politics of care within and beyond the institution (Pérez and Salvini-Ramas, 2019; Tronto, 1994; also found in different strands of institutional analysis in the work of Fernand Deligny, Jean Oury, Félix Guattari, Franco Basaglia)
3) a feminization of politics (Roth & Shea Baird 2017a; 2017b) that seeks to make institutional politics more inclusive (Institut Diversitas and Barcelona en Comú, 2018).

These currents often mixed, mashed and clashed in recent Spanish municipalism, producing fresh tensions and new articulations between the politics of autonomy and heteronomy (Zechner, 2021). They are tendencies, not positionalities strictly speaking, that a person or group can adopt any of these approaches at different times.

The new municipalism that arose in Barcelona would have been impossible without all this feminist groundwork. Not just because it strongly hinges on Ada Colau as a leading figure and on a range of radical women councilors that have done incessant educational and consciousness-raising work amongst their male colleagues as well as the general population, but also because the very concept of the commons that the municipalist movements started from had already been strongly influenced by feminist movements and struggles around social reproduction, in Spain and beyond. The post-15M social movements would never have endorsed a municipalism that were not at the level of its claims for another modality of social care, one that matched the modes of listening, caring and commoning of the squares and neighborhoods.

To shed light on learning and subjectivity formation across grassroots movement and public institutions, we must dwell on experiences and lessons articulated from within institutions as well as within movements, focusing particularly on the labors and lives that connect them. One of the core expressions of intelligence of municipalisms during this time was the notion that learning must happen across these levels. Lawyer and politician Jaume Asens put it simply in 2016 'Social Movements have certain limits, institutions have others' (Barcelona en Comú, 2017). Social centre activist Kike España Naveira put it this way: 'The problems of representation are well known and detestable, so is the ingeniousness of certain forms of horizontal organization that leave many things out and sometimes look inward too much' (España Naveira, 2019; my translation from Spanish). In the early years of municipalism, 'movement' and 'institution' were both seen as sites of struggle, constituting the poles of a tension that could bring forth new political forms and practices (see Barcelona en Comú, 2017).

SOME METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MICROPOLITICAL COMMONS RESEARCH

How to research micropolitics? Many situated, engaged, participatory action and co-research methodologies lend themselves to fostering micropolitical analysis. Key amongst them is militant research, a co-research practice emerged at a similar time and context (autonomist-experimental movements of the 1970s in Italy, France in particular; workers' inquiries and co-research, see Viewpoint Magazine, 2013) as micropolitical thinking. It saw a second wave of development in the context of precarity movements in Italy, Spain, Portugal and France at the turn of the millenium, as well as in subsequent feminist and autonomist contexts in Spain and Argentina (Precarias a la Deriva, Colectivo Situaciones). In this trajectory, the meaning of 'militant' shifts from the original figure of the male factory worker to the precarious, flexibilized worker on to the feminized, sexualized and care worker (Malo de Molina, 2007) as well as to the dissident subjects of socio-economic crisis (Colectivo Situaciones). The role of experience and the production of desire and subjectivity are central in these militant research processes.

Micropolitical production of knowledge is necessarily situated (Matheney, Garcia-Lamarca, Calderón-Argelich, Alfandari, Papillon 2023), hence the case study I will share here is one I have a deep first person (in the singular and plural) understanding of. It draws on at least four years (2016–20) of co-research as mother and feminist activist in a neighbourhood in Barcelona, as well as drawing on my experiences as active part of early municipalist movements and Barcelona en Comú in particular. Situated in a concrete place and singular time of political experimentation, my research aims to give account of learning processes, contradictions, tensions and synergies that may inspire. In what follows I give some more detail on the specific socio-political context my work on childcare commons and the micropolitics of municipalism stems from, how it sits within

broader municipalist commons experimentation, and what its key micropolitical traits are as seen through the lenses of three concepts: care, community and resurgence.

MUNICIPALIST COMMONS

SELF-MANAGED NEIGHBORHOOD SPACES AND PUBLIC-COMMONS PARTNERSHIPS

There is a lot to learn from the municipalism that started in Spain after 2014, micropolitically speaking. A vast collective project of experimentation and learning, it has engaged the lives and labors of tens of thousands of people from neighbourhoods, social movements and institutions in Barcelona and beyond (Rubio Puyeo, 2017). When municipalist candidacies were born out of social movements in 2014, there was a hypothesis of bringing the commons into city politics in a major way – in Barcelona they set themselves the hurdle of gathering 30.000 signatures of support in order to really run for the elections. Many people in social movements shared an assessment of the urgency of seizing the moment to propose an electoral political struggle over resources, to attempt institutional transformation, and a wager was made to run for elections. With all its difficulties, these grassroots candidacies set out to combine the force of struggles with 'the force of manoeuvres' (Lugano and Gutierrez, 2014) in the political domain.

In international commons movements and research, this municipalism is often praised and analysed via the concept of 'public-commons partnerships' (Milburn and Russel, 2019; Russel, Milburn and Heron 2022). This has implied a refiguring of notions and models of participation, and reimagining the range of possible articulations across the commons and the public (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2019a). It consists of grassroots, ongoing and collective modalities of participation – as modalities of cooperation and partnership, and indeed these terms are more appropriate for our descriptions – between movements and institutions. In Barcelona, where it has been most successful, this concerns the local collective governance of neighbourhood spaces like Can Battló, Ateneu9Barris, or Calabria 66, as spaces of building community and commoning politics.

The key to this approach is enabling a co-governance and use of spaces that operates by its community's own logic and laws, those of autonomous or neighborhood movements, but cooperates with the city administration on accountability (in the framework of Patrimoni Ciutada, see La Hidra Cooperativa, 2021), health and safety, accessibility and similar matters. This can mean 'public socio-cultural centers that operate on the basis of the model of community management' (Ateneu 9 Barris), publicly funded but 'an infrastructure [equipamiento] of citizen management that is not run by an intermediary administration or company, but administered via neighborhood debate and decisions' (Calàbria 66), a 'neighborhood self-managed space' (Can Battló).

Public-commons partnerships, contrary to the public-private partnerships of the neoliberal era, which can essentially be understood as enclosures of the public by the private, should open onto new circuits of collective ownership that extend and ground the commons by articulating them with the public system. Grassroots activists as well as municipalists at different levels recognize that the public as well as the commons need to be defended, strengthened and articulated; that they must not be pitted against one another in competition; that great political strength and power comes from articulating these two dimensions. In what follows, I will give an account of attempts to work towards such partnerships in the domain of childcare commoning, a sphere of work and politics often underrepresented and misconceived in patriarchal notions of activism and governance. This is not a success story, but an account of the processes, efforts, contradictions, tensions and alliances that underpin the making of any articulation of the commons with the public. In micropolitical and feminist terms, it is a very rich example, one that eschews the production of formulas or recipes but engages complex questions any struggle to partner the commons with the public must face.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHILDCARE COMMONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING FEMINIST INSTITUTIONS

Childcare commons: I prioritise this field of commons organization as a feminist and mother, to counter the association of childcare with 'unpolitical' domestic matters and render this most vital dimension of commoning visible, and also as embedded researcher engaged in micropolitical knowledge production on the governance of childcare commons (Zechner 2022b). There is a lot to learn from mothers self-organising childcare, building temporal and spatial commons for childcare to happen and be reinvented, questioned, politicized. The organization of care and the practice of childrearing and education are key spheres that commons have all too rarely been associated with – this is something that Spanish feminist movements, often in dialogue with rising municipalism, set out to counter (Keller-Garganté 2015, Ezquerra 2013, Nociones Comunes 2013). How are commons to allow us to socially reproduce ourselves differently, if they don't think about how we reproduce human life and bring children into community?

When it comes to care and education, the public and the commons make for powerful alliances. In the neighbourhood of Poble Sec, there is a public healthcare centre that locals are assigned to. Pregnant women go there for pre- and post-partum care, to have midwives accompany them. Within this public model of healthcare, feminist midwives run pre- and post-partum classes that encourage mothers to self-organise, network and exchange. Such midwives, like the midwife Pepi in the case of Poble Sec, silently and rather invisibly operate within public institutions to create lively and rich models of care that reach into neighbourhoods and create their own infrastructures, networks, communities. From Pepi's classes, a new generation of parents – the vast majority mothers – springs every 8–12 months, forming chat groups that extend the pre/post-partum classes into an ongoing collective conversation, into neighbourhood encounters, buggy walks, playground dates, mutual aid, childcare rotas and general debate. 200+ messages a day, anything from green vomit to nappy giveaways to welfare cuts to special sales to good reads to whatever else you can imagine. Those webs generate vital encounters as parents – mostly mothers – meet up to escape loneliness, boredom, insecurity, and indeed also patriarchy and other tricky familial relations within and beyond the home.

From those encounters, different forms of commoning care are born: can you watch my baby as I do that job interview call? Can our kids play at yours while I run to the doctor? All this, we can call childcare commoning, a form of feminist commoning that in the act also commons self-care. But there is more: as mother's systematize the sharing of their kids care, making rotas and regular dates, they often begin to generate institutions, their own common institutions. In a context of precarity, patriarchy and austerity, such sharing of care can be vital: because Ana can't afford a babysitter, because Vivi's kid didn't get a place in the public nursery (in 2022, only 60% of families who sought a place in public 'Bressol' nurseries could be offered a place [Baraza 2022]), because Alba lost her job, because Leila has no family support whatsoever, because Efi has postpartum depression. When those emergent institutions stabilize and become more formal, they are called 'Grupos de crianza compartida': self-organised nurseries basically. In the face of a shortage of public nursery places and in a context of grassroots movements rethinking childcare and education starting from the 15M movement of 2011 (Zechner, 2021; Keller-Garganté, 2015), many more such groups emerged, with Poble Sec featuring between 7–9 of them at different moments between 2015–20.

These self-organized nurseries participated actively in political life: in feminist and anti-austerity protests (forming baby blocs), in solidarity actions against evictions or local solidarity economies. After 2015, they were also entwined with municipalist movements as many parents were either activists or had voted for Barcelona en Comú. There wasn't much talk of public-commons partnerships but there was an acute sense of having to reinvent institutions, to democratize and enliven public education as well as foster commons based institutions. The ongoing process of experimentation and negotiation around spaces like Can Battló was known in self-organized spaces across the city (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2019b; Eroles 2011). So in 2016, different groups in Poble Sec formed a network (names PEPI, Plataforma de Educació I Participació dels Infants, in reference to Pepi the midwife), in order to negotiate the right to use spaces for their activities with the Barcelona en Comú city government. This could lower their costs – as they were entirely self-funded, running on a mix of unpaid labour of parents doing rotas as carers, and paid labour of professional educators, renting shopfront type spaces. Could municipalities cover parts of their costs – labour, rent, running costs – or maybe cede spaces to them for use?

Over several years, PEPI had discussions and meetings – both formal and informal – with neighbourhood and district councillors about this. In the end, as of yet, no solution was reached as different parts of Barcelona en Comú couldn't agree on whether and how to fund grupos de crianza compartida. The municipalist feminists found these projects too reliant on women's labour still, not sufficiently subversive of the patriarchal order; the education department will not conceive of destining money to commons projects until the public system is properly funded; the solution was most likely to be found in solidarity economy related programmes. But contradictions weighed too heavy to create a consensus or solution, as those commons projects were mostly populated by (higher) educated, (lower) middle class, (more or less) white families. The claim to universality that accompanies public institutions is not met in common's project like these. Whilst we are perhaps used to imagining improvements in the public system based on commons experiences, indeed looking at commons from the viewpoint of public can also reveal many interesting contradictions and limitations (for more detail on all the above, see Zechner 2021, 2022).

In the grupos de crianza compartida, we see intersections of different aspects of the becoming-feminist of politics, as concerning the politicization of care (Pérez Orozco 2022) and the imagination of feminist commons institutions (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan and Paredes Chauca, 2018). We find autonomous feminist politics of reproduction, the question of an ethics of care within and beyond institutions, and a claim to a 'feminization' of politics in the sense of women making public policy and decisions, setting

institutional agendas. How may we analyze this kind of process micropolitically?

THREE CONCEPTS FOR MICROPOLITICAL ANALYSIS: CARE, COMMUNITY AND RESURGENCE

COMMONS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: CARE AS AN OPERATIVE CONCEPT

Social movements play a vital role in enabling, accompanying and inhabiting municipalist commons-based formulas of public policies. The chains of connection and interdependence that mark the conditions of possibility of such commons-making processes run deep into the histories and infrastructures of social movements, tapping their knowledges in ways that don't coopt grassroots knowledges and practices but value them in their autonomy. Making commons policy based on micropolitical understanding entails a recognition of interdependence across movements and institutions: municipalist governments needing institutions in order to be able to legitimise and properly develop radically democratic *caretizen* politics and policies, and commoners and activists needing responsive politicians and administrators to make their demands heard.

This requires at least two kinds of political sensitivity and openness to *others*. On the one hand, it requires translators, intermediaries and mediators across these realities, figures and processes that enable negotiations and shifts in discourse and subjectivity. In the case of the grupos de crianza, that's parents, educators and councilors who reach out beyond their own remit, often because they inhabit several roles at once: councillors who have their kids in grupos de crianza and translate information between these two realities, parents active within municipalist movements, educators who foster parent self-organization or build networks between nurseries... This kind of micropolitical labour – often entirely unrecognized, invisible to the public eye and indeed often also to parts of the parties concerned – is what enabled the success of the Barcelona commons models described above: people who refused to take sides or take on formal roles, act as points of contact and debate across movements and institutions in public fora, echo and channel contradictions as well as proposals, etc.

On the other hand, micropolitical and care-based openness to others also requires a subjective shift within politics, away from the idea of citizens towards an inclusion of all those *others* who labour to reproduce cities and their people and spaces. So many of those performing crucial care in our societies are not citizens, but what we may call *caretizens*, people with essential roles but without passports of residency permits. Carers, cleaners, nurses, maintenance and delivery workers, garbage collectors are not seen as lowly and uninformed people but as agents of knowledge and skills, experts in their fields and vital to the reproduction of society. Letting those invisibilzed and undervalued *others* into institutions requires not only forms of openness and desiring production, but also ways of speaking different languages and dialects, valorizing different kinds of knowledge and body, learning from the forms of communication and organisation that different communities work with.

Thanks to the feminist underpinnings of Barcelona en Comú, this interdependence across the commons and the public can be affirmed and accepted as a matter of strength rather than weakness – no more illusions of sovereign political subjects but rather an intelligent articulation across interdependence and autonomy. Care workers of all kinds can be recognized and valued for their work, with migrant care worker's organizations leading the way in their demands – something that municipal institutions are now no longer in denial of in Barcelona, with the 'Caring City' policy that features care workers centres (Barcelona Cuida) and care worker's cards (targeta cuidadora). In education, traditionally, it's children who are the others, a notion that childcare commons as much as municipal policies like the City of Play (Ciutat Jugable) contest, putting children and their families at the heart of the design of learning, growing up and of the city. This micropolitical shift profoundly transforms what institutions and governments are and do, shifting away from the idea that public systems cater to uninformed people needing help, to valorizing and empowering the labours, lives and knowledges of those who reproduce everyday life as well as those who receive care (Zechner 2021).

COMMUNITY AND INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE COMMONS

Grupos de Crianza compartida are first and foremost community spaces and actors, as spaces that generate relations and community and occupy an important role within neighbourhoods, and can get organized to have a voice in local debates (like the PEPI network). Community is rendered operative and rich through a series of dispositifs (tools, configurations) and infrastructures of the commons. For Spanish language commons movements, the emphasis on community often comes via Latin America (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan and Paredes Chauca, 2018; Gutierrez Aguilar 2017). As Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar puts it, learning from indigenous epistemologies:

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

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

Commoning is about relating as much as it is about material resources –the assembly and the fiesta are key platforms for the circulation of affects and development of relations and organizational strength. In this sense, commons are about 'putting life at the center' of our activities (a key phrase of the Spanish-speaking feminist movements, see Pérez Orozco 2022), which hinges on radical collective care and the capacity for doing situated politics. Its materiality and relationality are specific to time and place, and as such any theory or politics of the commons must work through situated methodologies. It must be able to read the importance of practices, of rituals, of relations, rhythms and forms of collective practice, of ways of weaving community [*tramas comunitarias*] as Gutiérrez Aguilar, Gago, Gil and many other theorists call it. Needless to say that the role of women in these communitarian weavings is crucial, as is their role in the subversion of community (Dalla Costa and James, 1972).

In this view, commons are not just resources, but they are matters of relation, work and organization in a necessary sense: no commons without relations, processes of (re) production and organization of commoning, or in the words of feminist Maria Mies, 'no commons without a community' (Mies, 2014). The question of work –visible or invisible, reproductive or productive, communal or individual, paid or unpaid, etc. – in this sense is key to thinking commons, to avoid mystifying them. Their material conditions and bases, and the resilience of relational, micropolitical and communitarian fabrics and weavings, is what conditions the resurgence of commons, their capacity to revive.

RESURGENCE: PASSING ON MEMORY AND CULTURE

As Stengers and Gutwirth (2016) point out, self-organizational human commons (as opposed to natural commons such as land, water, forests, etc.) are by nature resurgent. They emerge, transform, collapse, reemerge and reconfigure themselves over time and across generations. They require our constant labors and attention in order to sustain themselves. To survive, both natural and social commons need to resist enclosure and construct memory, resilience and continuity – making 'humus' or compost, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa calls this commons-piling on of living and dead matter and of memory (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015).

As commons with a strong generational element, instances like childcare cooperatives (Zechner, 2022b) as well as municipalist platforms depend a lot on knowledges and practices of memory and resurgence. Their possibilities of existence and sustainability rest on the capacity of a group of people to set their own rules and to adapt to changing internal and external challenges, to produce and sustain living knowledges *across generations* (see also Vercauteren, Crabbé and Muller, 2007; Bartels, 2022). The generational transfer or knowledges, experiences, memory, as part of 'common cultures' (Stengers and Gutwirth, 2016, p.27) or 'écoliteratie' (Capra and Mattei, 2015) are key to most commoning. In the case of self-run nurseries, this presents itself as challenge to pass knowledges, practices and cultures of care on, as kids (and with them their families) grow out of the nurseries and into schools (cross-institutional transfer, from commons into public schools, being another key element here). In the case of municipalism, it presents itself as an immense challenge for the first activist generation that built Barcelona en Comú, who have to avoid getting stuck in professionalized roles and hierarchies of knowledge (their own ethics code prescribes rotation after two terms in office), to bring new people into the project continually and transmit memory and knowledge while also allowing for reinvention.

Commons build up an immense wealth of knowledge for those involved in them, yet their ceasing can often mean this knowledge is lost, leading to groups having to "reinvent the wheel" over and over again. Not all commons must last, but their knowledges of histories, processes and failures need to find a way to live on in communities and infrastructures, to enable powerful resurgence. As Félix Guattari put it, *groups need to know how to die* (Guattari, 2003) – and as members of the Collectif sans Tiquet put it in their book on the Micropolitics of Groups, (Vercauteren, Müller and Crabbé, 2007), groups also need to foster a *culture of precedents*. Those two eminently micropolitical challenges require an openness to transformation that also honors its memories and elders. This is a crucial concern in studies of commoning, particularly those that deal with the *others* of organization (or the supposedly *unorganizable*, as some put it (Milkman 2006, Kim 2015) – migrants, women, undocumented and informal workers, mad people, the ill, children): how to give account of, give concepts to, remember and transmit the experiences and knowledges gained, so that they can benefit future generations, nourish a sense of history, identity, tradition and belonging. Childcare commoning is a privileged space for this as it builds not only its own processual knowledge – carried forth by collective agents like PEPI and different chroniclers (Keller Garganté 2015, Rodrigo and Iberika 2020, Zechner

2021) – but it's also where future generations can first encounter cultures of community and commoning.

CONCLUSIONS

I started this text with questions about the relevance of micropolitics for understanding commons – and by extension commons municipalism. My guiding lines for this questioning came from the situated and transversal insights of militant research, building on the Spinozist question of the *capacities to act* that micropolitical knowledges can confer upon us. Following Guattari and Deleuze, I emphasised how the production of subjectivity across the grassroots and institutional dimensions of commons can come to make a difference, producing new common knowledges, referents, positionalities: new possibilities of being, speaking and doing. Municipalism in Barcelona has shown, in my view, that transforming public institutions is possible (much more so than transforming the political system in sweeping ways) and necessary, and that the commons and the public are not two opposed principles but that as matters that concern *all*, and often ought to be articulated. Though we must always evaluate what's possible and desirable in a given situation, overall we must not demand any less than that.

Care, *community* and *resurgence* have been three of the key lenses through which I have proposed to read the micropolitics of commons, as pillars for understanding what makes commons sustainable at a relational and collective level. Often overlooked and underestimated, those three dimensions point to the ways in which bodies and lives are sustained (care), in which collectivity and its infrastructures matter for commons (community), and in which commons last and reinvent themselves through time (resurgence). Those make for long and textured stories and genealogies of the commons, rather than just anecdotal or insular examples, or technical-organisational analyses and recipes. I have taken inspiration, in my genealogy-rich narrations here, in Latin American commons, which tend to valorize these dimensions of *liveliness*, *collectivity* and *memory* over more formalist accounts.

This way of paying attention to commons is what I have called micropolitical. Micropolitical knowledge, irreducible to a set of principles or hypotheses, challenge us to lean into complexity and struggle. While micropolitical learning may involve study, I have shown how it is mostly a matter of embodied, relational, inhabitational, organizational and associative intelligences (Rübner-Hansen and Zechner, 2015) – wherein the importance of listening, feeling, sensing and affect do not diminish the capacity to distinguish, criticize, reject. Understanding the interplay between dynamics of autonomy and interdependence as a fruitful and vital part of micropolitics, I have emphasised the importance of feminist knowledges and practices. I have written up these lessons on micropolitics in an attempt to show how commons can not do without care, relational intelligence and an openness to others.

Vibrant commons, just like public institutions, are always traversed by these others, and their capacity to enter into relation with them is an important marker of their collective health and openness. As a political-analytical lens, micropolitics comes, as I remembered at the outset of this paper, from the radical desire to transform institutions, to let in the madmen, mad women, the strangers, dreamers and irregulars. Not those who lay claim to truth or totality, but those who render visible all the blind spots in productivist and andocentric narratives, and expose the cracks of seeing, feeling, being and relating, making incompleteness and vulnerability palpable. Vulnerability is, as we again learn from feminists, the core of our common condition, what often opens doors to other possibilities, and as such something we must connect to (Zechner, 2022a). The invisibility and undervaluing of care and reproduction are not a must, feminist municipalism also shows, and as different feminist tendencies clash as well as mix in this context, theirs is a quest for justice and synergies, rather than hegemony. As such they are quintessentially micropolitical.

We have seen that the relation between movements and institutions was a core political matter for recent Spanish municipalism. This relation matters not because of a moral imperative or tactical electoral calculus, but because it is a condition for the capacity of an antagonistic, anticapitalist politics, and thus of a radical democratization along lines of class, race, gender, and so on. Some key lessons here: it matters not just that institutions listen to movements but also that they do not coopt or paralyze them. It matters that movements know how to confront institutions and make demands not just so that they achieve wins, but also affirm their autonomy. It matters that institutions and movements -as agents of the public and the commons- can see and inhabit their interdependence with one another, and invent new political horizons from there, direly needed after the destruction of the welfare state and the subsequent rise of neoliberal individualism and nationalist racism. Any new 'social contract' today must build on both commons and the public, on both autonomy and heteronomy as principles, and on *caretizenship*. Indeed, as I have suggested, these should be key terms when thinking about the commons. Too much time has been spent trying to show their tragedy and immunity respectively, with little attention given to the ways in which commons always necessarily involve both tendencies of interdependence and autonomy.

Finally, I have pointed to subjectivity as key sphere within which the above plays out. Feminism and municipalism can affect relationality and subjectivities within institutions, parties, movements as well as in everyday life, in ways whereby subjectivity, rather than ideology (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007), is what most profoundly and durably shapes social and political cultures. We cannot think transformation without thinking subjectivity, and micropolitics is a vehicle for that. Micropolitics leads us to think the rhythms, structures, patterns, temporalities, tonalities and textures of the political. For municipalism, this has meant challenges such as the individualization of responsibility as well as professionalization in institutions and parties, or the meaninglessness of participation when it is reduced to a formula. Public-commons governance shows itself to be a matter of experimentation, openness and listening, as then-councillor Claudia Delso of A Coruña said:

> These projects [of co-designing policy and spaces] helped us to listen. They contributed to the learning process of the institution, a machine designed to prevent change. After all, the institution can also learn, and we have learned to allow the institutions (and ourselves) to experiment, to change how things are done and also to make mistakes. Nobody can expect to know or control everything (Delso and Traviesas Mendez, 2019).

In this sense, commoning, and instances of commons municipalism, can be traced as processes of confronting the ghosts of individualism, paternalism, competition, supremacy, racism, sexism, and other -isms that we all have internalized. To realize that no one can expect to know and control everything, but rather thinks and speaks from an embodied and situated place, implies a radical recognition of limits (Kallis, 2019) and vulnerability (Pérez Orozco 2022; Gil, 2011). Two facts that we as humans and societies have to urgently live up to, in the face of rampant capitalism and neoliberalist exploitation, and its twin climate and ecological breakdown.

NOTES

1 Amongst other things, this article draws on research done in the context of the Heteropolitics research project on commons (heteropolitics.net), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement 724692).

2 Garrett Hardin's notion of 'lifeboat ethics' is deeply Mathusian, suggesting our contemporary crises are due to overpopulation (by implication, black and brown people in the global South) rather than extractivist-toxic capitalism and global injustice (that favour white people). Hardin's argument, that there are limited spaces on our rich nation's lifeboats and that we shouldn't help 'the poor', is a favourite of eco-fascist argumentation. See also Kallis, 2019.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I remain deeply grateful to all my co-researchers and fellow activists who accompanied the initial research this text draws on. From the mamas of Poble Sec to the people working for transformative commons within and beyond Barcelona en Comú, to Alexandros Kioupkiolis of the Heteropolitics research project, via my long term fellow traveller Bue Rübner Hansen, to ex-councillor and avid thinker-feeler Claudia Delso, and so on. All of the intuitions and conclusions above are nourished by collective intelligence, debate, process, organizing and care – there would be little to report without these.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Amongst other things, this article draws on research done in the context of the Heteropolitics research project on commons (heteropolitics.net), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement 724692).

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Zechner, M. (2023). No Commons Without Micropolitics. Learning with Feminist and Municipalist Movements in Spain. *International Journal of the Commons*, 17(1), pp. 447–461. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1232

Submitted: 03 November 2022 **Accepted:** 15 November 2023 **Published:** 20 December 2023