Gendering citizenship education. Feminist-relational approaches on political education

Género y educación ciudadana. Enfoques feministas-relacionales en la educación política

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Abstract

Questioning gender – by understanding that questions about gender are political - is one of the core implications of feminist epistemologies. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to how a gender perspective can question some dominant framings on citizenship education, and to discuss different ways in which feminist theory can help us to democratise political education practice. We begin by conceptualising politics as a relational practice, a place "in-between", in which power is understood as concrete embodied actions, and the personal is recognized as political. We then examine three key notions associated with political education: citizenship, participation, and rights through the lens of feminist-relational theory, we question their possible shortcomings and identify political education paradigms that enable not only critical understanding, but also transgression. We conclude suggesting ways in which feminist-relational theory can help us to reconsider political education, further democratising who we care for, what we care for and how we care.

Key words: political education; citizenship education; gender perspective; feminist epistemology.

Resumen

Cuestionar el género, al comprender que las preguntas sobre el género son políticas, es una de las implicaciones centrales de las epistemologías feministas. El propósito de este artículo es

llamar la atención sobre cómo una perspectiva de género puede cuestionar algunos marcos dominantes sobre la educación ciudadana y discutir diferentes formas en que la teoría feminista puede ayudarnos a democratizar la práctica de la educación política. Comenzamos por conceptualizar la política como una práctica relacional, un lugar "en medio", en el que el poder se entiende como acciones concretas encarnadas, y lo personal se reconoce como político. Luego examinamos tres nociones clave asociadas con la educación política: ciudadanía, participación y derechos a través de la lente de la teoría feminista-relacional, cuestionamos sus posibles deficiencias e identificamos paradigmas de educación política que permiten no solo la comprensión crítica, sino también la transgresión. Concluimos sugiriendo formas en que la teoría feminista-relacional puede ayudarnos a reconsiderar la educación política, democratizando aún más a quiénes cuidamos, qué cuidamos y cómo cuidamos.

Palabras clave: educación política; educación para la ciudadanía; perspectiva de género; epistemología feminista.

1.   Introduction

In November 2019, streets and squares around the world were filled with the claim from the Chilean feminist collective Lastesis: "El estado opresor es un macho violador[1] ". In contrast with other contemporary feminist protests, such as the *#metoo* movement, Lastesis were explicitly gendering the state. On the contrary, some right-wing parties in Spain have been standing against policies gendering violence: "violence has no gender", they argue. Does it make sense, to gender violence? To gender the state?

Questioning gender in any field – by understanding that questions about gender are political (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999)- is one of the core implications of feminist epistemologies. It is also an uncomfortable one, as it troubles many social and scientific assumptions. A gender perspective calls into question not only official knowledge and its epistemological foundations, but also the social, political, and institutional relations that we experience in our everyday reality as citizens. It challenges us personally and professionally (Díez-Bedmar, 2022). As Arnot and Dillabough argue (1999, p.163), feminist perspectives have "challenged the core of our understanding of citizenship and civic sphere".

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to how a gender perspective questions some dominant framings on citizenship education, and to discuss different ways in which a range of feminist theories can help us to democratise political education practice. When using the term "gender perspective", we stand from its intersectional projections (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; McCall, 2005), which enable us to locate power within diversity, and diversity within power (Massip & Castellví, 2019). Intersectional theories from black feminism pluralise gender categories by stablishing connections between social relations and individual identities (García-Peña, 2016; Mc Call, 2005; Rodó-Zárate, 2021).

We begin by conceptualising politics as a relational practice. We then examine three key notions associated with political education (i.e. citizenship, participation, and rights) through the lens of feminist-relational theory. We conclude suggesting ways in which feminist-relational theory can help us to reconsider political education, further democratising who we care for, what we care for and how we care.

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[1] The oppressive state is a rapist macho

2.   The relational nature of politics

Being in the world is being in the world with others (Levinas, 1989). Existing is appearing to others, being hosted in a world where each subject uniquely links a set of social, cultural, and affective relations (Garcés, 2020). As Biesta (2006) puts it, subjectification requires action and being-with-others.

Debates on the political literature often focus on discussing normative ideals or the institutional arrangements. However, a range of authors (e.g. Butler, 2009; Hooks, 2003; Honig, 2017) have emphasised the relational nature of politics which is overlooked by traditional debates on the nature of politics. Feminist analysis of the work of Hannah Arendt, for example, define politics as the space in-between us (Honig, 2017). Canovan (1985), for instance, explained,

> Following Arendt's approach, the individuals concerned do not need to be similar in themselves — of common blood, for instance. Neither do they need to be thought of as parts of some kind of superhuman organic whole. Instead, they can be united (…) by the world which lies between them. (…) It is the space between them that unites them, rather than some quality inside each of them (p. 634)

The way we conceptualise power strongly conditions our political understandings. If we take post-structural framings as starting point, power is not abstract, but emerges from the concrete actions throw which it gets materialized: "power exists only when it is put into action" (Foucault, 1982, p. 788). Power is embodied (Fernández-Martorell, 2018; Hawkesworth, 2016) and power relations are complex, dialectical, situated, and unavoidable. In Spain, young women are more politically mobilized than men (Injuve, 2021). Nevertheless, they disappear from all spheres of political participation, whether institutional or non-institutional, when becoming mothers (Escribano y Balibrea, 1999; García-Albacete, 2021; Injuve, 2021). From our point of view, this challenges some key concepts on political education. Sexuality and gender need to be analysed from these articulated powers (Butler, 2009; Foucault, 1976).

Power, and therefore politics, cannot be understood without considering how norms, roles and oppressions are reproduced through symbols, experiences, and social relations. Power is unavoidable, every action and every relation "between partners, individual or collective" (Foucault, 1982, p. 788) involves power. If one cannot walk alone the streets because of being a woman and she is afraid of being raped or killed, streets are no public spaces. If are denied the possibility of renting because you are black, gipsy, or poor, housing is not a right even if it is institutionally recognised. If a child is systematically bullied because of their companions' homophobic harassment, education is not a guaranteed right. This is, all interactions are political or the "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969/2006). The private/public dichotomy and its traditional public-political identification is in itself a political construct. As Judith Butler wrote:

> my pain or my silence or my anger or my perception is finally not mine alone, and that it delimits me in a shared cultural situation which in turn enables and empowers me in certain unanticipated ways. The personal is thus implicitly political in as much as it is conditioned by shared social structures, but the personal has also been immunized against political challenge to the extent that public/private distinctions endure. For feminist theory, then, the personal becomes an expansive category, one which accommodates, if only implicitly, political structures usually viewed as public. (1983, p. 522).

It is tempting to stay in this *power sphere* to analyse the decolonial approaches on power relations, or the evolution of feminist political theories from the projections of *power among* to *power to* and *power with* (De la Fuente, 2013). However, in this article, we wish to examine how relational approaches on power and politics can help us to critically examine political and citizenship education. From this perspective, political education can be questioned at least in two different ways. On the one hand, if we reconceptualise power and politics as relational, we need to reconsider what we mean by political culture – and thus values, knowledge, and democratic 'competences', that are the object of teaching and learning. On the other, we need to pay more attention to educational relations and encounters, particularly in relation to the spaces, dynamics, interactions, subjectivities and power relations within educational actions and institutions.

We wish to acknowledge that our focus in power relations is not new. It is, indeed, at the core of any critical pedagogy project. Yet, we align with feminist and decolonial perspectives that question whether critical pedagogues have been critical enough with gender and racial inequities (Hooks, 2021) and with the supremacy of Eurocentric epistemologies, which perpetuates neoliberal systems, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy (De Sousa, 2019; De Sousa & Aguiló, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). As Hooks [sic] argues, is not just about being aware of education being political, but it should be about making this politics counterhegemonic (Hooks, 2021).

3.   Dominant framings of political education: a relational critique

From the relational point of view, politics is not abstract but a material reality. It is not restricted to institutional terrains, neither to public realm: political relations are generated and materialized in every very relation, in every very situation.

If we combine the relational nature of politics and hook's claims for a counterhegemonic education, we can problematise dominant framings of political education policy and practice and their underpinning assumptions in several ways.

We have chosen to briefly problematise three key political education notions: citizenship, participation, and rights. They have been chosen as they help us to exemplify and illustrate our thesis and discussions. For each concept, we develop a brief critique.

3.1.   Citizenship.

Many manifestations of 'political education' are often framed under the umbrella of Civics or Citizenship Education. For instance, the National Curriculum of England defines 'Citizenship' as programme of study for 11-16 years old (DfE, 2014). In a range of countries, including Spain (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2014) and Colombia (Ministerio de Educación, 2015), students are expected to learn civic or citizenship competencies through different areas of the school curricula.

However, 'citizenship' is a very complex concept that encapsulates (and sometimes obscures) a range of political debates. Among them, feminist political theorists have raised questions that challenge the core of our understanding of citizenship and civic sphere (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999). Chantal Mouffe (1992), for example, directly points out how old versions of citizenship have become an obstacle to making democracy work, especially women. Citizenship is

identified as a "modern male narrative" (Arnot, 1997, p. 275) often represented as universalistic, but rarely applied universally.

The public-private distinction is identified as one of the principal reasons of this male-framed narrative on citizenship, and why mainly women have been traditionally excluded from its realm while state politics and institutions have rested upon a patriarchal notion of civil society (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999). As Arendt agues,

> Being in the public realm means being seen and heard by others, and it is the presence of others who see and hear what we see and hear that assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves (Arendt, 2018, p. 199).

Gendered citizenship emphasizes how being a male citizen is not the same as being a female citizen, as access to spheres of power is not provided in equal terms (Muxí &Madro, 2009). Thus, Arnot (1997) defends this notion of *gendered citizenship* by illustrating similarities and differences "in the way in which men and women speak of citizenship" (p. 286) and by pointing out the social, ideological, and philosophical mechanisms that perpetuates exclusions in citizenship realms. Others prefer the notion of *feminising citizenship*: this concept not only points out inequities among citizens and citizenship experience due to power relations within gender and intersectional identities, but also defend the generalization of feminist values among all citizenries. As Contractor explains,

> The feminization of citizenship has the potential to overcome the exclusionary tendences ingrained in the theory and practice of citizenship (…) which are inherently gendered but also reflect the exclusion of (…) women's experiences and perspectives as they interact with other axes of social division including class, sect, caste, region, language, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability. Furthermore, feminization of citizenship supports the inclusion of interests and issues that a Habermasian concept of the "public" labels "private" and treats as forbidden. However, the difference then is reinstated as a higher-order value, which encompasses equality through a relational and dialogical ethic of care, compassion, and responsibility (Contractor, 2021, p.10).

We would like to focus our attention to the understanding that citizenship, by definition, represents a committed relationship between individuals and the state (Heater, 2013). This relationship operates both, at the level of a given status and the level of a sense of belonging or identity (Sant et al., 2017). In educating children and young people 'for' citizenship, there is often an expectation that all members of our communities are already citizens by status and, consequently, the role of schooled education is primarily connected to the ideological domain – fostering identities and sense of belongings.

There is also, often, a second expectation, that within democratic enactments, ideals and institutions mirror each other. This is, democratic values such as those of equality and justice are embedded within the rule of the law and enacted by existing institutions. As such, it is relatively common that, within existing citizenship education curricula, implicit mentions to law and institutions are named as educational aims side by side with mentions to democratic values. The Council of Europe's reference framework of competences for Democratic Culture (2018), for instance, identifies "Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law" as one of the key twenty competences.

However, if we consider feminist theories emphasising the relational nature of politics, we can problematise these two assumptions. Butler's concept of 'precarity' is useful for this purpose. Butler explains

> Precarity (…) describes a few different conditions that pertain to living beings. Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed. As a result, social and political institutions are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity, especially within the nation-state, although, as you will see, I consider this restriction a problem. Political orders, including economic and social institutions are to some extent designed to address those very needs, not only to make sure that housing and food are available, but that populations have the means available by which life can be secured. And yet, "precarity" designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection (Butler, 2009, p. ii).

Meanwhile, decolonial scholars have largely examined deeper exclusions in our onto-epistemological stands. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2019) proposes as a basic differentiation within exclusions and social inequities: by stablishing an "abyssal line", he distinguishes inequities and exclusions within the metropolitan society in which everyone is recognized as human an as an "us" member, from those excluded from the consideration of their human condition, and whose lives can be appropriate by others.

The concepts of precarity and abyssal exclusions allow us to illustrate how dominant frameworks for citizenship/political education suffer from two clear democratic deficits. Firstly, citizenship education as schooled subject often excludes discussions around the 'stateless' – those who are denied a citizenship status to begin with. As such, there are increasing paradoxical examples of migrant, asylum-seekers and refugee children who are ought to be socialised as 'citizens' when they lack its status (Boyden, 2009; Sant et al., 2018). Secondly, whilst democratic institutions "are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity", existing accounts of institutional racism and patriarchy suggest that the same institutions can contribute perpetuate the vulnerability and exposition of their own citizens.

By failing to acknowledge existing tensions between ideal and institutional forms of democratic politics, citizenship education can contribute to obscure (rather than denounce) this democratic deficits. As Arnot and Dillabough condemn, "One should not assume therefor that concerns about gender equality are synonymous with the concept of democracy. Nor it can be legitimately argued that each and any form of democratic education would fulfil feminist educational ideals" (1999, p. 160).

According to Arnot (1997), this controversy may be addressed by problematizing the gendered premises of democratic education and by teaching democracy as a gendered and contested concept, along with building educational for citizenship on the principals of identity – in the sense of belonging- and agency-in the sense of empowerment-. At this point we think it is interesting to go back to hook's perspectives on teaching to transgress (1994): beyond political

education enabling us to recognize institutional structures and democratic values, we think citizenship education should provide the critical tools to understand the mechanisms by which citizens are excluded from inclusive and egalitarian citizenry, and the competences to transgress them by political participation.

3.2. Participation.

Participation (or active citizenship) often functions as a both a cornerstone and a rationale for schooled political education. In the UK, for instance, the political scientist Sir Bernard Crick, together with the Advisory Group on Citizenship (1998), defined community involvement as one of the three pillars of citizenship education as a subject. After almost twenty years, this foundation still remains, with students in England expected to "develop an interest in, and commitment to, participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity" (DfE, 2014). Similarly, in Brazil, even after the recent modifications, one of the purposes of compulsory education is for your people to become aware, critical, and participative citizens (Ministério da Educação, 2018). In some competencies-based curricula, such as that of Catalonia (GenCat, 2015), active participation committed to democratic values is a key competence in specific areas (i.e. social sciences)

However, these accounts of participation often signal two competing, yet unidirectional and disembodied understandings of power. On one hand, participation is sometimes seen as evidence of individuals' agency. Drawing upon the work of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), among others, it is assumed that

> meaningful participation requires that the voices of citizens in politics be clear, loud, and equal: clear so that public officials know what people want and need, loud so that officials have an incentive to pay attention to what they hear, and equal so that the democratic ideal of equal responsiveness to the preferences and interests of all is not violated (p. 509).

"Participation" is seen here as an instrument for political effectiveness. The pathway to political success (one in which citizens can gain disputes when differences emerge) require learning the pragmatic rules. Citizenship educators need to teach new generations the knowledge and skills so they can make a difference. Teaching how/why/when to participate is a highly democratic activity.

On the other hand, structural accounts of agency (where it is assumed that structures and institutions do have power over agents) often conceive participation as a form of socialisation (Raby, 2012). Learning that 'participation' is important and can be done through certain procedures can facilitate that children and young people's compliance with dominant institutions, rules, hierarchies, and processes (Batsleer, 2013). Learning to/how to participate could be another way to generate citizens' sense of belonging with dominant forms of politics. Teaching how/why/when to participate illustrate some of the democratic deficits of our current systems.

Drawing upon the work of Butler and further educational developments (e.g. Youdell, 2006), we conceive participation as a performative act that illustrates the complex and relational nature of power and democracy. Butler (2009) explains,

> To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the "appearance" of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth;

> gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines. (p. i)

As explained elsewhere (Sant & Davies, 2018), participation simultaneously operates as a source of domination and agency. By participating in political processes, we recognise and seek recognition from institutions. Meanwhile, we see 'participation' not as a formal engagement with pragmatic politics but rather as situated moment of engagement with others. Hannah Arendt (2018) explains,

> The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical locations; it is the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be (p. 198).

We argue that if political education only considers individualist/pragmatist/instrumentalist accounts of participation, we fail into a democratic deficit in terms of what is to participate. But simultaneously, if following critical accounts, we step back from 'promoting' participation, we might contribute to reduce spaces for children and young people to change/produce new political norms.

Against these abstract accounts of participation, we do not conceive participation as a purely oppressive or instrumentalist/rationalist activity. On the contrary. Participation is an embodied and situated act that happens in the space where we make politics. It may seem paradoxical -even it appears to be quite logical for us: oftentimes the most active and transformative political participation develops in those spaces excluded from hegemonic notions of public space and citizen participation. And they are ruled by those frequently marginalized from the dynamics of official institutional politics. Active citizenship is often embodied in the margins of legal or institutionally recognized citizenry. Exclusion is responded by active resistances and political participation, although using distinct strategies and mechanisms depending not only on the conditions of the excluded ones, but also on the repressive possibilities.

To exemplify this idea -and to discuss it from its situated nature: gender approaches on urban social movements emphasize the essential and leading role of worker women on the 70' as "poor neighbourhood living conditions most affect women and the problem of citizen participation is more serious in women (…) due to the oppression to which they are subjected and their exclusion from public space" (Muxí & Magro, 2009). Poor neighbourhood conditions especially affected women as their social and economic activities were mostly developed within their dwelling's close environment, as "relegated to domestic chords" and "private spheres" (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999; Muxí & Magro, 2009) within the traditional (or male) private/public distinction. Thus, "private" spaces were claimed as public ones, and active citizenship was being materialized on citizenry-excluded persons. Qudsiya Contractor (2021, p.10) argues that "women's active citizenship (…) is the face of female resistance, which evolves progressively to challenge authoritarian structures of power, typically controlled by men".

It is not easy to overcome these obstacles on compulsory education, particularly as this is lived in the beginning of young people's political journey. Some studies point out that political

participation has a remarkable lifetime evolution (Injuve, 2021): each vital stage involves a series of social roles that offer different levels of resources, interests and needs to face the costs of political participation (García-Albacete, 2021). In this lifetime evolution, questioning participation throw gender perspective increases the challenge on political education oriented to participatory citizenry. Girl students from Secondary Schools, for example, are generally more politically active than boy students are. But, as exposed before, when they take on adult roles, and especially when they have children -if they do-, the challenges they encounter cause their political participation) to plummet.

Studies on young political participation in Spain (Injuve, 2021) suggest that inequalities on political participation are increasing. Gender, nationality, educational instruction, or employment situations clearly condition political participation among age stages. Adult women and not-yet-nationalized people have their troubles to participate, even if they control other resources (economical, cultural, etc). How can scholar political education prepare not only to overcome current exclusions, but also future ones?

How do all this challenge political education? When educating to participate, it seems necessary to us to not only critically understand the political and philosophical spheres of participation and its complex domination-agency implications, but also to identify the obstacles to plenty active citizenry. Identification, here, should not be an aim itself, but a first step to overcome them. If we assume that the appropriation of participation mechanisms and strategies are educational aims for political education, there is a need to find strategies to overcome vulnerability and obstacles to plenty active citizenship. And, in this case, individual-centred orientations of citizenship education are difficult to fit in: overcoming vulnerability and different ways of exclusion or repression is a *power with* enterprise. In Freire's words, "no one frees anyone, no one frees themselves: men[2] are freed in commune". Again, *Teaching to Transgress* seems a great horizon to look at, not only from a theoretical point of view, but from practical one. We agree with Gert Biesta's concern about schools being spaces where action and participation might happen, and where individuals can be subjects (Biesta, 2006, p. 140). Thus, we would add: and where power relations within participation is taken care, so that exclusion mechanisms are identified and rescinded.

3.3.   Rights

The third key political education concept that we will examined through our relational lens is that of 'rights'. Again, the notion of rights is highly embedded within dominant frameworks of political and citizenship education. The "civic competence" within the Spanish curricula, for example, explicitly names the need for students to know Human and Civil rights, Spanish Constitution's rights, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and how these are applied at the local, regional, national, European and international level (Ministerio de Educación y Formacion Profesional, 2014).

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[2] We understand Freire's is using "men" but meaning "persons", "humans". Androcentric character of Freire's proposals has been pointed out by feminist pedagogues such as Hooks (1994), although acknowledging the essential contributions of his work. Many decolonial and feminist pedagogical approaches take Freire's ideas as a reference paradigm.

However, in applying our relational lens to consider these notions of rights, we can see how, again these existing dominant accounts of political education aim to homogenise democratic politics. Rights are both ideals and mechanisms through which institutions operate. As a result, we can see how these accounts suffer from two additional democratic deficits. Firstly, at the level of rights' design. Secondly, at the level of rights' execution.

On the one hand, at the level of rights' 'design'. It is not the intention of this article to enter theoretical discussions on rights -and especially human rights- being or being-not ideological or useful. However, it seems appropriate to know about and learn from this debate. Indeed, major critiques (not cancellation) to Human Rights question the ideological nature of the construct (wa Mutua, 1996), particularly its classed, cultured, racialised and gendered assumptions (Parisi, 2017; Zizek, 2006). Feminists' perspectives on Human Rights mainly point out their androcentric construction and public/private differentiation. As they argue, egalitarian emphasis of rights is limited and claim for the necessity of noticing gender-specific abuses into the mainstream Human Rights theory and practice (Parisi, 2017), and for noticing that civil-political liberties and socioeconomic rights are inextricable.

Underpinning the dominant form of political education's emphasis on rights lies an assumption that the normative or the ethical is 'universal' and 'all-encompassing'. In other words, rights are seen as an abstract configuration of our ideals more that manifests in our encounters with institutions. Rights, as a pragmatic form of ethics, is conceived "as a solution, a resolution, or an answer to conflict" (Todd & Säström, 2008, p. 5).

Instead, if we take on board the relational nature of politics, we can see how ideal politics can function at the level of the encountered relation in-itself. Following Arendt's account on politics as the space between us (Honig, 2017), ideals might be better conceived a moment of interruption of our pragmatic arrangements that take place in a situated space between political 'subjects'. Bell Hooks' notions of 'radical openness' and 'subject-to-subject encounters' (1989; 2003) are helpful to illustrate this perspective.

According to Hooks, we are always more than our 'conditions' (e.g. racialization, class, sex). Ethical events, subject-to-subject encounters or moments of radical openness only take place when we can overtake these conditions and witness and listen the other on their own terms. The subject-to-subject encounter in-itself responds to the politic and educational moment where processes underpinning the operation of power and the regulation of differences and group decision-making are negotiated/learnt. The impact that the Other in all its alterity has our subjectivity is transformative. Hooks (1998) explains,

> We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which is difficult, challenging, hard and we know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfils desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (p. 23).

These ethical events respond to what Todd and Säström (2008) denominate "ethics of democracy" (p. 8) or a form of ethics that "cannot sediment into appeals for a normative discourse ethics or rules of communicative engagement; instead, it emerges, is revealed, in the actual

encounter between people holding different points of view" (p. 8). We can leave these questions open: how does this ethics fit in rights' design? Should it? Which are the struggles between such a universalistic concept as rights and the subject-to-subject encounter?

Beyond these open questions, we take rights as a key construction not only for democratic systems but in guarantee of human dignity. They are institutional mechanisms with legal, judicial, and normative implications, but also social constructions configurating collective imaginary guarding human dignity. As Makau Wa Mutua points out (1996, p. 657)., "even if they turn out to resemble the ideas and institutions of political democracy, or to borrow from it, they will belong to the people". This brings us to the second deficit we wanted to discuss about rights' execution: the distance between the right and the pragmatic possibilities from its execution. Dominant forms of political education fail to acknowledge that the way in which rights are executed are not always mediated by institutional processes. Furthermore, rights' execution is not a mere personal choice, but an embodied (non-)possibility conditioned by relational realities.

As exemplified before: is housing a right, if one cannot rent or buy a dwelling? In a conceptual sphere, we could discuss if rights can be considered rights when they are not doable. If rights are not guaranteed, are they vulnerated, denied or non-existent? Relational approaches and gender perspective (questioning gender and its intersections) shed light on the possibility and the non-possibility of rights, and raise some important challenges to citizenship education.

The right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Mayer, 2012; Merrifield, 2011) seems a good example to understand this embodied distance between rights disposition and their execution. As Zaida Muxí & Tania Magno explain, "the right to the city, which can be understood abstractly and philosophically, has a first level that is evidently material: affording women the same opportunities of choice than men" (2009, p. 1121). Feminist geographers have been fundamental in questioning and reinterpreting citizens' life from its physical and symbolic spaces, and noticing how different is the city lived, thus how different is citizenship experienced depending on our identities and subjectivities. Spaces are understood as political entities -not only geographical-, as the result of the social relationships that conform it, which place social groups in different and unequal positions (Massey, 2005; Rodó-Zárate, 2021). We can find gender implications -along with other identity axes- in every sphere of city life: from urbanism and mobility to public services and time management.

Streets are walked, felt, and experienced differently by children, car drivers, girls at night, wheelchair users, transgender people, boy bands on stag parties, lesbian couples. After 11-S terrorist attacks in New York, many Muslim New York citizens changed their city daily routes because they were afraid of being harassed. Similarly, shame can restrict how some gay couples use spaces and services, and frustration limits immigrant citizens who do not master language to participate in sociocultural event. Emotional experiences of place condition their social uses (Rodó-Zárate, 2021).

There are some rights we take for guaranteed in democratic societies that are explicitly vulnerated to those who do not have national documents, whose legal situation is not resolved, or to those with specific situations such as being legally supervised because of mental disabilities. But some other rights are vulnerated in a more subtle way in the relational sphere. During the

most restrictive months of COVID home confinement on spring 2020 (in European countries experience), contextual inequalities in access to fundamental rights became clearly apparent.

The right to the city, as we seen, is not guaranteed to every citizen, at least not in the same way or quality. Not understanding the gendered implications of the city life and spheres, and extensively the rights execution within, can let us neglect some rights' possibilities even without noticing. This brings us to reconsider citizenship education. Political education should not only be about knowledge and/or commitment to rights, but also about identifying the mechanisms by which rights are vulnered, cannot be materialized, overcome and transformed.

After thinking about and discussing these three concepts -citizenship, participation, and rights-, we would like to follow hook's claim for a counterhegemonic education and conclude by suggesting ways to democratise political education in the light of gender and relational perspectives.

4.   Conclusions: Democratising political education

Anne Phillips used to speak about *en-gendering democracy* (1991) as giving rise to it by exposing its gendered assumptions. In this article, we have used feminist and relational perspectives to challenge some "sacred truths" - borrowing Yemini's words (2021)- on political education. If gender- neutral policies fail to eliminate entrenches inequities (Hawkesworth, 2016), gender-neutral political education may also do so.

As Díez-Bedmar (2022, p. 7) argues:

> The lack of training offered by intersectional feminist epistemology as part of democratic culture competences sets a serious problem for democracy since, if future teachers are not able to challenge their own gender stereotypes and prejudices and how they are personally and professionally affected, they will not be able to work critically on the human and social sciences constructed, which are configured with heteropatriarchal models, sexist, Eurocentric, and based on hegemonic cultural models of hierarchical structures whose hegemonic narrative is based on exclusionary power configurations.

We would like to conclude this article by wondering how political education could be democratized (or *engendered*, using Phillips' words) from this starter line of discomfort generated by relational questions. To do so, we embrace a key concept coming from feminist epistemologies: caring, which is understood as *power to*, community oriented (De la Fuente, 2013; Hartsock, 1996).

Caring seems a fundamental concept to us, not only to revalue the social significance attributed to caring tasks, but to do so from a critical projection of justice and denunciation: why caring is socially despised? Why is it precarious? Why do we care more about some people than others? What do we care for? Following these open questions, we conclude by thinking about democratizing political education by democratizing *who we care about, how we care about, and what we care about.*

4.1.   Democratising who we care about

Caring about subjectivities. In political education, subjectivities manifest in, at least, two different levels. On the first level, the epistemological one: who is 'cared' enough to be read? A fast

check to our bibliography is quite illuminating here. Who are we listening to? With whom are we discussing, deliberating, even in a deferred way? Ans whose visions are we avoiding, not considering? If power is understood from the possibilities of exclusion and inclusion (Knudsen, 2005), how are we exercising this power epistemologically?

On the second level, in the specific curricular knowledge. Even when subjects are objectified as 'contents' of study, who are we caring about, and who we are caring for? Who is there and who is not? Finally, this question should be applied regarding our students and scholar members, questioning relations within school context.

4.2.   Democratising how we care

'How to care' attends methodologies and ethical affections. This question invites us to revise internal dynamics, possibilities and non-possibilities for pragmatic realms, and whether we are enabling "new spaces for emotions in education" (Boler, 2017). Evans et al (2021, p.147) suggest concrete pedagogical implications while "citizenship education embracing its performative nature (…) may enable alternatives for 'voice' and 'act' within a pedagogy for active citizenship. Working through affective, performance-based pedagogic methods enables a constant relationship between what happens and exploring why".

Feminist approaches on methodology emphasize contextual, collaborative, egalitarian, interactive and empowering learning, ethically and politically committed (EduGen, 2020). Similarly, humanizing pedagogies focus on dialogical and reciprocal relationships, and about responding to concrete contexts, needs and students, while standing from strong critical approaches challenging neoliberal and oppressive power relations (Massip, 2022). Keeping this radical affective view on critical pedagogy, Hooks' (1994) claims for the place of love and tenderness within most transgressive trends of education.

4.3.   Democratising what we care about

Finally, what we care about attend contents. The realities we think are worth taking, talking, exploring, learning about. What do we socially care about? What should we care about? At the light of relational implications regarding political culture, and before the selection of articulating specific social content, we think it would be necessary to discuss specifically *what we care about*. Do we care about rights? About dignity? Do we care about institutions? About civic behaviour? Do we care about inequities? About confronting oppressive relations?

We acknowledge that questioning some ingrained constructions on democratic culture, such as citizenship, participation, or rights, can generate personal, interpersonal and professional discomfort (Boler, 2017). Indeed, discomfort is one of these subtle mechanisms which operate as resistance to critical analysis, also present when introducing feminist and gender perspectives in education. Feeling discomfort means something is struggling, something is moving. When questioning democratic values throw gender perspectives and throw relational framework, we're questioning not only ingrained beliefs, but personal relationships and behaviours. When pointing out that personal is political, when diluting boundaries between public and private, everyone can feel interpellated and questioned. Removing is positive and necessary, and also democratising. Because it challenges privileges, oppressions and power relations. It is needed in all spheres of life, and specially on educational practice and training.

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