PUSH*BACK*LASH

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Integrated report on the contribution of feminist theory and conceptual framework

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Responsible Team: Nikita Dhawan and Ana María Miranda Mora

With contributions from:
Vera Beloshitzkaya
Lara Zwittlinger
Mónika Kovács
Enikö Virágh
Zsuzsanna Vidra
Carlos Serra Castells
Lydia Bueno Sanchez
Laura Llop Medina
Magda Szarota
Barbara Helfferich
Valentina Magllietta

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About Push*Back*Lash

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Project summary:

The goal of PUSH*BACK*LASH is twofold: (1) Firstly, to systematically inquire into the present-day contestation of gender equality issues and policies at both elite and citizen levels. Approaching democracy from a global feminist perspective, we employ a rigorous, comparative, multi-method design (e.g., experiments, surveys, interviews, participatory theatre). Our project enables: (a) identifying anti-gender strategies as well as best practices in counter-acting them across space and time; and (b) assessing the effects of anti-gender discourses by focusing on parties, social media, and public opinion. Secondly, to (2) develop and test strategies that can effectively counteract anti-gender and anti-feminist discursive strategies. Aiming at supporting the quality of democratic governance in more inclusive European societies, we acknowledge intersections between gender and other social categories at all stages of the project (composition of consortium and advisory board; theory formulation, empirical investigation, and policy recommendations) and thus engage with stakeholders. To develop sustainable solutions, we bring together gender activists, EU experts, and researchers from several fields of political science (political theory, public policy, political parties, public opinion, political behavior), anthropology, communication and media, philosophy, sociology, and social psychology. PUSH*BACK*LASH is a transdisciplinary, gender-diverse consortium aiming at equipping pro-equality actors with practical toolkits for responding to anti-gender equality and anti-feminist discursive strategies and backlash tactics.

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-Gender in political sciences
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-Social issues
-Women and gender studies
-Gender
-Democracy
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About this document

Description:
Integrated Report on the contribution of feminist theory (including modern feminist frameworks) and intersectional analysis to democratic theory in the context of anti-gender and anti-feminist movements and conceptual framework (M8).

Executive summary:
The report is structured as follows: (I) The first part gives an overview of current antifeminist and anti-gender movements, backlash theory, and democratic backsliding to briefly map the current challenges and problems facing scholarly, activist, and policy efforts towards gender equality in Europe. (II) The second part delves into feminist approaches to democracy against the background of a genealogical and normative analysis of democracy within the framework of liberal European democracy. This part reconstructs key feminist arguments and criticisms of liberal democracy and offers alternative tools to transform it from within. This part is divided into two sections. The first one reconstructs some prominent classical ideas and theories of Western and non-Western feminisms for the *engendering* of democracy in three main fields: citizenship, participation, and representation. The second section discusses significant contemporary feminist democratic frameworks, such as ecofeminism, social reproductive theory and care ethics, and queer and trans feminism, which broaden Western notions of democracy by advancing new concepts and perspectives. (III) The third part provides an intersectional understanding of gender injustice in the context of global inequalities, specifically Eastern & Western European inequalities. This section engages with the crucial contributions of different feminist traditions to intersectionality theory. It reconstructs the vital contributions of non-Western feminist theories to intersectionality politics, such as Black Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Feminist Disability Studies, and Roma Feminism. (IV) Finally, the fourth part explores the project of a feminist pushback against the antifeminist and anti-gender backlash for a new age of democracy. The final section engages with gender justice as a utopian concept and the normative dilemmas that beset a new age of democracy. Feminist democratic critical ideals of citizenship, participation, and representation reshape and inform alternative concepts of justice by reimagining democracy through the lens of intersectionality.

Methodology

This research uses genealogy and normative theory to reconstruct and analyze feminist critiques of liberal democracy, contemporary feminist approaches to democracy, gender inequality, and gender justice. Genealogy, as a method of historical critique, is especially suitable because, in contrast to conventional historiography, which presupposes a linear scheme of progressive history, genealogy's critical-historical narrative explains a phenomenon or event by showing how it came into being by unpacking the relationship between power and knowledge. The focus on the interplay between practices and discourses reveals how language does not simply mirror the world; rather, it shapes and interpellates it. The genealogical method helps understand how systems of thought and knowledge are governed not only by grammar and logic but also by rules that operate beyond the consciousness of individual subjects. These define the structure of conceptual possibility that determine the limits of thought in each domain and period. Genealogical analysis uncovers how a given system of thought results from contingent turns of history and is not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends (Gutting, 2022). This method enables a philosophical-historical criticism of present thought and praxis and is thus adequate to our research interests and goals.

In addition, we draw on normative theories as they enable us to explore the foundations, principles, and justifications of systems, relations, and practices. It helps examine the underlying values and theories that inform concepts and ideals and their moral and philosophical implications. This approach is distinct from descriptive, explanatory, or empirical research. Normative theories provide frameworks and criteria for evaluating and correcting existing systems, relations, and practices by highlighting their shortcomings and envisioning potential improvements. For instance, in the history of political ideas and political philosophy, there are different perspectives and approaches to normative democratic theory, inequality, and justice. In what follows, we consider new understandings and standards to evaluate and appraise prevalent practices and approaches. Drawing on normative theories, which provide invaluable impetus for critically examining and refining concepts and practices, we outline how to pursue more just, fair, compelling, inclusive, and legitimate democratic governance, gender equality, and gender justice.

To this end, we first reconstruct prominent feminist positions on democracy from an Anglo-European perspective. We start with the historical-theoretical analysis of early twentieth-century feminist theory, followed by focus on contemporary theories and interventions from Western and non-Western scholarship alike. We map the temporal and spatial framing of concepts and problems as well as how they travel between different regions. This approach helps us to understand the current conundrums and challenges within scholarship and activism. In addition to reconstructing feminist criticisms of liberal democracy, we also present a critical analysis of prominent approaches and normative proposals put forth by feminist scholars from the global South.

Secondly, we reconstruct key contributions of different feminist traditions to intersectionality theory from non-Western approaches to better understand gender injustice and global inequality. This augmentation of the canon allows us to understand intersectionality as a corrective methodology. The shift of focus to the co-constitution of multiple categories and the critical evaluation of the dominant paradigms employed in scholarship and research enables

a better understanding of diverse inequalities and their entanglements with disparate social hierarchies.

In the final section, the focus is on the project of a feminist utopian ideal of gender justice. We weigh some common obstacles that arise along the pursuit of gender justice as well as numerous normative dilemmas such a struggle it faces in a new age of democracy. The concept of utopia encompasses the desire for the qualitatively new. However, this is not merely abstract or ideological in terms of invoking a general normative ideal. Rather it is the form of immanent critique that enables material and symbolic change to achieve gender equality and justice.

Introduction: Gendering Democratic Theory from an Intersectional Perspective

As a form of collective exercise of political power that guarantees parity of participation to all members of society, gender equality is crucial to democracy. Democracy is as much about citizenship rights, participation, and representation as it is political parties, elections, and checks and balances. The quality of democracy is determined not only by the form of its institutions but also by the extent to which different social groups can participate as members of these institutions and the public sphere.

Since 1979 the European Parliament (EP) has claimed to be a key promoter and fierce supporter of gender equality. It has one of the highest percentages of women parliamentarians worldwide, and its multi-national composition is unique. The seemingly progressive position on gender equality does not hold up under closer scrutiny. Contemporary feminist analyses reveal several critical facets of how political representation is gendered across countries, political groups within the EP, and other organizational branches, as well as its real impacts on recent changes in the EP's structures, policies, and practices (Ahrens & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Sauer, 2020). The overrepresentation of men in the EP, in the national parliament, as heads of state, and in significant political parties translates into discrimination against and obstacles for women. For example, women have greater misgivings about standing for election; their campaigns often receive less funding than their male counterparts, who spend less time on childcare than women across the EU (Ahrens & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019). To prevent "democracy without women," policies to foster women's rights and to increase women's participation in parties, the judiciary, civil society, and the public sphere are imperative.

The absence of women and other minorities and marginalized groups from the public sphere and political arena results in democratization with a male face or in a "male democracy" — an incomplete and very biased form of democracy. In the global North, democratic rights were initially enjoyed by property-owning *white* males and only extended to women and the rest of the male population much later, due to struggles "from below." In the global South, the expansion of women's rights has often been part of decolonization processes, in which women's mobilizations have played a key role (Gago, 2021). Contemporaneously, democratization and women's rights movements are closely intertwined and mutually dependent (Moghadam, 2008). Separating the two is conceptually misleading and politically dangerous. The importance of gendering democracy rests in the interdependency of women's rights with substantial and effective citizenship, political participation, and representation. In scenarios when a party or a group based on patriarchal norms comes to power through free elections, women are relegated to second-class citizenship. Women can pay a high price when a democratic process is launched without strong institutions and firmly established principles of equality and the rights of all citizens (Moghadam, 2008). The decline of democratic institutions and practices is detrimental to justly substantive female representation. Thus, the recent democratic backlash in European countries such as Poland has negatively impacted women's representation. A democratic system excluding women's political and human rights and gender equality is a deficient form of democracy.

The turn of the 21st century marked a shift towards a participatory approach in public decision-making, accompanied by introduction of the New Public Management[1] measures. This shift, however, bears a neoliberal character, with financialized capitalism, bureaucratization, and commodification of public action being the norm (Jones, 1992). In response, feminist theory presents a critical intervention, advocating for intersectional perspectives, social justice, and sustainability. Feminist movements have a history of promoting decentralizing, anti-hierarchical, and internally equal participatory processes, to democratize the political, social, and economic relations and structures. Feminist praxis aims to promote citizen participation in order to achieve sustainability of life rather than as a functional tool for furthering political and economic interest. Additionally, the feminist critique of democracy outlines how women and other genders have traditionally been excluded from the democratic system, thereby failing to establish equality. Therefore, feminist movements have significantly contributed to contesting social and political structures of domination in democratization processes (Martínez-Palacios & Ormazabal Gastón, 2022; Mazur, 2002).

Drawing on these insights, this report is divided into four main parts: It begins with an introduction to notions of antifeminist and anti-gender movements, backlash theory, and democratic backsliding to briefly map the current challenges and obstacles faced while pursuing gender equality and justice in Europe. This entails hostility and opposition to feminist advancements; the erosion and attack on women's and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) rights; and the weakening of democracies and their institutions, mainly resulting in the deterioration of democratic principles and the debilitation of the rule of law.

The second part delves into feminist engagements with normative theories of democracy and the framework of liberal European democracy. This part reconstructs key feminist arguments and criticisms of liberal democracy and furnishes tools to transform it from within. This part is divided into two sections. The first one reconstructs some prominent classical ideas and theories of democracy promulgated by Western and non-Western feminists in three main fields: citizenship, participation, and representation. The second section introduces significant modern feminist democratic frameworks, such as ecofeminism, social reproductive theory and care ethics, and queer and trans feminism. These broaden Western notions of democracy by introducing new concepts and perspectives, such as interspecies politics, caring societies, and disidentification politics. The goal is to outline how these critical interventions, ideas, and theories expand the core principles of liberal democracy to incorporate women's rights and gender equality, from an intersectional feminist perspective, including LGBTQI+ perspectives. A feminist intersectional analysis of democracy, therefore, involves studying how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and disability, to produce specific forms of inequality and discrimination within democratic practices and processes.

The third part addresses an intersectional understanding of gender inequality in the context of transnational and supranational inequalities, specifically in Eastern & Western Europe. This section engages with the crucial contributions of different feminist traditions to intersectionality theory. It outlines how these have enriched struggles for equality and justice, especially for marginalized subjectivities and communities, including racial and religious

[1] New Public Management (NPM) is an approach to running public service organizations used in government and public service institutions and agencies at sub-national and national levels. The term was first introduced by academics in the UK and Australia (Hood, 1991)

minorities, colonial subjects, LGBTQI+ people, people with disability, and women. It reconstructs the significant contributions of non-Western feminist theories to intersectionality politics, such as Black Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Feminist Disability Studies, and Roma Feminism. The aim is to show how intersectional politics and intersectional corrective methodology contribute to engendering democracy. Against the background of global inequalities, feminist intersectional theory's focus on the co-constitution of multiple categories enables a better understanding of the challenges of transnational feminist scholarship and activism.

Finally, the fourth part explores the project of a feminist democratic pushback against the antifeminist and anti-gender backlash. The final section engages with the concept of gender justice and the normative dilemmas that beleaguer the new age of democracy. Feminist democratic critical ideals of citizenship, participation, and representation reshape and inform alternative concepts of justice by reimagining democracy intersectionally. This entails a reconfiguration of norms in order to enable democratic recognition but also to transform the historical and structural conditions that produce and reproduce the misrecognition of women and LGBTQI+ groups as political agents. The challenge is ushering in innovative, normative orders for a new age of democracy that achieves and secures gender justice, assuring democracy for all.

I. Antifeminist and Anti-gender Backlash and Democratic Backsliding

Over the past years, processes of de-democratization across Europe have emerged along with opposition to gender equality in both theory and practice (Roggeband & Kriszán, 2020). It is notable that the attitude to gender equality often serves as a metaphorical seismograph that foretells the deteriorating situation of fundamental rights and values (including democracy and the rule of law) in a given society. Efforts to restrict or undermine women's rights frequently signify broader societal conflict. Scholars suggest that such tendencies to erode progress in women's rights represent "the tip of the iceberg" of a vaster phenomenon, which is accurately captured by the notion of the rule of law backsliding.[2] In what follows, we will briefly highlight the connection between antifeminist and anti-gender movements and the backsliding of gender equality policies. This will be followed by historical reconstruction and genealogical analysis of feminist theory of democracy and a focus on the shortcomings of liberal democracy. The effort is to contribute to the developing understanding of the historically gendered aspects of democracy and its contemporary challenges.

In recent years, Europe has made significant progress in advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality. However, there has been certain pushback that indicates opposition to these progressive politics and policies. As feminism grows, so too do anti-feminisms, a multifaceted and complex set of phenomena characterized by individual, collective, and institutional opposition to gender equality. These counter-movements contest the ideas, policies, and people that make up the feminist movement (Lamoureux & Dupuis-Déri, 2015). Anti-feminism is an organized counter-movement in and across diverse cultural and historical contexts that seeks to undermine and counteract the accomplishments of the feminist movement in economic, social, and political arenas (Zald & Useem, 1987; Bonet-Martí, 2021). The anti-feminist backlash is part of a broad network of (neo)conservative discourses and practices fed by misogyny, sexism, and chauvinism. However, it cannot be reduced to any of these. Anti-feminism is a set of beliefs, practices, discourses, actions, and subjectivities that promote mobilizations and attacks against feminist agendas to the detriment of women's and LGBTQI+ people's rights.

Another widespread form of anti-feminism is the anti-gender movement, which questions the concept of gender, discrediting its notions as an ideology. "Gender ideology" is a discursive strategy devised by the Vatican and adopted by various actors to challenge feminist ideas and agendas for equal rights for women and LGBTQI+ people (Faur & Viveros, 2020). Christian-based religious antifeminism is pursued by both Catholics and evangelicals. These forms of antifeminism decry the social and moral instability allegedly triggered by contemporary feminism (Gago, 2020). Two key factors contribute to the emergence of this type of antifeminism: the Vatican's opposition to both the agenda of the Cairo Conference of 1994 and the Beijing Conference of 1995 as well as the Catholic Church's growing support for mobilizations against the decriminalization of abortion and equal marriage, especially in European countries (Bonet-Martí, 2021).

[2] Bárd, Grabowska-Moroz, Zoltán Kazai, 2021: https://reconnect-europe.eu/blog/rule-of-law-backsliding-in-the-european-union-lessons-from-the-past-recommendations-for-the-future/ (Last accessed June 2023)

A good example is the antifeminist and anti-gender backlash against reproductive rights, which guarantees women choice by ensuring access to safe and legal abortion. Some conservative groups have sought to restrict or ban abortion, often framing it as a moral or religious issue. The backsliding of these policies can manifest as restrictive laws or policies limiting women's autonomy over their bodies. Poland's conservative Law and Justice Party has actively pushed for stricter abortion laws. This led to mass protests and international condemnation (UN News, 2020). Additionally, in Poland and Hungary, there has been opposition to comprehensive sex education and attempts to undermine women's rights organizations (UN News, 2023). Another relevant example is the case of Hungary, where the rise of conservative and nationalist ideologies has often clashed with feminist movements and institutions. The government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, has been criticized for promoting traditional gender roles, limiting the rights of LGBTQI+ people, stigmatizing the term "gender," pushing for withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, and banning gender studies programs in universities (Ryder, 2022).

These movements and actions, however, are not limited to Eastern Europe but are also prevalent in Western countries.[3] In France, antifeminist backlash targets head coverings and other religious symbols. Bans on religious attire, such as the controversial "burkini ban," restrict women's freedom of expression and reinforce anti-Muslim racism. This debate has raised questions about secularism and women's agency, focusing on the violation of women's freedom of religion (UN News, 2018). There is growing hostility in Spain toward gender equality policies, particularly against the Law on Gender Equality, enacted in 2004. Certain conservative and far-right groups, like the Vox party, have criticized the law, arguing that it promotes "gender ideology" and undermines traditional family values. They also disavow the existence of gender-based violence against women (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022). In Germany, far-right political parties, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), are increasingly mobilizing against LGBTQI+-inclusive sex education and pushing to protect the *white*, heteronormative family (Hajek, 2020). In Austria, where the conservative-far-right government was in power for about two years, the anti-feminist agenda had devastating implications for feminist organizations and advocacy. Regrettably, these agendas persist to some extent in the new government coalition of the Green Party and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). For instance, in the ethnicization of gender equality and provisions and legislation on protection against violence (Götz, 2020).

These are just a few examples of how feminist backlash theory critically examines the hostility and opposition to feminist advancements, which challenge traditional gender norms and power structures. As feminist movements gain momentum and push for gender equality, there is often a reactionary response from individuals and groups who reject these changes, i.e., those who benefit from existing gender hierarchies feel threatened by the ostensible loss of power and privilege. As feminist movements challenge traditional gender roles, expectations, and inequalities, they can create anxiety and engender antagonism from those who uphold and benefit from these sexist systems. This animosity may manifest in various forms, such as (cyber) bullying, trolling, virulent stereotyping, delegitimizing feminist arguments, or even actively working against feminist goals or women's and LGBTQI+ rights.

[3] It is important to consider that while in Poland and Hungary, the government enforces the backlash, in Western countries, most of the anti-feminist and anti-gender movements are initiated by the opposition, and minor political groups but not by those who hold the political power.

Antifeminist backlash can occur on both an individual and an institutional level. On a micro level, people may resist feminist ideas and actions because they perceive them as threatening to their status, identity, or beliefs. On a macro level, backlash can occur through policy changes or social practices that seek to roll back feminist gains or undermine their legitimacy. This backlash is not a universal or inevitable response to feminism but rather a social and cultural phenomenon that varies in manifestation across different contexts and historical periods. Backlash can be influenced by a host of factors including cultural conservatism, economic crises, and political ideologies, to name just a few. Understanding backlash is important for analyzing local and global power dynamics as well as advancing transnational gender equality.

Susan Faludi introduced the notion of "antifeminist backlash" in her influential book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, published in 1991. Faludi's theory explores the phenomenon of societal backlash against feminist advancements and the push to roll back women's rights and gender equality. As Faludi explains:

> The backlash is not a conspiracy, with a council dispatching agents from some central control room, nor are the people who serve its ends often aware of their role; some even consider themselves feminists. For the most part, its workings are encoded and internalized, diffuse and chameleonic. Not all of the manifestations of the backlash are of equal weight or significance either […] Taken as a whole, these […] move overwhelmingly in one direction: they try to push women back into their 'acceptable' roles (Faludi, 2006, p. 13).

While her analysis primarily focused on the United States, it has been applied widely and in various contexts, including Europe. According to Faludi, as women's rights movements gained visibility and made progress toward gender equality, there arose a backlash from conservative forces that sought to maintain traditional gender roles and power dynamics. She claims, "the antifeminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it. It is a preemptive strike that stops women long before they reach the finish line" (Faludi, 2006, p. 11). This backlash aims to undermine feminist achievements and restore traditional gender norms. Faludi identifies several key components and strategies of antifeminist backlash, which primarily includes media misrepresentation, wherein the media often portrays feminism in a negative light, distorting its message and trivializing women's issues. Antifeminist backlash often employs scaremongering and fear-based tactics. This suggests that feminism threatens societal values, family structure, and economic stability. Another tactic is individualizing women's concerns, which are then dismissed as personal problems rather than systemic or structural issues. The burden for addressing gender inequalities is shifted onto women, diminishing the need for broader social change and accountability. Another approach is the cooptation of language, in which antifeminist groups appropriate feminist language and concepts while distorting their meaning or using them to advance antifeminist agendas. Finally, political antagonism and opposition to feminist policies and legislation involve efforts to dismantle or weaken laws promoting gender equality, reproductive rights, or workplace protections for women.

In the face of these pushbacks, numerous individuals, organizations, and governments in Europe are working tirelessly to counter them and protect women's and LGBTQI+ rights.

Many countries have implemented policies and initiatives to address these challenges and promote gender justice, recognizing that achieving true equality benefits society as a whole. However, the erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms in certain EU countries has resulted in the deterioration of democratic principles and the undermining of the rule of law. Democratic backsliding harms progressive norms and practices and is characterized by the breakdown of democratic institutions, the undermining of judicial independence, the weakening of checks and balances, restriction of media freedom, and the infringement upon fundamental rights and freedoms.

In recent years, dissatisfaction with democracy has sharply risen (Foa et al., 2020). Among the reasons driving this discontent are economic crises, polarization, corruption scandals, inept governance and gridlock, and citizen perceptions of failed promises of democracy to deliver development and prosperity for all (ibid). The number of people living in autocracies has increased from 46% in 2012 to 72% in 2022, with 43% of the world's population living in countries that are "autocratizing" ("moving away from democracy") (Papada et al., 2023, p. 12). "Autocratization" (Papada et al., 2023), "democratic backsliding" (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018), and "de-democratization" (Brown, 2006; Enyedi, 2019) are different names for the recent phenomenon of the slow erosion of democratic institutions. They refer to values, principles, and practices that have steadily been on the rise in the last decade. They differ from the rapid democratic breakdowns of the past instituted through military coups or revolutions in that democratic backsliding is a slow and gradual process of attacks on political institutions and norms, particularly the free press and independent judiciary (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Krekó & Enyedi, 2018). Democratic backsliding usually occurs in countries that "have crossed the democratic threshold" (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). In other words, this concept is relevant when describing, for example, the United States, Poland, Hungary, or India. However, it does not apply to Russia or China, where the concept of authoritarian resilience fits better, as Russia has never become a consolidated democracy and China has never democratized in the first place.

Nancy Bermeo (2016) identifies three key varieties of contemporary "democratic backsliding". The first is a promissory coup —a coup against an elected government that is organized with a promise to quickly institute free and fair elections, which rarely take place in practice. As this type of democratic backsliding is a rapid regime change, it aligns better with the concept of democratic breakdown than with what most scholars would consider a slow erosion of democracy. The two other varieties fit squarely into this concept of democratic backsliding. They are strategic manipulation of elections (gerrymandering is one case in point) and enhancing the power of the executive while minimizing the system of checks and balances. The recent Covid-19 pandemic opened more opportunities for the latter, particularly in weaker democracies (i.e., Ludgren et al., 2020). However, it is worth noting that the emergency powers of many executive branches remained constrained in numerous countries as well (Ginsburg & Versteeg, 2021).

David Waldner and Ellen Lust (2018, p. 95) define democratic backsliding as a "decline [through a discontinuous series of incremental actions] in democratic qualities of governance." If a country shows deterioration in two of the three dimensions of democratic governance – participation, competition, or accountability – then it can be considered a form of democratic backsliding (Waldner & Lust, 2018). Democratic backsliding also differs from the rise of right-

wing populism, as the former occurs at the institutional level. Right-wing populists, however, often drive these institutional changes (i.e., Zielonka and Rupnik, 2020).

Right-wing populism is a political ideology combining right-wing politics with populist rhetoric and policies. While variations across countries and parties can be identified, some common characteristics are often associated with right-wing populism. Five main features are: nationalism, namely, these movements often emphasize national identity. Secondly, they have a strong anti-immigration stance: they adopt a strict stance on immigration policies, calling for tighter border controls, limitations on refugee intake, and the protection of national culture and identity from perceived threats posed by immigrants. Thirdly, there is a strong sense of skepticism towards the European Union, such that right-wing populist parties are often hostile to the EU and its supranational institutions. The fourth trait is punitive rhetoric, as they advocate stricter law enforcement, harsher penalties for criminals, and stern measures to protect citizens from perceived threats to public safety. Last but not least is an opposition to political elites, which often involves strongly rejecting established political elites. Populist leaders position themselves as anti-establishment figures, criticizing mainstream political parties and portraying themselves as the alternative, deploying populist rhetoric to appeal to the concerns and frustrations of the general population. Right-wing populist parties and their leaders are at the forefront of undermining democratic institutions by capitalizing on the dissatisfaction and anxieties of people with the political system and the erosion of individual economic and social prospects (Halikiopoulpu & Vlandas, 2022).[4]

In addition to these aspects, further reasons for democracies to backslide are coalitions of political elites, who radicalize and polarize populations to maintain electoral gains and stay in power, only aggravating this process (Waldner & Lust, 2018). Alternatively, Wendy Brown (2006) sees the seeds of democratic backsliding in the intersecting logics of neoliberalism and neoconservatism in that they produce citizen-consumers willing to accommodate the management of everyday life and are complicit with the state being run like a firm (p. 705). Finally, democratic backsliding in some Central and Eastern European countries results from bringing leaders into power who reject and resist the perceived hegemony of Western liberalism (Krastev & Holmes, 2019; Zielonka & Rupnik, 2020).

Over the past years, trends of de-democratization across Europe and the Americas have emerged along with opposition to gender equality and threats to previous achievements in gender equality policy. Within this context, scholars suggest that such tendencies to prevent the progression of women's rights are part of a vaster phenomenon. A similar trend is noticeable in the phenomenon of "the rule of law backsliding," which refers to the process under which a country, previously committed to upholding the rule of law, erodes or undermines those principles. It involves a gradual or deliberate regression in protecting and enforcing legal norms that can harm democracy, human rights, and governance. This is the case of Hungary and Poland, where governments removed checks on their power, eliminated independence, and failed to honor their European commitments (Pech & Scheppele, 2017).

In such a context of de-democratization, gender equality comes under attack along with other democratic values, such as fundamental human rights and the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups. While significant attention has been devoted to democratic (and the rule

[4] Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2022: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/06/01/understanding-right-wing-populism-and-what-to-do-about-it/ (Last accessed June 2023)

of law) backsliding, there is a striking lack of research into its *gendered* characteristics and implications, that is, into the very concept of "backlash against women's rights." Such backlash is part of a broader project that contests the global gender equality norm, which has expanded internationally since the 1960s (Berthet, 2023). Over the past few years, there has been a rise of highly coordinated, well-funded, organized 'anti-gender and antifeminist movements,' dangerously undermining the achievement of gender equality. Behind these movements is a powerful religious, anti-women lobby fueled by right-wing populist politics, growing nationalism, and conservatism. These movements not only incite intolerance and hate (against women and their rights and against LGBTQI+ people) but also encourages support for regressive laws and policies running against international and human rights standards and commitments on gender equality and non-discrimination. For example, they sabotage struggles against gender-based violence as well as the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Against this background, the feminist pushback against the backlash is a multifaceted response that seeks to challenge and overcome hostility toward feminist ideals that undermine gender equality. It aims to counteract anti-feminist politics and protect and promote all individuals' rights and well-being, regardless of gender, class, race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, or religion. To contest antifeminist and anti-gender backlash and democratic backsliding, one feminist pushback strategy is to focus on democratic theory and practice. A society with substantial equality requires actual citizenship for, and the participation and representation of all.

II. Feminist Analysis of Democracy

A. Normative Democratic Theory & Liberal Democracy

Democracy is a system of government in which power is bestowed upon the people, who exercise it directly or through elected representatives. It is derived from the Greek words *demos*, meaning the "common people," and *kratos*, meaning "rule" or "power." Democracy can take various forms, such as direct democracy (where citizens directly participate in decision-making) or representative democracy (where citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf). It is important to note that there are different models of democracy worldwide, and their specific structures and institutions can vary from country to country and over time. In a democracy, all citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the political process, regardless of their social status, wealth, race, gender, religion, or ideology.

The normative theory of democracy is a branch of political philosophy and theory that explores the foundations, principles, and justifications of democratic governance systems. It seeks to examine the underlying values and theories that inform the concept of democracy and its moral and philosophical implications. "The normative democratic theory deals with the moral foundations of democracy and democratic institutions and the moral duties of democratic representatives and citizens" (Christiano & Sameer, 2022). This approach is distinct from descriptive and explanatory democratic theory, which explains how democracy and democratic institutions function. "Normative democracy theory aims to provide an account of when and why democracy is morally desirable, as well as moral principles for guiding the design of democratic institutions and the actions of citizens and representatives" (Christiano & Sameer, 2022).

Several philosophical theories have contributed to our understanding of democracy as a system that values individual rights, public deliberation, participation, equality, and the pursuit of the common good. Political theorists such as Aristotle, John Locke, Charles-Louis de Secondat (better known as Montesquieu), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Hannah Arendt have coined influential concepts and theories that aimed to answer some of the following questions: Why is democracy morally valuable? What is the aim of democracy? What authority do democratic institutions have? What are the different conceptions of the limits of democratic authority? What can be reasonably expected from citizens in democratic societies? How can equality in processes of representation be secured? Who should be included in democratic decision-making? These questions encompass various philosophical perspectives regarding the nature, legitimacy, and purpose of democracy and the values and principles that should guide democratic decision-making. Whether direct or representative, small or large political units, the notion of democracy in the history of Western countries has taken several forms.

Normative democratic theories provide important frameworks for evaluating and correcting existing democratic practices, highlighting their shortcomings, and envisioning potential improvements. In the history of political ideas, there are different perspectives and approaches to normative democratic theory, and scholars hold varying views on the ideal form and principles of democracy. In addition, normative democratic theories provide invaluable impetus for critically examining and refining democratic practices so as to pursue more just, fair, effective, inclusive, and legitimate governance.

Liberal democracy, the dominant form of government in Western countries, is a political regime and system of governance that combines the principles of political liberalism with those of democracy. It seeks to protect individual rights and freedoms while ensuring popular participation and representation in decision-making processes. It strives to strike a balance between individual freedoms and collective decision-making, promoting a system of governance that upholds human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Liberal democracy seeks to reconcile the tension between majority rule and the protection of individual rights through constitutional safeguards and a commitment to the rule of law. Understood as a "form of government," it can take the form of a constitutional monarchy, presidential, semi-presidential, or parliamentary republic. In addition to formal aspects of governance, contemporary liberal democracy concerns the symbolic ordering of social and political relations drawing on two different traditions: on one side, that of political liberalism (the rule of law, separation of powers, and individual rights), and on the other, the democratic tradition of popular sovereignty (Mouffe, 2000, p. 18). According to Chantal Mouffe, the difference between ancient and modern democracy resides in accepting the *pluralism* constitutive of modern liberal democracy. This difference is not one of size but of nature (2000, p. 18). By pluralism, she means “the end of a substantive idea of the good life”. Such recognition of pluralism implies a profound transformation in the symbolic ordering of social relations.

In the case of the European Union, the core values common to the member states that define liberal democracy are “pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men” (Treaty on European Union, art.2). Nowadays, the dominant form of democracy is a representative democracy, where citizens elect government officials to rule on their behalf, such as in a parliamentary or presidential democracy (Tangian, 2020). Democracy provides a framework to safeguard individual liberties, as majority rule is tempered by respect for fundamental rights. According to the United Nations, liberal democracy provides an environment for protecting and realizing human rights and fundamental freedoms in which a person’s will is freely exercised. The UN does not advocate for a specific model of government but promotes democratic governance as a set of values and principles that should be followed for greater participation, equality, security, and human development. In 2002[5], the Commission on Human Rights declared the following essential elements of democracy:

1. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Democracies aim to safeguard individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and the press. They promote and protect civil liberties and provide citizens with mechanisms to challenge violations.

2. Freedom of association, expression, and opinion. Liberal democracy recognizes and respects diversity regarding individual beliefs and group identities. It promotes pluralism, allowing different political opinions, ideologies, and lifestyles to coexist peacefully. Tolerance and respect for diverse viewpoints are essential for a healthy democratic society.

3. Access to power and its exercise by the rule of law. Liberal democracy upholds the principle of popular sovereignty, which means that ultimate political authority rests with the

[5] Global Issues UN: https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy (Last accessed June 2023)

people. Citizens have the right to participate in the political process through elections, voting, and other forms of civic engagement.

4. The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people. Democratic systems typically hold periodic elections where citizens can choose their representatives. These elections are conducted freely and fairly, allowing for a peaceful transfer of power, and holding government officials accountable.

5. A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations. In a pluralistic environment, multiple parties and diverse organizations coexist and compete for political power and representation. It is characterized by diverse viewpoints, ideologies, and interests represented through various political entities.

6. The separation of powers. The separation of powers is a fundamental principle that aims to distribute and limit power within a government by dividing it into separate branches or institutions. This separation safeguards against the concentration of power and the potential abuse of authority.

7. The independence of the judiciary. Democracies are governed by the rule of law, which means that laws are applied equally to all individuals, including those in positions of power. It emphasizes the importance of an independent judiciary to ensure fair and impartial interpretation and enforcement of laws.

8. Transparency and accountability in public administration. Democracy incorporates a system of checks and balances to prevent the concentration of power and protect against potential abuses. Separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government helps maintain a system of accountability and prevents any branch from becoming too dominant.

9. Free, independent, and pluralistic media. Free media provides citizens with accurate, reliable, and diverse information. An independent media acts as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable. It investigates and reports on government actions, exposes corruption, and highlights abuses of power. A pluralistic media offers diverse perspectives and viewpoints, promoting a vibrant marketplace of ideas. It presents alternative opinions, encourages debate, and challenges prevailing narratives. Free media encourages civic engagement and citizen participation. It provides a platform for individuals and organizations to express their opinions, concerns, and aspirations.

The path toward liberal democracy in the European Union has been a complex and gradual process shaped by historical, political, and social factors. Feminist actors, movements, and theories have played a momentous role. Over the last century Feminist Democratic Theory, which aims to create a more just, inclusive, and equitable society, has significantly addressed how gender impacts political systems. More recently, contemporary feminist frameworks and intersectional approaches have challenged and broadened Western notions of democracy. In what follows, we will reconstruct some key feminist contributions and criticisms of the liberal theory of democracy. We will outline how they expand core democratic principles to include women's rights and gender equality, including LGBTQI+ demands and needs. These theoretical contributions have shaped policy and legislation and fostered a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of democracy and justice that strives for equal membership, participation, and representation of all individuals, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, or class.

B. Gendering Democracy

As briefly outlined, democracy remains a contested concept in both political science and philosophy (Coppedge, 2021; Collier & Mahon, 1997). Feminist theories of democracy encompass a range of approaches that highlight the gendered dimensions of political power within democratic systems. Feminist critics seek to challenge and transform patriarchal structures to promote greater gender equality and inclusivity in democratic processes. Common goals include challenging gender inequalities, promoting women's and LGBTQI+ rights and participation, and transforming democratic systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to diverse perspectives and needs. Feminist theories of democracy center around the idea that women's and LGBTQI+ empowerment is essential for achieving a truly democratic society. They challenge the traditional understanding of democracy by highlighting how intersectional inequalities persist and influence political systems, how they define politics and the political, i.e., practical and normative dimensions. Feminist theories of democracy often seek to go beyond procedural democracy (i.e., focusing solely on formal rules and procedures in decision-making) and aim to modify democracy fundamentally. These approaches challenge and seek to alter existing power structures, norms, and institutions perpetuating inequality and injustice. They envision democracy as a tool for social transformation towards a more just and egalitarian society. While feminist theories of democracy can vary in their specific emphasis and approach, a few central concepts often feature prominently: citizenship, participation, and representation.

Feminist scholars problematize how gender norms, roles, and expectations shape and constrain political participation, representation, decision-making, and social and political recognition. A feminist intersectional analysis of democracy, therefore**,** involves studying how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and disability, to produce specific forms of inequality and discrimination within democratic practices and processes. In what follows, the focus will be on feminist analysis of Western liberal democracy, emphasizing three main categories and their debates within the last century: citizenship, participation, and representation.

1. Citizenship

Feminist theories of citizenship examine gendered dimensions of citizenship and explore the challenges and inequalities within political, social, and legal frameworks. It problematizes traditional understandings of citizenship, often failing to account for gender-based disparities and women's experiences. For centuries, women were denied the right to vote and the same political standing as men. Feminist political thinkers such as Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft challenged women's lack of political autonomy. They assailed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, adopted in 1789 by the National Constituent Assembly during the French Revolution, for denying women civil and political rights. Women's demands for equal rights were mocked and denounced as dangerous for the nation and society. The backlash against struggles for women's citizenship resulted in de Gouges being convicted of treason and sentenced to execution by guillotine. Olympe de Gouges was punished for demanding equal citizenship for women and enslaved people (Adami, 2018).

It took more than a century to overturn this gendered conception of citizenship, which changed dramatically after suffrage. As voting citizens, women's role in the public sphere was radically modified through their participation in state-making. The right to vote transformed their standing from dependent citizens to autonomous actors by granting them equal participation in statecraft. The legal status and political identity of women as citizens promoted political equality. It also had far-reaching consequences for women's domestic lives and family and community roles. It is important to note here that factors such as race, class, caste, disability, and religion influenced women's citizenship, with working-class, Black, and indigenous women not having the same effective rights as *white* bourgeois women.

While women today enjoy the same civic and political rights as men in the EU on paper, one must remember that these are relatively recent developments. For instance, Liechtenstein introduced women's suffrage as late as 1984, making it the last European nation to do so. These hard-won rights are again under attack, with women, particularly underprivileged women, being treated as "second-class" citizens and denied citizenship's social, political, and economic benefits. The enduring political under-representation of women in Europe makes it imperative to explore strategies that ensure women's full citizenship. This is not just about incorporating women into male spheres of power; rather, this necessitates the disestablishment of the sexual contract. A radical transformation that the historical achievement of suffrage could not in itself achieve.

Feminist scholars and activists highlight how gender inequalities are embedded within the concept and practices of citizenship. They diagnose how traditional notions of citizenship often exclude or marginalize women and disregard their specific needs, experiences, and rights. One of the cornerstones of liberal democracy is the public sphere, where citizens can contest conditions of inequality and question their exclusion from political arrangements through a practice of societal deliberation. Nancy Fraser offers a theory of citizenship that addresses how social and economic inequalities can undermine democratic participation and the full exercise of citizenship's promised rights, even when formal and legal parity of participation prevail. She challenges traditional conceptions of citizenship by highlighting the importance of social and economic justice in sustaining democratic societies. Fraser's theory centers around the concept of "participatory parity" (1990), which emphasizes the equal distribution of resources necessary for individuals to participate in society fully. She argues that citizenship should entail formal political rights, legal protections, and the social and economic conditions that enable individuals to exercise those rights effectively. Therefore, participatory parity requires substantive social equality. "This does not mean that everyone must have exactly the same income, but it does require the sort of rough equality that is inconsistent with systematically generated relations of dominance and subordination" (Fraser, 1990, p. 65).

Accordingly, achieving participatory parity requires the dimensions of both recognition and redistribution to be considered simultaneously. Social movements and political struggles should aim to challenge and transform structures and systems that perpetuate social and economic inequalities, ultimately ushering in more inclusive and egalitarian citizenship. Overall, Nancy Fraser's theory of citizenship provides a framework for reimagining citizenship beyond formal legal rights and political participation.

Normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion are essential to the concept of the public sphere in democratic theory. Fraser proposes "subaltern counterpublics" (1990, p. 67) as an antidote to the exclusionary mechanisms implicit in homogenized public

spheres. This encompasses four aspects: 1) a focus on inequalities in deliberation, 2) a move from Jürgen Habermas's unitary to a more plural conception of the public; (3) the inclusion of self-interest in deliberation when self-interest is constrained by fairness and rights and, (4) an overcoming of a sharp distinction between civil society and state, as these spheres are interrelated and both subject to democratic norms (Mansbridge, p. 2017). Contemporary democracies are founded on universal principles of justice and human rights, but these do not equally apply to all groups within the territory. The restrictions on political membership or the exclusion of marginalized groups within democratic processes have always been a central issue for feminist theories of democracy. They struggle for more effective and inclusive democratic procedures that safeguard plurality and egalitarian membership.

The notion of pluralism is further elaborated by Chantal Mouffe (2000) in order to challenge the homogeneous and harmonious vision of the political community. Societies are characterized by conflicts and divisions rooted in various social, economic, and cultural factors. According to Mouffe, these conflicts cannot be eliminated, and so should be recognized and channeled into democratic processes. This implies that citizenship is an ongoing, dynamic process of political engagement rather than a fixed status. Mouffe emphasizes the importance of political agency and the right to dissent as essential components of democratic citizenship. Central to Mouffe's theory is the concept of "agonistic pluralism" (2000, p. 69), which focuses on the necessity of political disagreement and confrontation. Instead of seeking to eliminate or suppress conflicts, democratic societies should create spaces to express and negotiate conflicting interests, values, and ideologies. Mouffe explains that "[t]he relation between social agents becomes more democratic only as far as they accept the particularity and the limitation of their claims; that is, only in so far as they recognize their mutual relation as one from which power is ineradicable" (2000, p. 21). Through democratic agonism, which acknowledges and embraces the existence of conflict, citizens can engage in a productive and transformative exchange of ideas and interests. Mouffe also emphasizes the importance of the political community and collective identities in citizenship. Citizens should be able to identify with and participate in various political and social groups that reflect their values and interests. These groups can act as arenas for political mobilization, articulation of demands, and formation of shared identities, providing citizens with a sense of belonging and fostering transformative political engagement.

Another important contribution to feminist democratic theory is Seyla Benhabib's concept of "democratic iterations." This alludes to the possibility of re-appropriation and re-signification of citizenship in order to enable the extension of democratic voice. Democratic rule, according to Benhabib, has been based on various constitutive illusions, such as the homogenization of "the people" and territorial self-sufficiency. We face the challenge of reconfiguring the democratic voice without resorting to these illusions (2004). "Democratic iteration" (2006, p. 45) interrogates how universal norms can respond to particular interests while remaining true to a universalist liberal model. Benhabib (2004, p. 179) conceives of "iteration" as repetition leading to changes directed towards consensus between different positions within a heterogeneous liberal democratic society (Zafer & Millan, 2014, p. 311). Transformations through "democratic iterations" constitute a space that mediates between institutionalized legal norms and demands for change initiated by civil society actors. Benhabib's treatment of statelessness, asylum, and immigration attempts to integrate excluded actors into the political sphere to deepen democratization. For her, legal norms evolve into self-

reflective norms by transforming the principles informing legal decisions and our understanding of democracy, the criteria for membership in a democratic state, and the rights of minority groups within its territory (Benhabib, 2011, p. 76). Thus, for Benhabib, "democratic iteration" transforms not only legal norms but also the identities of civil society actors involved in this process. Emancipatory social movements and civil society actors often pursue such changes and are usually subject to political contestation.

Wendy Brown explores the relationship between citizenship and neoliberalism (2003, p. 2015) and offers another crucial insight into citizenship. Traditional conceptions of citizenship, historically tied to the nation-state and focused on rights, duties, and participation within a bounded political community, have been transformed under neoliberalism. As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism "is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism […] is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player" (2003, p. 39-40). According to Brown, neoliberalism has reconfigured citizenship, turning it into a form of market-oriented consumerism and eroding its democratic and collective dimensions. In neoliberalism, citizenship is no longer primarily defined by political participation and civic engagement but is reduced to a set of consumer choices and market-driven behaviors. Brown avers that "neoliberal citizenship" emphasizes the individual's responsibility for their own well-being and success while neglecting the social and collective dimensions of citizenship. Citizens are transformed into "calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care"—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions" (2003, p. 42). As a result, citizens are encouraged to view themselves primarily as consumers rather than political actors. As entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life, they prioritize their self-interest over the common good. Consequently, depoliticized citizens are reduced to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency. "The neoliberal citizen is calculating rather than rule-abiding" (2003, p. 43). Brown's diagnosis challenges the market-oriented and individualistic understanding of citizenship, emphasizing the need to reclaim its democratic and collective dimensions. It invites the development and promulgation of "a counter rationality, a different figuration of human beings, citizenship, economic life, and the political", which "is critical both to the long labor of fashioning a more just future and to the immediate task of challenging deadly policies" (2003, p. 59).

These concepts show that by inserting new actors into the political stage, democratization promises to instigate a dialogue on the meaning of citizenship. It is well accepted that socially vulnerable and marginalized groups cannot have their interests represented in political systems with the same ease as the more privileged actors. Democracy and its egalitarian principle that everyone, regardless of their background, social identity, or migratory status, is entitled to shape government rules, represent a central promise for marginalized or excluded groups to claim rights and to influence politics. Although the focus has primarily been on minorities or marginalized groups in Western nation-states or central European countries in discussions on the enhancement of democratization through the progressive inclusion of excluded groups into democratic decision-making, it is also imperative to consider the challenges of furthering democratization within a postcolonial and a post-Soviet context.

Contemporary democratic theories should envisage mechanisms for protecting the rights of excluded and marginalized groups on a transnational level. Here is where the notion of subalternity, one of the central concepts of feminist postcolonial theory, comes into play. Gayatri Spivak (1993, p. 2008) explains that when a citizen cannot claim the public sphere, a certain form of subalternity is reproduced. The precarious position of subalterns excludes them from all access to democratic membership and decision-making. Democratic participation is impossible as their claims are not acknowledged like those of more privileged citizens. Social differences such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and disability, among others, preclude the recognition of "democratic voices" or reproduce forms of discrimination and exclusion.

The concept of subalternity indicates the limits of democracy and citizenship. Formal voting rights without access to the public sphere do not enable subalterns and excluded groups to make their interests count. Spivak argues that democracy is not just about economic empowerment; rather, it entails putting every citizen, even if abstractly, into a position of being able to govern. By activating habits of democracy, Spivak aims to imagine a democracy that does not reproduce the "class apartheid" of contemporary democracies (2008, p. 21). This imagined or future democracy remains in the mode of "to come," namely, a process and not an event (Zafer & Millan, 2014, p. 319). The goal is to enable discriminated and subaltern groups to make claims on the state within the formal grammar of rights and citizenship, to activate a "democracy from below." While subaltern subjects gain access to democratic structures through a "new pedagogy," the transnational elites, in turn, should learn from subaltern groups to question their assumptions, privileges, and imbrication in hegemonic structures. This pedagogy of reciprocal learning between transnational elites and rural subalterns contributes to transnational literacy and planetary ethics in a new age of democracy.

Digital spaces have further opened up debates on how virtual publics function as sites for democratic participation and activism (Chandra & Erlingsdóttir, 2020; Turley & Fisher, 2018; Mossberger et al., 2007). The term “digital citizenship” was coined to describe this new phenomenon (Henry et al., 2021), encompassing digital literacy, equal access to digital technologies, and opportunities for participation and self-expression. These technologies engender rights and rules that govern online behavior (Henry et al., 2021). However, they also bring new forms of backlash and discriminatory practices. More recently, scholars have shifted their attention to the emerging threats in the digital sphere to women’s participation in politics and public life. Some examples of this are Kate Manne’s (2017) study of misogyny, Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless’ (2010) study of the gender gaps in self-efficacy perceptions when deciding to run for office; Mona Krook and Juliana Sanin’s (2020) study of violence against female politicians, with a particular focus on digital spaces. Helen Margetts (2019, p. 117) argues that “social media misogyny threatens to discourage a whole generation of women and ethnic minorities from public life.” Similarly, Kathleen McNutt (2007), while highlighting the opportunities that *e-government* and digital democracy open up, discusses how these can exacerbate existing structural inequalities for women and members of marginalized groups, if these inequalities are not explicitly addressed at the time of system design. Nicola Henry et al. (2021, p. 1973) also shed light on "how gender power relations and hierarchies operate to shape digital citizenship.” Drawing on the intersectional feminist approach, they offer a “critique of its promise and practice” (ibid, p. 1979) as well as feminist solutions to overcoming the shortcomings of digital citizenship in its current forms.

Among the key issues discussed is the unconscious bias within data and algorithms that sustain stereotypes, perpetuate systems of oppression, and contribute to the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities. Another problem is the gender gap in access and ability to effectively utilize technology. This gap is wider in the global South and among the first-generation immigrant women and women who experience poverty and disenfranchisement in the global North. A further concern is many forms of "technology-facilitated" abuse against women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons (ibid, p. 1981) that negatively affect their participation in online spaces and their experience with digital citizenship. These drawbacks notwithstanding, technology can empower women (broadly defined) and people from historically less privileged backgrounds to exercise their agency and share their experiences in the local context. This was the case with the #MeToo movement, which ultimately created "solidarity in difference" (Lister quoted in Henry et al., 2020, p. 1985). Effective democratization is unattainable without substantial participation.

2. Participation

Early feminist contributions to democratic political theory focused on dismantling the public/private divide, which essentially excluded women from participation in the public sphere, even as it served as the foundation for male citizens' participation. Feminist scholars also questioned traditional gender roles in the family and community that supported unequal participation in democratic polities. Carole Pateman and Susan Okin, two pioneering feminist thinkers, engaged with classical liberal political theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and challenged their idea of a *gender-neutral* social contract.

As a thought experiment that explained the emergence of modern societies, social contract theory argued that rational actors willingly transfer some of their rights, namely the right to defend themselves, to a central authority, which guarantees the rule of law and peaceful coexistence. They are granted protection of life, liberty, and property from a war of all against all in, otherwise inherent to the state of nature. Liberal feminists like Carole Pateman and Susan Okin pointed out that the social contract rests on the divide between public and private, which operates under two sets of laws and assumptions – one based on equality and free agency, and another based on inequality and oppression. They further examine how a male citizen's participation in politics is only possible because of the free time he gains, while women are burdened with care work.

In her book, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), Carole Pateman argues that the sexual division of labor in the household and its hierarchical structure, which places the man as the head of the family, is best understood as a contract prior to the social contract, which is among men who are considered equal and autonomous. This sexual contract, which involves marriage and reproduction, excludes women from political participation. It subordinates them to the will of men, who represent their interests in the public. The world of liberal egalitarian rights guaranteed by a social contract was built, Pateman argues, on a foundation of exploitation, domination, and subordination of women to men, which violates the idea of a contract – a legal instrument that equal parties enter freely.

Susan Okin, in her book *Justice, Gender, Family* (1989), also assails the public/private divide created by liberalism and indicts the family as an inherently oppressive institution that prevents women from participating in the public sphere. For Okin, as for other liberal feminists,

the personal is political, such that the family is a site of patriarchal power. This power hierarchy stems from the division of labor between the sexes, which is assumed to be part of the natural order in liberalism (Okin, 1989, p. 125). Power hierarchies that emerge in the private sphere of the family translate into and are supported by other structural inequalities that women experience in the public sphere (Okin, 1989, 132, 138), thus affecting the choices women make, the opportunities they pursue, and those in which they can succeed (Okin, 1989, p. 147).

Dismantling the private/public divide and contesting essentialist gender roles has had wide-ranging implications. Firstly, it raised awareness that men and women are entitled to the same rights and privileges. It further introduced a radical idea that women are capable political subjects adept at making their own choices, determining their interests, acting on them, working outside the domestic sphere, and participating in politics. Moreover, it focused on the role of the state and society in perpetuating but also in eliminating gender disparity. The goal is to mitigate the lack of women's participation and representation in politics by drawing attention to discriminatory social policies and their gendered repercussions. Data gathering exercises, which document the impact of inequality and injustice, play a crucial role in understanding gender relations and have become a standard item in survey research.

The newer generation of feminist scholars continues to examine formal and informal modes of women's participation in politics as well as their implications for democratic political theory. For instance, Pamela Paxton argues that if one were to explicitly consider female suffrage as a necessary condition for democracy, then one would find very different country groupings in the famous Huntington's waves of democracy (Paxton, 2012, p. 48). Furthermore, if women's participation or lack thereof is seriously considered, it reveals that democratic institutions "are organized around men's lives and interests. Women cannot participate on the same terms as men because of their separate roles, their different bodies, and [because] the assumptions that accompany them are not built into the institutions [at the time of their creation]" (Lovenduski, 2019, p. 24); women's role is "restricted to participation in elections as voters, candidates, and elected representatives" (ibid, also see Celis & Childs, 2020). Thus, whether and how women can effectively participate in democracy remains high on the agenda of liberal feminist theorists and practitioners. They continue to generate solutions ranging from political quotas to fighting gender stereotypes to encouraging more women to participate in politics. Studies have also explored women's informal participation in democracies as part of feminist movements and the political implications of these (see, for example, Htun & Weldon, 2012; Htun & Weldon, 2018; Fábián, 2010).

Iris Marion Young (2000) identifies four consequences of applying the republican civic ideal to deliberative spaces that restrict the participation of marginalized social groups. Firstly, a narrow interpretation of what constitutes a good argument is privileged, favoring dispassionate, neutral forms of argumentation over experiential and narrative-based arguments. Secondly, the defense of unity and common interest in the public sphere perpetuates the interests of those already in power. Thirdly, face-to-face debate is prioritized, despite the limitations it poses for marginalized groups. Lastly, the participation structure in deliberation is normative, masking the subjective power dynamics. This results in issues being labeled as "out of order" or "not up for discussion" without acknowledging the exercise of power involved.

Since the 1980s, scholars have criticized Habermas' liberal and consensus-based notion of the public sphere for its androcentric and eurocentric approach. Feminist theorists, for

instance, have highlighted the exclusionary nature of the male public sphere and have called for the recognition of feminist counterpublics (Félski, 1989; Fraser, 1990). Similarly, Marxist scholars have emphasized the importance of material conditions in producing the public, seeking to emphasize the material realities of proletarian counterpublics (Majewska, 2021). Finally, scholars of the Black liberation movement have contributed to this conversation by highlighting how the dominant public sphere has been shaped by racial oppression and exclusion (Dawson, 1994). These critical insights challenge the assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the public sphere and offer alternative visions of democratic participation and inclusion.

Feminist approaches outline how the binary division of labor, roles, spaces, and time profoundly impacts various aspects of life, including democratization processes (Wojciechowska, 2019). Participation in such inegalitarian structures and processes reinforces a gendered, racial, and class-based division of labor. With *white* men monopolizing the public sphere, women and people of color are relegated to invisible labor resulting in lower participation rates (Bird, 2015). Feminist scholarship concludes that true democratization cannot be achieved without acknowledging and reflecting on gendered, racialized, and class divided public and private spaces.

In the wake of the so-called "Cultural Turn" of the 1970s, feminist theories shifted their emphasis from redistribution to recognition and representation. The former approach centered around material equality and redistribution and claimed that overcoming the gendered division of labor and promoting women's participation in the labor market was critical to achieving gender justice and, thus, full political equality. The latter emphasized recognizing sexual differences and deconstructing the categorial opposition between masculine and feminine. This approach emphasizes that to achieve political equality, it is imperative to focus on issues of identity and representation.

Nancy Fraser (2007) bemoans this shift in feminist democratic thought and claims that the split between redistribution and recognition has seriously weakened feminist struggles to dismantle gender injustice. To overcome the competition between materialist and non-materialist struggles, Fraser (2007, p. 25) proposes a two-dimensional approach to gender justice, "theorizing both the gendered character of the political economy and the androcentrism of the cultural order, without reducing either one of them to the other" (2007, p. 25). She labels these two dimensions political-economic and cultural-discursive, with the former corresponding to the focus on redistribution and the latter to the emphasis on recognition. Fraser argues that the dimensions are relatively independent of yet at the same time interacting with each other. According to Fraser, the proposed two-dimensional approach to understanding justice necessitates a corresponding nuanced consideration of gender justice. Such a concept of justice encompasses "the traditional concerns of theories of distributive justice, especially poverty, exploitation, inequality, and class differentials", as well as aspects of recognition, "especially disrespect, cultural imperialism, and status hierarchy" (Fraser, 2007, p. 27).

The current shortcomings of democracies in achieving gender justice are reflected in both dimensions: Insofar as the economic structure of society denies women the resources they need to participate fully in social life, it institutionalizes sexist maldistribution. To the extent that women are less-than-full partners in social and political processes, it institutionalizes sexist misrecognition. In either case, the result is a morally indefensible gender order (Fraser, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, "what is required is not only the deinstitutionalization of androcentric value

hierarchies, but also the restructuring of the division of labor to eliminate women's 'double shift', which constitutes a formidable distributive obstacle to their full participation in political life." Any democratic system that aims to be a just system, "requires participatory parity across all major axes of social differentiation; not only gender, but, also, 'race,' ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and nationality" (Fraser, 2007, p. 29). Postcolonial-queer-feminist scholars supplement this by considering other categories of discrimination that intersect with gender, including but not limited to ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and/or nationality. In addition, more recent contributions also increasingly pay attention to gender inequalities that exceed national boundaries, including questions of participation and representation in intergovernmental and supranational institutions, as well as the transnational public spheres (Fraser, 2006, p. 47f.). "In contesting misframing," in addition to earlier scholars' emphasis on maldistribution and misrecognition, Fraser (2006, p. 49) describes this newer phase of "transnational feminism" in "reconfiguring gender justice as a three-dimensional problem, in which redistribution, recognition, and representation must be integrated in a balanced way".

It is worth noting that thus far, we have discussed political participation and its constraints through the liberal and Western feminist lens. Though women are no longer considered a homogenous group, they are still perceived as a group with somewhat shared interests that can be observed, measured, and represented. Postcolonial and intersectional feminists challenge the reified notion of women as a group with shared experiences (Anzaldua & Moraga, 2015; Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 2003; Hancock, 2007; Dietz, 2003). They argue that second-wave feminism reflects the interests and aspirations of upper-middle-class white women in the US and cannot represent the experiences of Black women, women of color, and women living in the global South. Their understanding of participation, agency, sexual division of labor, oppression, and patriarchy differs from their more privileged counterparts (Mohanty, 1984). They further object to the universalization of the Western notion of state and society, calling for more careful attention to local gender and racial power dynamics, not just from the elites' perspective but also from the oppressed (Hall, 2020).

Against notions of "global sisterhood," scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (2004), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), Amina Mama (2001), and Kristen Ghodsee (2004) contest "imperialist feminist" efforts to empower and emancipate their suppressed sisters. They criticize Western-centered, top-down approaches to gender justice and women's human rights promotion. Instead of fostering democratic participation and activating the agency of Third World Women, the "will to empower" discourses feed "rescue narratives." This reduces Black, migrants, women of color, and women in the global South to mere recipients of solidarity and benevolence instead of a recognition of their agency and voice (Dhawan, 2013). The failure to listen to the perspectives of subaltern women reduces them to victim status. It makes them dependent on the efforts of First World agencies, thus perpetuating neo-colonial relations. To foster the political participation of traditionally marginalized groups, Black, Roma, immigrant, indigenous, and Muslim women, all often excluded from decision-making processes, must be recognized as legitimate political subjects. Elite transnational feminists must unlearn that they are problem-solvers and must develop intellectual humility. This would involve listening to solutions generated by subaltern women, and opening pathways to facilitate their inclusion in democratic practices.

3. Representation

Like citizenship and political participation, political representation is a core feature of liberal democratic theory. Substantive representation aims to challenge the gender bias inherent in political institutions and bring about substantive gender equality. It is argued that it is not sufficient to have women in political positions; their presence should also lead to meaningful changes in policies, priorities, and decision-making processes that appropriately address women's concerns and interests. Karen Celis (2008, p. 74) explains that the "presence of the represented via the representative is a necessary component of representation, but their absence is too; inclusion and exclusion are inherent aspects of the concept." She distinguishes two approaches for understanding representation, one focusing on the mandate linking the represented and representatives and the other focusing on descriptive representation. While liberal democracies permitted women to be part of the represented much later than men, they ultimately received the right to vote, with representatives now being accountable to them as well. In the second approach, the number of representatives remains skewed towards men, however. Other authors stress the importance of substantive representation, which looks beyond the composition of assemblies and focuses on the extent to which the representatives are "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1972, p. 209). In this view, women's interests continue to be underrepresented, too. For some scholars (e.g., Young, 2000), substantive representation is not so much about a representative knowing her constituency's interests but more about knowing their perspectives.

Descriptive representation is viewed as a precondition of substantive representation (not by all authors), yet mere quantitative representation does not suffice to achieve the substantive representation of one's interests. "Formal participation (e.g., as candidates and electorate) is often a prerequisite for descriptive (e.g., female legislators) and substantive representation (e.g., through the inclusion of women's issues in the party program)" (Celis, 2008, p. 81). Despite the significant progress of Western democracies in putting women's issues on the agenda, feminist scholars continue to question whether and how democratic institutions are accountable to women and the degree of substantive representation women get on the "issues [that] are of particular concern to women, [such as] gender pay gap, sexism, childcare, gender-based violence, reproductive rights and political representation itself" (Lovenduski, 2019, p. 28). These issues are often not framed in feminist terms, thus making women's experiences invisible, reducing potential gains for women, and creating unanticipated negative consequences (Lovenduski, 2019; Kantola, 2010; Montoya, 2015).

Outlining the link between substantive and descriptive representation, Anne Phillips (1998, 2006) argues that having women and other marginalized groups in political assemblies is important. This ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are included in the discussion and demonstrates that women and members of marginalized groups belong in that space. Furthermore, she notes that merely by their presence, women and members from historically underrepresented groups send a message to other legislatures to consider their concerns. For her, "democracy then appears as an exciting engagement with a difference: the challenge of 'the other'; the disruption of certainties; the recognition of ambiguities within one's self and one's differences with others" (2006, p. 81).

If proportional representation of the citizenry is regarded as an essential goal of democratic political systems, then the extent of democracy is constrained insofar as

representation continues to favor men to the detriment of women and other genders, minorities, and marginalized groups. Worldwide, women's political representation has historically been and continues to be curbed along multiple lines, including 1) the absence of the active right to vote, excluding them from the represented and from opportunities to gain representation; 2) descriptive underrepresentation in legislative bodies; 3) substantive underrepresentation in legislative bodies; as well as 4) the absence of the passive right to vote, excluding them from the representatives and hence their opportunities to represent women (descriptively or substantively).

We can look at these two descriptive and substantive representation dimensions from either a quantitative or qualitative perspective or both. From the first perspective, the degree to which a legislative assembly is considered politically representative regarding sex and gender depends on the number of representatives from different genders or the number of legislations that substantively represent women. From the second perspective, representativeness hinges on the qualitative resemblance of representatives and represented (on the descriptive dimension) and the quality of their acts, such as the inclusiveness and scope of women's interests considered in legislation. According to Celis (2008, p. 84), a fully representative system is only given when the ideal type of representation is achieved, which implies "(1) a full and equal formal participation [...]; (2) descriptive representation of men and women reflecting the composition of society as a whole [...]; and (3) substantive representation including representation of women's interests and the gendering of the general interest".

These ideals are distorted by the way in which recruitment and selection processes are organized as well as the elections, through which the link between represented and representatives is established. In these areas, both dimensions of gender injustice discussed above – maldistribution and misrecognition – have detrimental consequences for gender equality. An additional, comprehensive overview of the research programs studying the effects of substantive and descriptive representation can be found in Lena Wängnerud's work (2009).

In recent years, feminist scholars are increasingly paying more attention to the symbolic representation of gender. Building on Pitkin's concept of symbolic representation, Emanuela Lombardo and Petra Meier (2016) explore the role of socially constructed meanings behind the concept of "man" and "woman" in politics. They emphasize the importance of understanding the "symbolic representation of gender through the discursive construction of women and men as political symbols, in finding out how women and men are discursively constructed, and how symbols stand for and symbolically represent gender" (p. 9). The theory of symbolic representation focuses on the cultural and discursive aspects of representation, exploring how gender norms, stereotypes, and ideologies shape the meanings attached to political symbols, rhetoric, and practices. Feminist theorists argue that gender plays a significant role in shaping these symbolic representations as it influences how women are perceived and treated in politics. For example, associating leadership qualities with traditionally masculine traits like assertiveness or strength may reinforce the notion that women are less suited for leadership positions. Feminist theorists also analyze the role of language in symbolic representation and argue that the language used in political discourse can perpetuate gender inequalities and marginalize women's perspectives. This can be seen in the use of gendered terms or in the trivialization of women's concerns through dismissive or derogatory language. For example, deviating from the male norm, women in politics are stereotyped in the media as less competent and capable. Feminist theories of symbolic representation highlight the importance of

challenging and transforming these gendered representations. They emphasize the need for language and imagery that acknowledges and values women's experiences and perspectives. This includes promoting inclusive language, avoiding stereotypes, and actively challenging and disrupting the dominant gendered narratives. This theory also recognizes the power of counter-symbolism and alternative discourses in challenging gender inequalities. This involves creating new symbols, narratives, and cultural meanings that contest gender norms and redefine women's roles and identities in politics, for example, by creating alternative discourses to foster a more equitable and inclusive political representation for women.

C. Contemporary feminist analysis of democratic theory

Building upon the foundations laid by earlier feminist theories (discussed above), contemporary feminist approaches continue to evolve, responding to current events and developing debates. In what follows, we reconstruct three contemporary feminist theories of democracy: Ecofeminism, Social Reproduction Theory and Care Ethics, and Queer and Transfeminism. These modern feminist theories of democracy reflect ongoing efforts to address new challenges and expand the understanding of gender and other social categories like race, ethnicity, class, and disability within democratic systems. They highlight the importance of engaging with intersectionality, transnational perspectives, normative violence, environmentalism, technology, and vulnerability/relationality in the pursuit of advancing feminist goals within democratic contexts. This section summarizes different Western and non-Western perspectives and offers a multifaceted analysis of recent contributions to feminist democratic theory.

1. Ecofeminism

At the interface of feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism highlights the conceptual, historical, and material correlations between the subjugation of women and the domination and continued degradation of nature. As a social movement and a form of multidirectional critical theory, ecofeminism challenges patriarchy and capitalism simultaneously (Mallory, 2010). The synergies between environmentalism and feminism enhance both movements' conceptual and political aspirations. This encounter enriches each movement's analysis, adding depth, complexity, and clarity while contributing to the struggle for a more equitable and just society (Herrero, 2015; Mallory, 2010).

Vandana Shiva is one of the leading exponents of ecofeminism. In her view, "Earth Democracy" (Shiva, 2005) is central to understanding the relationship between democracy and ecological sustainability. Shiva argues that while we are rooted locally, we are at the same time connected to the world and the universe; any global economy that acknowledges ecological limits must necessarily localize production to minimize waste and maximize human potentiality (Shiva, 2005). This understanding highlights the importance of concepts such as sovereignty, citizenship, and participation in democratic theory. Shiva contends that democratic control over our food, water, and ecological survival is crucial to our freedom. For her, a "living democracy" (Shiva, 2005) provides a platform for reclaiming our most basic freedoms, defending our fundamental rights, and exercising our shared responsibilities toward protecting life on earth, promoting justice, and maintaining peace. She highlights the

limitations of current democratic regimes, controlled by multinational corporations, lobbyists, and coercive rules of globalization. This has eroded democratic principles, such that exclusion, hatred, and fear are weaponized to mobilize power and votes. In contrast, "living democracy" empowers us to engage democratically in all aspects of life and death by drawing on the intrinsic value of all species, peoples, and cultures (Shiva, 2005). Shiva advocates for a more participatory paradigm of democracy that is lacking in contemporary representative democracies worldwide.

"Living democracy" is simultaneously local and global, transcending the exclusivist logic of disjunctions and evolving through the non-duality and inseparability of relationships. This generates accountability and lays the foundation for sharing and having compassion, following the ideals of fair and equitable partaking of the earth's vital resources. Through shared decision-making regarding the use of planetary resources, hitherto vulnerable collectives can become equal participants in transnational dialogues (Shiva, 2005). To build living democracies, Shiva identifies several aspects, including reinventing citizenship and reclaiming community networks, expanding popular sovereignty, and reinventing global institutions and governance.

She emphasizes that localization does not imply autarky, such that areas of life not amenable to self-organization require government. Shiva's theory also underscores the importance of accountability, representation, and the need to democratize national governments, international institutions, and large corporations, subjecting them to greater social control (Shiva, 2005). This promotes a participatory conception of democracy, such that "[e]conomies of care imply decentralization and participatory democracy and encompass cultural and biological diversity which precipitate participation and localization rooted in relationships and affinity" (Shiva, 2022).

Another non-Eurocentric approach is provided by Jing Liu, who examines the relationship between Daoist ecofeminism and democracy, focusing on contemporary China (Liu, 2022). Liu analyzes how patriarchy operates in China as well as how it relates to the environment and suggests that Daoist ecofeminism could be a means to address both of these issues. Liu argues that while individualism and autonomy are important principles, they can become problematic when prioritized over relationality and contextuality (Liu, 2022). She stresses that the oppression of humans often takes place through the oppression of nature, such that the liberation of nature is naturally tied to the struggle for true democracy, both in Western and Eastern societies (Liu, 2022). Liu explains that Daoist democracy is a way of life characterized by equality and freedom for all beings, expressed through *ziran*. Ziran is a Chinese term that means "nature," "self-going," "being free," "spontaneous," or "natural" (Liu, 2022). Daoist philosophy advocates that all things are equal, and that human freedom can only be attained by belonging to nature (Liu, 2022).

Ecofeminism thus provides a prescriptive account of progressive and liberatory interspecies politics and suggests concrete strategies to achieve it. Assailing liberal democracy for foregrounding political strategy and liberal consumerism, Val Plumwood (1995) highlights how a critical ecofeminist approach contests the architecture of liberal democracy that has resulted in the current ecological crisis. Ecofeminists challenge the capitalist and extractivist reduction of nature to private property, the appropriation of reproductive labor, and the coding of masculinist citizenship in terms of the disavowal of dependency as a human condition (Plumwood, 1995). The main flaw of liberal democracy is its failure to extend democratic

principles to ecologically crucial areas of life, including the economy, paid work, and private areas, such as the household and personal life (Plumwood, 1995). Plumwood's insights have been further developed by many ecofeminists political theorists, including Catriona Sandilands (1999), who connects struggles for social justice and extends membership/citizenship to the more-than-human world. Teena Gabrielson and Katelyn Parady (2010) call for a radical rethinking of green citizenship and ecological democracy, drawing on Plumwood's work and arguing for a move towards recognizing the common materiality of humans and nature as embodied and embedded beings.

Another important thinker in these debates is Donna J. Haraway, who, as a prominent feminist theorist, has notably contributed to science studies but also focuses on eco-political questions. Haraway's primary contention resides in the intersection of nature/culture and sex/gender, serving as the foundational premise for elucidating the valuable and pertinent contributions that feminism and gender studies can offer to the realm of environmentalism (Haraway, 1978). Since the 1970s, numerous scholars within the environmentalist sphere have examined the notion of 'nature' as a fluid construct that cannot be unequivocally deemed an unalterable 'fact' or a reality devoid of entanglement with human discursive practices. Haraway criticizes the conceptual framework of modernity that perpetuates the subjugation of women and nature (Haraway, 1978). According to Haraway, biology can be perceived as an extension of politics (Haraway, 1996), as it has been instrumental in delineating the parameters of inclusion and membership within the collective identity of "us" (Haraway, 1984). In her perspective, the natural sciences have provided the means to exert control over both the human body and (indigenous) communities by constructing the category of nature, thereby also enabling the imposition of constraints on human agency and freedom (Haraway, 1991). Consequently, the appropriation and recontextualization of the concept of nature hold significant importance in social reclamation and emancipation (Haraway, 1991).

Haraway recognizes nature as "a crucial cultural process for people who need and hope to live in a world less riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality" (Haraway, 1991, p. 2). She criticizes the essentialist tendencies in ecofeminism by questioning the logic of identity (Haraway, 1999). Instead of fixed essences, Haraway prefers to speak of "articulated" or "articulations". Every entity is a set of articulations of diverse elements and never a homogeneous whole determined from within, nature being one example. This implies rejecting the premise that there is only one form, the real or true form of nature (Haraway, 1999). Haraway rejects essentialist analytical ideas inherent in traditional modernity, prioritizing human and cultural dominance. Instead, she argues for a collective understanding of our existence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-human actors. This perspective acknowledges our existence within a web of relationships guided by a systemic logic transcending rigid identities. Biological and cultural determinisms are viewed as flawed assumptions, as they mistakenly attribute concrete existence and predetermined foundations to abstract and localized categories (Haraway, 2003). Haraway's ecofeminism stands out for incorporating technology into the nature-culture dynamic, which she terms "naturecultures" (Haraway, 2016). It challenges binary thinking and acknowledges the interdependence of humans, machines, animals, nature, and culture. Overall, ecofeminist perspectives highlight the need for a fundamental reimagining of democracy and citizenship that considers the interconnectedness of humans and nature and the importance of care work in sustaining both.

Shifting the focus to ecofeminist European debates, we engage with two Spanish scholars. Alicia H. Puleo, who is widely regarded as one of the foremost ecofeminist academics, outlines the main tenets of ecofeminism that do not abandon enlightened universalism and its regulatory ideals (Puleo, 2008). These tenets include: 1) being critical thinkers, 2) advocating for the equality and autonomy of women, 3) accepting the benefits of science and technology with prudence, 4) promoting the universalization of the values of the ethics of care toward humans and nature, 5) engaging in intercultural dialogue, and 6) affirming the unity and continuity of nature based on evolutionary knowledge and compassion. Puleo argues that an ideal democratic organization goes beyond the limits of representative democracy. She posits that the ecofeminist utopia supports a participatory democracy, which is not simply formal but deep and inclusive (Puleo, 2008). Of particular interest is Puleo's reflection on the idea of fraternity.

Although liberty, equality, and fraternity were the rallying cries of the French Revolution that opened the way to modern European democracy, the third element of this triad has received less attention from political philosophy than the first two, despite being an important normative principle in Rawlsian theory (Puleo, 2008). Fraternity is linked to the moral sentiment that predisposes society to a fairer distribution of resources and recognition and is a fundamental normative principle. In the era of climate change, desertification, and biodiversity loss, fraternity must also include both sustainment to preserve the common living space as well as responsibility towards future generations. Fraternity is also important in addressing the conditions of those most vulnerable to pollution and the degradation of the Earth, including women, children, and poor people of the global South (Puleo, 2008). Puleo's ecofeminist approach to democracy thus emphasizes the need for deep, participatory democracy that goes beyond formal mechanisms of representation (Puleo, 2017). Her reflection on fraternity as a normative principle, which includes sustainability, is particularly relevant in the context of the current ecological crisis. By highlighting the importance of caring for nature and the most vulnerable members of society, Puleo's ecofeminism contributes to a broader understanding of basic democratic concepts such as liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Another prominent ecofeminist activist in Spain is Yayo Herrero, who advocates for economic rather than traditional democracy as a form of social organization (Herrero, 2015). Herrero criticizes conventional economics for exclusively valuing money and formalizing the abstraction of *Homo economicus* as an economic subject. In contrast to the reductionist "my economy," ecofeminism centers on the "we economy," which prioritizes satisfying collective needs. This requires seeking new forms of socialization and economic organization that foreground the maintenance of life over monetary profit.

Herrero's ecofeminist perspective challenges the androcentric and biocidal logic of conventional economics, which fails to consider the needs of humans and nature alike (Herrero, 2015). The relationship between ecofeminism and democracy emphasizes addressing collective concerns and inclusive participation in decision-making processes. Herrero proposes a radical change in the economy, politics, and culture, which would involve reorganizing the productive model and its impact on people (Herrero, 2015). The "we economy" prioritizes the satisfaction of the collective needs of all individuals, which is a fundamental aspect of democratic theory. Ecofeminists, therefore, focus on what is essential for promoting a democratic society that values the well-being of all individuals as well as the environment. Furthermore, ecofeminism's focus on the intersectionality of oppressions and the

interconnectedness of all living beings can provide valuable insights for creating a more inclusive and participatory democratic system.

2. Social Reproduction Theory & Care Ethics

One of the most radical contributions by recent feminist scholarship has been the critical questioning of liberal understandings of subjectivity, which assumes individuals to be autonomous and sovereign. Feminist approaches to vulnerability and precarity highlight that humans inherently depend on others for survival (Butler, 2018). This approach contests androcentric and eurocentric framing of political agency and social relations. Feminists argue that being interdependent, vulnerable, and precarious does not preclude political agency or action. Marginalized groups, systematically deprived of life-sustaining conditions, often become political actors, claiming their right to participate in the public sphere and demand justice. This "embodied and plural action" is a response by vulnerable bodies who struggle for a more inclusive and equitable social order (Butler, 2017).

The feminist focus on vulnerability is closely linked to the interdependence of care, which is vital for social reproduction and encompasses both the affective and material domains (González & De la Fuente, 2022). During the third wave of feminism, Marxist and materialist feminist theories drew attention to the gendered dimension of domestic and reproductive work (González & De la Fuente, 2022). More recently, care work has been re-examined from a global and transnational perspective, reflecting the current care crisis and its impact on women, resulting from economic, social, political, and demographic transformations (Fraser, 2020). This crisis is intrinsically linked to several factors, including the dismantling of the traditional family, the increasing integration of middle-class women into the labor market, the concomitant “disappearance” of the housewife, and the neoliberal demand for labor flexibilization. These factors consolidate patriarchal structures in the care labor market. As a result, care has become a vital issue for the feminist agenda for the 21st century (González & De la Fuente, 2022). The exclusion of care practices from the public sphere despite their crucial role in sustaining human life has been criticized by feminist scholars for decades (Ruddick, 1980). It is argued that creating a fairer society requires urgent recognition of care work's ethical and political significance.

Since the 1990s and 2000s, Joan Tronto (1993), Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998), Eva Feder Kittay (1999), and Virginia Held (2006), among others, have argued that all members of a society have a collective obligation to ensure equal opportunities for giving and receiving care, thereby promoting an egalitarian society. Joan Tronto (1993) is particularly noteworthy for her significant contribution to the intersection of feminist care ethics and democratic theory. She offers a fresh perspective on fundamental concepts of democratic theory by foregrounding the intimate interconnection of caring, democracy, citizenship, and equality. This focus raises important questions regarding reimagining democracy and care work to foster the development of “caring societies” (Jesenková, 2021). Tronto argues that engaging with care ethics will lead to re-evaluating the democratic concept of citizenship. As they disregard the relational aspect of intersubjectivity, mainstream accounts of self-interest and selflessness are inadequate in understanding what it means to be human. Society establishes complex social and political institutions to support altruistic and egoistical behaviors. It is essential to examine the structural

and systemic conditions that enable specific forms of human action, including caring practices (Lorey, 2022).

The term *cuidadanía* (care and citizenship in Spanish) acknowledges the diverse array of care relationships and redefines the traditional notion of citizenship. By merging the terms "ciudadanía" (citizenship) and "cuidados" (care), "cuidadanía" embodies a fresh model of social interaction that upholds the importance of interdependence without relegating it to a purely personal sphere (Lorey, 2022). Thus, the mutual dependence of citizens on others to meet their care needs constitutes the basis of equality in a democratic society (Tronto, 2013). In a nutshell, care ethics challenges and modifies the democratic concept of citizenship, as it underscores how caring practices are essential to promoting equality and interdependence among citizens in a democratic society.

A related approach is Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), which emerged from socialist-feminist and anti-racist movements in the aftermath of struggles for emancipation and recognition in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA and Western Europe. SRT is an analytical framework that examines how gender inequalities are reproduced and reinforced through social and economic structures, particularly concerning reproductive labor and care work. It is a comprehensive analysis of the processes of production and reproduction (Melda Yaman, 2022). Rather than just focusing on capital accumulation/commodity production and reproduction of capital, SRT expands the concept of social production to include care and reproduction work, which women typically perform. It highlights how gender roles and inequalities are perpetuated through the organization of work, family, and society. While many Marxist analyses investigate the productive economy, SRT engages with issues such as childcare, health care, education, family life, and the roles of gender, race, and sexuality, all of which are central to understanding the relationship between economic exploitation and social oppression (Bhattacharya, 2017). Contributing to democratic theory, SRT provides a critical lens to examine key concepts such as equality by highlighting the often invisible and unpaid labor. Women primarily perform this work that is essential to the functioning of society. SRT also underscores the need for recognition and equality in both the public and private spheres. Alternatively, SRT brings attention to the constraints faced by those who perform care and reproduction work, often limiting their freedom to participate fully in other aspects of society, such as workers or citizens.

Thus, care ethics and SRT compel us to question the conventional dichotomy between private and public life as well as their associated values and concepts (Tronto, 1993). An ethical approach to care work changes political concepts and social policy. In contrast to the mainstream understanding of citizenship, typically defined by employment and viewed as a public good and a prerequisite for fulfilling human needs, membership is modified in a society governed by care. In a caring society, care work gains recognition, leading to a newer understanding of citizenship and political participation. Care ethics requires a re-conceptualization of democracy, in which it is the collective responsibility of all citizens to ensure equality and possibility of giving and receiving care.

3. Queer & Trans Feminism

Gender is not an inherent or fixed characteristic but a social and performative construct. It is not determined by one's biological sex or by any essential qualities. Rather, it is a set of norms

and expectations that society imposes on individuals based on their perceived sex. Therefore, gender is not a natural or fixed category but a historically contingent and socially constructed system of power relations (Scott, 2008). It is not a fixed or stable identity but a dynamic and contingent concept that varies across time, place, and culture. Gender is performed and reproduced through everyday actions, discourses, and institutions, such as language, family, education, media, and politics.

Challenging traditional feminist and sociological understandings of gender by offering a materialist analysis that emphasizes the role of social and economic structures in constructing and perpetuating gender inequality, Christine Delphy's (1993) concept of gender is closely tied to her understanding of capitalism and its impact on women's lives. She argues that gender is not simply a product of individual identities or cultural norms but is fundamentally rooted in the material conditions of society, particularly in the relations of production and reproduction. She also criticizes the notion of gender as a binary system and argues that gender is not simply about the differences between men and women but about power relations. Gender, in her view, is a social division that allocates unequal resources, opportunities, and social roles based on one's perceived sex. Furthermore, Delphy challenges the concept of "gender roles" by highlighting that gender is not a set of fixed, innate characteristics or behaviors but is actively produced and reinforced through social practices and institutions.

Gender, as Judith Butler (1988) explains, is constructed and performed through repetitive acts reinforcing societal institutions, language, and cultural practice at large. Gender is a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political forces and should be seen as a site of ongoing struggle and contestation. Butler’s work encourages critical analysis of the social construction of gender and calls for greater recognition of individuals' experiences and the expressions of their gender identities. This approach to gender also challenges the traditional binary understanding of gender as exclusively male or female. There are multiple ways of being and expressing gender beyond male and female categories. This approach questions the assumption that gender identity must align with biological sex and advocates for a more inclusive understanding of gender that acknowledges and respects diverse identities and expressions.

In recent scholarship, there has been increasing focus on the historical and cultural aspects of transgender identity and activism. In her work, Susan Stryker explores how transgender individuals have challenged and negotiated gender norms throughout history, examining how transgender experiences intersect with broader social, political, and cultural contexts. Gender, Stryker argues, "is not related to 'sex' in the same way that an apple is related to the reflection of a red fruit in the mirror; it is not a mimetic relationship. Perhaps 'sex' is a category that, like citizenship, can be obtained by non-native residents of a particular place by following certain procedures" (2007, p. 60). For Stryker, "the genealogy of this relationship is established in a more complex way, both at the level of individual biography and socio-historical process" (2007, p. 60). It is precisely through this shift of perspective and methodology that LGBTQI+ subjectivities, by denaturalizing the gender order, draw our attention to the processes through which normativity is produced. Trans-feminism challenges and disrupts heteronormativity, which assumes that heterosexuality is the norm and that gender roles and expectations are based on binary male and female categories. Stryker argues that these rigid norms marginalize and oppress individuals whose experiences and identities fall outside these prescribed binary categories.

Queer and trans-feminist scholarship has enormously contributed to rethinking democratic theory by exposing its heteronormative bias. For instance, Butler's idea of gender performativity challenges identity politics. Queer politics undermines the logic of identity by rejecting the liberal approaches to sexuality and instead emphasizes queer desires in social interactions (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Butler suggests that disidentification is crucial for democratic contestation, underscoring the importance of resisting regulatory norms that materialize sexual differences (Butler, 1993). Inspired by Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) and Judith Butler (1993), Hans Asenbaum proposes disidentification as a radical political practice with the potential to offer new interpretations of the democratic subject (Asenbaum, 2021). For him, freedom as a democratic concept is altered through "disidentification," which involves rejecting dominant cultural expectations of identity and finding alternative ways to express oneself. By disidentifying, individuals can gain more freedom to articulate their personae, which can democratize subjectivation and social relations (Asenbaum, 2021). Although dominant discourses cannot be completely overturned, disidentification would allow individuals to work with the available terms and use them as raw material to represent disempowered subjects or positionality rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (Asenbaum, 2021).

Isabelle Lorey draws on the notion of "presentist democracy" guided by queer-feminist protest movements (Lorey, 2022). She challenges the idea that there can be a stable and transhistorical account of the "right" form and values for a democracy, arguing instead that democracy is a matter of political negotiation and debate that must be continually re-evaluated. Lorey's examination of Rousseau's theory of democracy is particularly illuminating. While she acknowledges his masculinist biases and exclusionary implications, in his 1758 letter to French philosopher d'Alembert she nevertheless identifies him as a suitable mentor for a critique of political representation (Lorey, 2022). In this letter, Rousseau pleads against constructing a theater in his hometown of Geneva, fearing it would lead to moral decay. He contrasts the theater's solemn and passive experience with the festival's vibrancy and gaiety, which does not require spokespeople or mediators. Lorey uses this opposition as a starting point for reconstructing the foundations of democracy (Lorey, 2022). Typically, democracies are understood as the rule of self-governing demos; however, in the shadow of the demos, the "countless many" remain dispersed, difficult to govern, and have always been seen as a threat. In Rousseau's dynamic and playful festival, Lorey finds a model for a democracy that avoids the pitfalls of representation by favoring spontaneity and relative invisibility (Lorey, 2022). Lorey argues in favor of a "presentist democracy" that does not represent the demos as a single people but instead sees it as a multifaceted multitude (Lorey, 2022). This form of democracy liberates everyday local practices from the constraints of the private sphere, allowing them to become political. Such practices, which are not typically considered political within liberal frameworks due to their relational and dispersed nature, are no longer suppressed. However, "multitudinous democracy" cannot be achieved within a liberal framework, as its objective is to radically transform this very framework. This democratic approach challenges discrimination based on identitarian categories such as class, gender, sexuality, and race, while affirming the valorization of difference. Furthermore, it opposes patriarchal-heteronormative and racialized gendering, which secures domination and reinforces existing power structures, and instead counters exploitative neoliberal relationships. The multifaceted emergence of the

multitude provides new avenues for participation, organization, and institution-building (Lorey, 2022).

Another crucial intervention by queer scholarship has challenged the normative understanding of bodies as autonomous and self-governing by proposing that all embodiment is fundamentally queer, constantly transgressing boundaries and embodying fluidity. For instance, Daniel D. Miller explores the traditional *social-as-body* metaphor and contests the normative understanding of embodiment. This metaphor legitimizes a hierarchical social order, with each member occupying and conforming to a predetermined place within the hierarchy (Miller, 2022). Institutions and regimes of a liberal democracy enforce this normative morphology of the social body by governing the people. Miller proposes an alternative vision of the social-as-body metaphor, where the people, or the demos, is a fluid body undergoing constant transformation, driven by the extension of liberty and equality to new social spheres (Miller, 2022). This vision undermines the representation of an organic totality and welcomes indeterminacy. However, it does not aim to dissolve embodiment but rather represents an expression of queer social embodiment.

In contrast to neoliberal governmentality, "queer democracy" reconfigures the concept of "the people" by extending liberty and equality to new social domains. The demos in queer democracy are not limited to a privileged subset of society but include hitherto marginalized political subjects. It is constitutively incomplete, coextensive with the social, and marked by morphological fluidity. Thus, queer democracy represents a radical reimagining of the quintessential democratic concept of the demos, challenging normative understandings of the social body and its political implications (Miller, 2022).

Providing a corrective to a Eurocentric approach, queer scholarship from the global South rethinks sexual democracy in processes of decolonization. Critical studies, including Decolonial and Postcolonial Theory, Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality Studies, argue that the logic of the gender binary is no different from the biological essentialism of modernity. An imperialist approach differentiates between the humanity of *white* beings and the non-humanity or animality/bestiality of non-*whites*. All other forms of differentiation stem from this initial distinction (Vázquez García, 2022). In contrast, the African philosophy of *ubuntu* offers an alternative framework for negotiating values and reimagining notions of freedom and justice (Seely, 2020). The ubuntu philosophy posits that freedom is not achieved through personal autonomy or the disavowal of social obligations. Instead, subjectivity is attained relationally and collectively. As individuals express their unique singularity, they contribute to the unity and harmony of the collective and the cosmic whole; the collective, in turn, affirms their singularity by making room for and recognizing its expression.

This focus on intersubjectivity challenges traditional Western notions of freedom and underscores the importance of interdependence and community while pursuing freedom and justice (Seely, 2020). Similarly, Rafael Vázquez García puts forth the concept of "non-binary citizenship," a decolonial approach that aims to provide an open and democratic platform for those marginalized due to their sex-gender-sexuality identity. This approach opposes the binary mechanisms that have supported (cis/hetero) male colonial Eurocentric thinking (Vázquez García, 2022). While neoliberal governmentality is not concerned with constructing an extensive concept of citizenship, democracy aims to expand citizenship and make it all-inclusive. This involves recognizing the different dimensions of citizenship, including its civic,

political, and social aspects. An inclusive construction of the status of rights-holders, which includes civil, political, and social rights, is necessary to ensure that all individuals can enjoy the different aspects of citizenship as an indivisible set (Vázquez García, 2022).

III. Intersectional Inequalities

A. Global Inequalities. Eastern & Western European Inequalities

The differences in the historical development and political economy of the various countries of the EU must be considered when comparing them. The foundation of the current economic system can be traced back to the 16th century and the rapid rise of European colonialism (Wallerstein, 2010). In the last decades, globalization has accelerated and resulted in the transnationalization of capitalism. The national economies are interconnected and interdependent, with the global economic order being extremely hierarchical: it is historically built on a system of unequal exchange and an unequal division of labor. Raw materials, cheap labor force, and low-value-added work procedures are in the peripheries. In contrast, high-value-added work procedures are concentrated in the metropolitan centers of the global economic system. Countries that find themselves in the middle of these extremes are termed semi-periphery. In the global North, wages are higher, and the formalized labor market guarantees higher living standards as well as stricter environmental protection and work-safety regulations. At the same time, periphery countries tend to have more labor-intensive industries with weaker regulations. Unsurprisingly, the direction of migration is usually from the periphery to the so-called core or center.

Driven by the capitalist motivation of maximizing profit and minimizing expenses, production is outsourced to the peripheries (the textile industry is a good example), where states and thus regulations are weaker and labor and production costs, generally, can be reduced. The exploitation of cheap labor in these countries cements the hierarchical structure of the global economic system. Within this global economic system, core countries of the European Union (Western Europe) are clearly at the center. In contrast, countries of the former 'Eastern Bloc' belong to the semi-periphery. Central-Eastern European countries are not simply at a disadvantage because of their historical experiences of communist dictatorship and state socialism – which again can be examined through the lens of postcoloniality, imperialism, and colonialism of the Soviet project (Johnson et al., 2022) – but even more importantly, in the aftermath of the regime change in '89-90, they were reintegrated into inferior positions within the global economic world system.

As strict controls over foreign travel and access to information were eliminated, new dimensions of opportunities and new forms of exploitation arose. With the economic shock of the transition, rising unemployment rates, growing social inequalities, and the feminization of poverty (Watson, 1993), Eastern European women (specifically poor and Roma women) became particularly vulnerable to the new forms of exploitation, for instance in the sex industry (Corrin, 2005) and care work (Hochschild, 2000). With the growing care crisis (Gregor, 2018; Fraser, 2016), there is an increasing demand for services such as domestic work, childcare, and – with aging Western societies – elderly care. This need is filled at least partly by migrant Eastern European women (Gábriel, 2016; Turai, 2016), whose work ironically frees women in recipient countries from domestic responsibilities. This is termed "distorted emancipation" by Uhde (2016). Although, with better wages, work conditions, and personal safety, these jobs are usually framed as opportunities for a better life for the individuals, East-European female workers are often ill-treated in the recipient countries, with experiences of abuse and exploitation, especially at the hands of private employers (Bucur, 2022).

The structure of the sex industry and the direction of human trafficking are also determined by the global economic system (Suchland, 2015). As a result of the decriminalization of prostitution in Western European countries and the EU enlargement in 2004, over the last decades Eastern European women entered the sex labor market in huge numbers. Most sex workers in these countries are not local women but women originally from semi-peripheral or peripheral countries (Corrin, 2005). In the case of Hungarian women, they are typically from the country's poorest regions, and Roma women are heavily overrepresented among them. Despite the decriminalization and the liberal policies of the recipient countries, most sex workers operate without legal permits. They are often isolated, do not speak the local language or understand the regulations, and can only communicate with their pimps. The purported advantages of decriminalization thus do not benefit the sex workers from the (semi-)peripheries, who are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and violence (Dés, 2018).

The porn industry is another labor market for female migrant workers from Eastern Europe. Hungary is considered the porn capital of Europe thanks to its liberal economic policies. It has the most liberal sexual politics in the region, reasonable but relatively developed infrastructure, and, most importantly, "a vast and desperate supply of cheap female workforce that the international porn industry could easily exploit" (Csányi et al., 2022, p. 4). Moreover, *pornification* appeared as a form of Westernization, a signifier of social, economic, and ideological development. Despite digitalization and the rise of the new platform-based model of the global porn industry, the commodification and exploitation of women mostly living in the semi-periphery and periphery, including Eastern Europe, has not abated. In the sex-cam industry, for instance, female performers are vulnerable to the algorithms that contribute to online and technology-facilitated exploitation (Barna & Katona, 2020).

Let us now turn to intersectional feminism to understand further how in addition to global inequalities, it is imperative to focus on the co-constitution of multiple categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and religion in order to understand the challenges of transnational feminist scholarship and activism.

B. Gender Inequalities & Intersectional Feminism

Gender inequality refers to disparate treatment and unequal opportunities based on gender. It is a pervasive social issue endured in many societies worldwide, with specific local and historical characteristics. It affects diverse aspects of life, including education, health, economics, employment, political participation, violence, and discrimination. Addressing gender inequality and injustice requires a multifaceted framework to understand its manifold impact. An intersectional approach to gender inequality focuses on gender-based discrimination, power relations, and oppression, seeking to rectify them. Intersectional feminism is a framework that recognizes and addresses the interconnected nature of different forms of oppression and discrimination, particularly those related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, nationality, disability, and other social identities. It acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple, intersecting systems of oppression simultaneously and that these overlapping identities and experiences shape their lived realities.

There is no standard definition of intersectionality. However, most scholars would associate one or more of the following principles with intersectionality: "(1) racism, sexism, class exploitation and similar systems of oppression are interconnected and mutually construct

one another; (2) configurations of social inequalities emerge at the junction of intersecting oppressions; (3) perceptions of social problems reflect how social actors are situated within the power relations of particular historical and social contexts; and (4) because individuals and groups are differently located within intersecting oppressions, they have distinctive standpoints on social phenomena" (Hill Collins, 2016, pp. 25-30).

Intersectional feminism also contributes to understanding how intersecting axes of discrimination and power systems shape women's and LGBTQI+ individuals' experiences within democratic processes and access to justice. Pursuing gender justice challenges and transforms societal norms, structures, and systems as they perpetrate and perpetuate different forms of inequality, discrimination, and violence. Ultimately, gender justice aims to create a more equitable and inclusive society for all. The intersectional approach is important for feminist democratic theory as it helps understand how different forms of discrimination co-constitute each other, producing vulnerability and inequality within democratic practices and processes. The focus lies on how injustice emerges in interconnected socio-political institutions like the heteronormative family, the community, the market, and the state (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, p. 12).

In what follows, we will engage with the important contribution made by different approaches to intersectionality theory and outline how these have enriched struggles for equality and justice, especially concerning marginalized subjectivities and communities, including racial and religious minorities, colonial subjects, LGBTQI+ people, people with disability, racialized people, and women. We also focus on interventions from the global South, some of which are disregarded within Western debates on intersectionality politics. These are Black Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Feminist Disability Studies, and Roma Feminism. Finally, we argue that despite the shortcomings, intersectional politics significantly contributes to the analysis *of* and struggles *against* inequality (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023). Intersectional politics and intersectional corrective methodology make important contributions to engendering democracy and spaces of democratic participation.

1. Black Feminism

The term "intersectionality" was coined by the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who highlighted the limitations of traditional feminist and antiracist theories in addressing the unique experiences of Black women. Crenshaw argues that traditional feminist movements often focused solely on the experiences of *white*, middle-class women and failed to address the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized communities. For example, a Black woman may face sexism and racism, and these forms of oppression can overlap, interact, and compound, resulting in unique challenges and experiences that differ from those faced by *white* women or Black men. "Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms." (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252). Intersectional feminism builds upon this insight by highlighting that women's experiences and struggles are not uniform and that gender intersects with other social categories to create distinct forms of disadvantage and privilege (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, p. 14).

This resulted in an epistemological framework and theoretical categories that attempted to reflect the experiences of different subject positions. The oft-quoted statement by the Combahee River Collective astutely summarizes the efforts: “A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically, we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism” (Combahee River Collective, 1984, p. 4). The assumption that global patriarchy equally victimized all women was central to intersectional feminist critique. Such a viewpoint, which sums up the focus of the second-wave feminist movement, not only implies that all other power relations – such as racism and classism derive from patriarchy and correspondingly disappear with the victory over the same but also suggests that sexism is a universal and transhistorical phenomenon. The US feminists of color provided theoretical alternatives in challenging the exclusive focus on universal patriarchy that neglected other forms of discrimination (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Lorde, 1984). It is important to note that the alternative was not to simply “add and stir” other grounds of discrimination to sexism. Rather the interrelations of diverse forms of discrimination and the co-constitution of social categories were considered (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, p. 14).

By adopting an intersectional approach, feminists challenged the foundational premises of single-issue politics as proposed by Black feminist scholarship (Hill Collins, 1990). It addresses the co-constitutiveness of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of discrimination, which intersect to create overlapping systems of privilege and oppression (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 14-15). The pursuit of an inclusive and diverse feminist movement considers the experiences and needs of individuals and groups with varying identities and backgrounds. It does not erase and hierarchize different forms of oppression or essentialize gender (for example, Butler, 1990).

The intersectional approach combines feminist theory with anti-discrimination politics by focusing on the varied experiences of diverse constituencies without losing sight of the simultaneity, contradictions, and interdependencies of these perspectives (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 14-15). Intersectional feminism emphasizes the importance of solidarity and alliance politics while recognizing that different groups of women may face different struggles and require different strategies for achieving equality and justice. It seeks to create inclusive spaces for dialogue, learning, and coalition-building across various social movements. In practical terms, intersectional feminism addresses gender-based violence, reproductive rights, economic inequality, racial discrimination, LGBTQI+ rights, disability rights, and more. Intersectional feminists work towards creating inclusive spaces, amplifying marginalized voices, challenging stereotypes, and promoting social, political, and economic justice for everyone, regardless of their intersecting identities.

Patricia Hill Collin's work builds upon and expands the intersectional framework developed by Crenshaw. Power relations are viewed through the “matrix of domination” concept, which examines how intersecting oppressions create distinct social positions for individuals and how power structures are maintained through multiple interconnected systems. It outlines “how political domination on the macro-level of analysis is organized via intersecting systems of oppression [...], a power analytic that both explains oppression and suggests strategies for resisting it” (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 22). Hill Collins explains that power has multiple sources and is understood to operate dynamically within social and political arenas. Different forms of domination have distinct power grids and intersecting power

dynamics. This helps us understand how social inequalities that flow from intersecting oppressions are ordered across power domains. Intersections of racism, capitalism, and sexism within, for instance, the USA will differ from those in Brazil or India, producing a distinctive matrix of domination inter- and intranationally. Therefore, the USA, Brazil, and India can neither be reduced to one another, nor some general principles of domination disregarding the specificity of their histories. For example, there is no causal relationship between how immigration policies articulate citizenship in different geopolitical and historical contexts.

In addition to understanding the exercise of power, resistance is an important focus for intersectional feminism. The concept of community as a site of solidarity and empowerment plays an important role in Hill Collins's understanding of the matrix of domination. This framework helps capture the complexities and instabilities that characterize how domination and resistance coexist. Resistance is embedded within domination, and communities constitute a necessary albeit ambiguous bedrock of politics. This goes against liberal democratic theories that promise individual citizens personal freedom if they succeed in breaking free from the structures of various collectivities. Hill Collins foregrounds collective politics over the valorization of the individual as the primary subject of citizenship (2017, p. 28). Marginalized individuals and communities, in her view, can develop alternative knowledges and collective strategies that challenge and disrupt systems of domination. Recognizing their shared experiences and building coalitions across different social groups allows marginalized individuals to engage in transformative activism and work toward social justice. For instance, Black women's political activism was articulated by working for institutional transformation and group survival within a larger framework of collective struggles for social justice. This shows how care work is deeply embedded within African American communities' survival politics and serves a broader political purpose.

Lastly, Hill Collins draws on the relationship between intersectionality and participatory democracy. For her, they share a common set of concerns; "both aspire to imagine new social relations of equality, fairness, inclusion, and social justice. Achieving these ethical ends for both projects requires building equitable communities of inquiry and praxis that can survive within yet challenge intersecting oppressions" (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 35). The challenge consists in building intellectual and political solidarities across differences in power, i.e., to address diverse social differences without undermining the necessary solidarity across categories or inadvertently reinforcing essentialisms and reifications, such that former margins can be transformed into oppositional centers (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 14-15). Intersectional participatory democracy is, for Collins, a project primarily undertaken by marginalized communities in the form of inquiry and praxis. The goal is to empower groups and not merely contribute to the inclusion of individuals. She opposes formal inclusion from the top since token inclusion in social institutions is not the same as gaining political power. "Participatory democracy, from the perspective of elected officials, differs from that of subordinated groups. Both may embrace principles of participatory democracy, especially if such principles are hegemonic. Nevertheless, belief in the same value systems cannot override highly unequal possibilities for participation across multiple power domains. In contrast to top-down managerial ethos, bottom-up understandings of participatory democracy deepen through use" (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 37). This is the case for many Black women, who confront ubiquitous social problems by drawing on and formulating solutions based on shared collective experiences. The strategies are then tested and revised via social action.

In addition to the focus on the co-constitutiveness of the different categories, it is imperative to also engage with the conflicts and tensions between the categories so that anti-discrimination policies do not end up reinforcing essentialist identity politics, which would lead to counter-productive effects (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 14-15). The dilemma, already highlighted by Audre Lorde's powerful remark, "There is no hierarchy of oppressions" (1983), is how to negotiate between different forms of discrimination without giving precedence to one over the other. Lorde shares her experience as a black lesbian woman who did not have the luxury of only fighting one form of oppression; rather, it was imperative to struggle against sexism, heterosexism, racism, antisemitism, and capitalism on multiple fronts without prioritizing one over the other. Lorde outlines how oppressed groups are pitted against each other and how this division serves the interests of hegemonic groups, who profit from disrupting joint political action. Instead of cooperation, there is competition between diverse groups, which undermines a common fight against multiple axes of inequality (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023, pp. 9-10). By outlining the affinities between experiences, intersectionality does not flatten the uniqueness of particular sufferings but pursues the hope of building alliances across differences.

2. Postcolonial Feminism

Intersectionality as a "traveling concept" has had unparalleled contributions to feminist scholarship and activism. Nevertheless, its relevance for the postcolonial world remains a contentious issue. There have been controversial disputes regarding the "export" of theory from the global North to the global South and the extraction of data from the global South by feminists from the global North. The asymmetry and non-reciprocity between these two ends indicate the challenges of transnational feminist alliance-building (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, p. 19).

Another challenge is contextualizing the race-class-gender triad according to the specificity of different postcolonial societies. For example, the focus on caste within the Indian context is more relevant than race – and this is also pertinent for understanding the relations of power within the Indian diaspora. Similarly, categories such as "First Nations," "Native Americans," or "*pueblos originarios*" cannot be simply subsumed under the umbrella term "race" and even less under that of "migration". Neglecting these nuances distorts any examination of (historical) processes of discrimination. Similarly, an over-emphasis on "race" can lead to "class" being disregarded (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 23-24). As the polemical debate between Nancy Fraser (1997) and Judith Butler (1997) has taught us, the conflict between categories of "class", "race," and "gender" endures. Not only do these axes of discrimination overlap and co-constitute each other, but they also clash and side-line each other. Inevitably one is over-emphasized over the other (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023, p. 6). Therefore, it is imperative not to lose sight of the singularities of each category while highlighting structural entanglements.

Postcolonial scholars also warn against equating anti-racist politics with decolonization. Even though "race" is a prominent category of critique, one should not understand decolonization simply in terms of dismantling racist structures and narratives. As Mahmood Mamdani (1996, p. 288) rightly observes, the historical legitimacy of nationalist governments after decolonization was principally measured in terms of whether they initiated

an effective de-racialization. Mamdani reminds us that this resulted in "de-racialization without democratization," for instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.). Framed as an "indigenization program" or "nationalization," one of the primary aims was to dismantle the privileges that *white* colonizers had accumulated through racist and imperialist politics. This led to the neglect of other urgent sites of oppression in postcolonial societies, such as class, gender, sexuality, and religion (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 24-25).

Unless these critical interventions are given due consideration, intersectionality can end up being "old wine in a new bottle." The Indian feminist Nivedita Menon (2015, p. 4) avers that intersectionality merely becomes a buzzword for a long-known fact. Menon warns against equating India with the USA while drawing attention to the contestation of the single-axis framework by marginalized groups in the Indian context long before intersectionality was "exported" to the global South. In her view, feminist politics in a context like India is unthinkable without interventions of Dalit women. She discusses how Dalit activists, for instance, reject feminist categories such as "sex work" as this trivializes the historical relations of sexual exploitation imposed by the hegemonic upper castes on vulnerable Dalit women. In a context where Dalits women were forced into prostitution in the name of tradition, Dalit scholars reject the term "sex work," which suggests wage labor and free choice. Menon uses this example to illustrate the interplay between gender, sexuality, class, and caste, drawing attention to the important criticism of Dalit and *adivāsi* scholars (1995) against upper-caste and upper-class feminist scholarship and politics. Elite Indian feminists long neglected the caste category and disregarded the survival struggles of disenfranchised groups (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2023, p. 3).

Disagreeing with Menon, Mary John (2015) argues that the strength of an intersectional approach lies in its ability to make transparent the problem of multiple and overlapping discriminations "by pointing to a place where identities fail to appear or be recognized as we might have expected them" (ibid.). Here John supports the claim that intersectionality functions as a *corrective methodology*. John agrees with Menon on the problem of universalism and the assumption that any theory developed in the West can be applied everywhere. Regrettably, non-Western concepts and theories are not guaranteed the same reception. John, however, suggests that simply rejecting all universalisms is not a viable solution (ibid., p. 75).

This debate is instructive in that it warns of the dangers of a simple "transplantation" from the West into the postcolonial context, which is questionable and intellectually dubious (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2016, pp. 20-21). Nevertheless, as John remarks: "Above all else, then, there is a profound need for more critical dialogue across global feminist margins and centers. I, for one, think that intersectionality would make for an excellent candidate in such an endeavor" (Menon, 2015, p.76).

3. Feminist Disability Studies

Disability studies are considered a well-established yet constantly evolving discipline despite their relatively short history. They emerged from American and British disabled people's movements in the 1970s. Subsequently, disabled and non-disabled scholars developed them in social sciences and the humanities in the following decades. Disability studies have undergone several epistemological, theoretical, and methodological transformations that are considered "evidence of the growing maturity and openness of debate within [this discipline]" (Roulstone

et al., 2012, p. 4). Simultaneously, disability studies are intended to remain the "academic counterpart" of the disabled people's movement (Longmore, 2003, p. 2). Hence, the fundamental goal of disability studies is to enhance the lived experiences of people with disability. To meet this commitment, disability studies scholars, many of whom are activists as well, have continued to challenge the "medicalized model of disability" (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997, p. 24) and "unreflective paradigms of normality" (Meekosha, 2004, p. 724) that traditionally underpinned academic research about disabled people/people with disability. Moreover, focusing on disabled people's perspectives and expertise is central to this discipline and its methodology. Therefore, disability studies research is intended to serve, firstly and foremostly, disabled people – who are understood as subjects and not objects of academic scrutiny.

The social model of disability was initially conceived by British academic Mike Oliver and the British disability activists in opposition to the dominant discourses on disabled people that permeated capitalist welfare states (Oliver, 1990). The focus on the "materiality of disability" and the "structural basis to disability discrimination" (Meekosha, 2004, p. 729) constituted a revolutionary paradigm shift regarding individual, medical, philanthropic, and personal tragedy approaches to disability[6] (Goodley et al., 2019). The social model influenced Disability Studies worldwide, shaping the human rights discourse on disability as encapsulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and backed by disabled activists worldwide (Berghs et al., 2019).

The social model of disability has roots in the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, created in 1972 in Great Britain), a ground-breaking reconceptualization of disability. The organization's fundamental premise was that it would be led and controlled by people with physical impairments and not, as was usually the case with disability organizations, by non-disabled people. Their revolutionary "political ideology of disability" (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 11) was outlined in the Fundamental Principles of Disability (UPIAS, 1976). UPIAS leaders argue that disability is a situation, which is caused by social conditions and thus requires its elimination (UPIAS, 1976, p. 3). In so doing, they categorically undermined the causal link between impairment and disability, which hegemonic models of disability such as the individual, medical, charity, and personal tragedy rested on. Instead, they established clear-cut boundaries between those two notions.

Impairment was defined as "lacking all or part of a limb or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body." At the same time, disability was understood as "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization" (UPIAS, 1976, pp. 3-4). Hence, they declared that disability is "wholly and exclusively social" (Oliver, 1996, p. 41). The passage expressing this radical shift's essence reads: "In our view, it is a society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are, therefore, an oppressed group in society" (UPIAS, 1976, p. 3).

The last sentence of the above-cited statement captures another major contribution that UPIAS activists have to theorization and, in turn, to the politicization of disability. Drawing parallels with different historically segregated oppressed groups, they argued that people with

[6] While in the Anglo-American disability scholarship, those approaches/models have tended to be associated primarily with the capitalist Western societies, post-socialist disability researchers highlight that these have also been characteristic for countries of Eastern Europe in socialist and post-socialist times.

impairments, by virtue of being disabled by societal forces, also constituted an oppressed group. Hence, UPIAS was not only run by disabled people but was also guided by a political principle of redirecting the focus from people with impairments onto the broader systems of oppression and segregation that made them disabled. Hence, through disability activism that was mediated by organizations they themselves led, they attempted to (re)gain control over their own lives in society and impact the lives of other disabled people.

UPIAS’ leaders' reconceptualization of disability, as Carol Thomas aptly points out, took place “in the light of the social exclusions encountered in their own lived experience” (2014, p. 10) and was informed by their worldviews and ideological standpoints. The critical influence over the intellectual and political agenda of UPIAS is attributed to Paul Hunt and Vic Finkelstein (Shakespeare, 2006; Thomas, 2014), both of whom were physically impaired and had, to different degrees, experienced the mechanism of societal segregation: Finkelstein as a civil rights activist opposing the South African apartheid and Hunt as a resident of a care home. Having Marxist leanings, their analysis of “the powerlessness of disabled people in the much bigger institution, that of society” (Hunt, 2001) highlighted material dimensions of oppression which were “bound up with the social relations of production in capitalist society” (Thomas, 2007, p. 53). This could manifest in the form of different types of disabling barriers such as “flights of steps, inadequate public and personal transport, unsuitable housing, rigid work routines in factories and offices, and a lack of up-to-date aids and equipment” (UPIAS, Aims paragraph 1). This materialist standpoint was also enhanced by UPIAS’ politically potent organizational style that, as Shakespeare describes, was “coherent and disciplined” due to being “modeled on labor movement politics” (2006, p. 14). On the other hand, the Liberation Network, which was “modeled on feminism and personal growth” as well as co-led by disabled women, proved to be less strategically effective in the socio-economic environment of Great Britain (Shakespeare, 2006, p.14).

It is based on this intellectual and activist lineage that in 1983 Michael Oliver, the first professor of disability studies, coined the term “social model of disability” – that became the central notion for both British disability studies and the British disabled people’s movement. Oliver conceptualized the social model of disability as a binary opposite to the individual and medical models of disability. However, he was not introducing a new idea per se. As he stressed, he took this division “quite simply and explicitly from the distinction originally made between impairment and disability by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation” (Oliver, 1990, p. 98).

Building on feminist epistemologies, it can be argued that the specific situatedness and certain privileges of UPIAS’ leaders that stemmed from them being “white western men with physical impairments” curtailed the extent to which UPIAS could have been representative of a diverse community of disabled people (Berghs et al., 2019, p. 7). Therefore, UPIAS has been associated with achievements and shortcomings resulting from partial knowledge-making and is subject to justified critique. The most immediate flaw that was identified pertained to the definition of disability, which included only “physically impaired people” (UPIAS, 1976, p. 3), leaving people with other types of impairments out in the cold (Shakespeare, 2006). Moreover, as disabled and mostly female activists and scholars pointed out, UPIAS disability politics was a mix of radical elements with conservative ones (Morris, 1991; Thomas, 1999).

Feminist activists with disabilities argued that the liberatory potential of disability “left-wing political organizations” (Thomas, 1999, p. 74), like UPIAS, was limited due to being

"male-dominated and male-oriented" (Morris, 1991, p. 9) and, as such, "dominated by a view of the world that was unashamedly male" (Morris, 1990, p. 160). Specifically, this situation led to sustaining the private/public dualism, in which problems and lived experiences were deemed "domestic" and were not treated as "real" political issues because they were about "private" life." Hence, such issues were considered to be of little significance for disabled people as a societal group. As Tom Shakespeare puts it, "[m]ale, instrumental, public, rational, and material concerns were seen as more pressing than domestic issues" (2000, p. 160). Hence not only the "personal experience of disability" in general (Morris, 1991, p. 9) but also gendered dimensions of disability and disablism such as the "particular oppression[s] that women with disabilities experience" (Lonsdale, 1990, p. 175) were overlooked by UPIAS and because of that were not well-captured in their theorization of disability and disablement.

Furthermore, British materialist feminist disability scholarship akin to the British materialist disability studies has been shaped by respective academics' worldviews, ideological standpoints, and personal experiences. Specifically, British materialist feminist disability scholars treat the social model of disability and feminist perspectives as their critical conceptual and analytical tools. Importantly, their interpretation and application of both the social model and feminism have been informed by their and other disabled women's lives and activists' experiences. They considered the appearance of the social model of disability to be a turning point in their personal lives as it helped to change how they perceived their disability. They also argued that it was a revolutionary concept more broadly due to its main premises, which they firmly adhered to in conceptualizing disability as a social and political issue. In interpreting disability as a form of oppression, they stressed the detrimental effects of socio-structural barriers on par with social attitudes, treating the social model as a tool for empowerment and activism. Liz Crow has captured those sentiments well in her often-quoted statement:

> My life has two phases: before the social model of disability, and after it. Discovering this way of thinking about my experiences was the proverbial raft in stormy seas. It gave me an understanding of my life, shared with thousands, even millions, of other people around the world, and I clung to it. This was the explanation I had sought for years. Suddenly what I had always known, deep down, was confirmed. It wasn't my body that was responsible for all my difficulties, it was external factors, the barriers constructed by the society in which I live. I was being dis-abled – my capabilities and opportunities were being restricted – by prejudice, discrimination, inaccessible environments and inadequate support. Even more important, if all the problems had been created by society, then surely society could un-create them. Revolutionary! For years now this social model of disability has enabled me to confront, survive and even surmount countless situations of exclusion and discrimination. It has been my mainstay, as it has been for the wider disabled people's movement. It has enabled a vision of ourselves free from the constraints of disability (oppression) and provided a direction for our commitment to social change. It has played a central role in promoting disabled people's individual self-worth, collective identity and political organization. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the social model has saved lives. Gradually, very gradually, its sphere is extending beyond our movement to influence policy and practice in the mainstream. The contribution of the social model of disability, now and in the

> future, to achieving equal rights for disabled people is incalculable (Crow, 1996, pp. 206-207).

Simultaneously, upon closer examination of the areas and issues that the male social model associated with the premises mentioned above, disabled feminists evidenced that the social model of disability was biased towards the lived experiences and needs of disabled men. It was a privileged, a male-oriented vision of society that includes "male-dominated sociological accounts of disability" (Oliver, 1999, p. 27). Feminism turned out to be an ideal tool for British disabled female scholars because it enabled redressing flaws of the social model and, due to certain overlaps with it, allowed them to keep the social model's framework (Pamula et al., 2018). It could be argued that thanks to feminism, those academics' adherence to the social model was not weakened but strengthened, albeit in its renewed and improved form. However, stating that those disabled feminists were feminists is not enough. This is because, as Barbara Fawcett explains, "feminism has become fragmented. It has become an umbrella term with numerous different explanations being proposed as to the source of and solutions to women's oppression [...] there is no one feminist means of analysis" (1999).

The greatest proponent among this group of "feminist social modellist[s]" are the "materialist feminists" (Thomas, 1999, p. 2) whose theoretical perspective enables "[explaining] disablism in terms of the productive forces, the social relations of production and reproduction, and in the cultural formations and ideologies in society" (Thomas, 1999, p. 143). This perspective overlaps with the core premise of the "strong social model," which affirms that disability understood as a form of oppression is socially produced due to the workings of late capitalism and often takes the form of various barriers. However, it enriches this premise by including the "gendered nature of [disablism]" (Thomas, 1999, p. 143), which is meant to benefit not only disabled women but disabled people in democracies in general.

The identity-first and person-first languages emerged due to the changing and varied understandings of disability. The first notion has often been associated with the proponents of the social model of disability as conceptualized by the British disabled people's movement and studies. In contrast, the second concept has been linked with the North American tradition of the socio-political disability model/minority model (Heyer, 2007). Moreover, person-first language has recently been propagated internationally through the UN CRPD, legitimizing its connection with the human right disability paradigm. However, the meanings of those approaches are not "set in stone" and can vary between and across disability communities.

Therefore, depending on the accepted epistemological perspective and socio-political standpoint which influence the interpretation of those terms, either the former or latter notion is considered by disability activists and disability studies scholars as reflective of the emancipatory politics of the disabled people's movement that can challenge oppressive hegemonic discourses (Szarota, 2019). There is no consensus within the disabled people's movement as to which of those notions is a more potent tool for politicizing disability and which, on the contrary, depoliticizes it (Heyer, 2007). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the ongoing debates about this issue are a source of much-needed "fuel" for action and critical analysis. As Katharina Heyer explains, "[i]n either case, disability terminology (What do we call ourselves? What do we ask others to call us?) becomes an important political tool to reclaim a sense of identity and personhood" (2007, p. 277).

4. Roma Feminism

Roma are the largest minority in Europe[7] and thus present a unique insight into the challenges of the relevance of intersectionality in the EU. Roma are geographically concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and the majority live in post-communist societies, many of which currently face the political challenges of populism and illiberalism. The "Roma issue" has been on the political agenda of the EU well before the accession of the CEE countries. Engaging with social exclusion, discrimination, and the non-recognition of Roma is obligatory for EU membership. Member states must adopt non-discrimination legislation and implement social integration policies through the EU funds. However, it is important to note that the focus on the Roma communities did not automatically result in recognizing the problems facing Romani women. Their experiences did not become a political or policy issue, such that the intersection of anti-Roma discrimination and gender issues was not a major concern for the EU and the member states. It took the efforts of non-government organizations, international organizations, and Roma feminists to gain recognition and to politically advance the issue of multiple disadvantages of Romani women (Jovanovic et al., 2015).

To understand the emergence and development of the Romani women's movement after the fall of the state-socialist system, we should look at both bottom-up and top-down social and political processes. Romani women engaged in political activism and first articulated their concerns within Romani political movements. The aim was to be recognized as a stateless nation in Europe and the member states as a means to the political emancipation of the Roma. Romani women, however, often faced sexism and misogyny within the movement. Like Romani men, they faced discrimination from the non-Romani, but they also experienced sexism within their community. They thus sought alliances with non-Romani feminists, which was not always possible as they faced racism in these feminist organizations (Balogh, 2018). Thus, in these initial years, Romani women activists could either position themselves along the "ethnic" or the "gender" issue without being able to formulate and express their intersecting experiences (Kóczé et al., 2018).

Besides the support from non-Romani feminist groups, the recognition of Romani women's problems by international organizations and EU institutions also helped create the institutional background for Romani women. The Open Society Foundation initially helped to establish the Joint Romani Women's Initiative in the mid-nineties (JRWI). Some years later (2003), the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe initiated the International Romani Women's Network (IRWN). These two forums represented different approaches and values concerning the Romani women's issue. The JRWI was radical, while the IRWN was more conservative. The JRWI dealt with sensitive issues such as sexual harassment, early marriages, trafficking, prostitution, and intimate and other forms of gender-based violence. At the same time, the IRWN refused to address these concerns. The only exception was the forced sterilization of Romani women, which was an important topic for the IRWN. The divergences in values were partly due to generational differences, as engaging with these sensitive issues entailed challenging existing male-dominated structures of the Romani

[7] European Commission, Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in the EU: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en#roma-people-in-the-eu (Last accessed June 2023)

movement. At the same time, the focus on these problems created new difficulties for Romani women because this reinforced the stereotypical image of the "aggressive Roma men" (Jovanovic et al., 2015; Morell, 2016).

The recognition of Romani women's multiple disadvantages was gradually included within the EU policy frameworks, and intersectionality as a policy approach was introduced. In 2008 and 2011, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU surveyed the Roma populations in Europe, additionally focusing on gender-related issues as well. The results lead to policy focus on the intersectional inequalities and gaps between Romani men and women (Krizsán & Zentai, 2012). While there has been a move towards a more intersectional approach on the international and European policy level, the current social and political processes have not significantly assuaged the problems of Romani women. Twenty years after the fall of communism, some of the CEE countries, such as Hungary and Poland, experienced a backlash against liberal democracy and turned to illiberalism and/or populism. These regimes are characterized by a strong anti-gender and anti-minority political agenda (Kováts & Pető, 2017; Fodor, 2022), creating new challenges for Romani women. Gender equality has been steadily replaced by anti-women and anti-Roma family policies. This promotes and supports the idea of the family over women's rights and consolidates the myth of the respectable and "worthy" family that is *white* (non-Roma), economically self-sufficient, and does not rely on social welfare. Through its various social support schemes, the non-Roma middle and higher-middle-class families have been the greatest beneficiaries of the state family policies in Hungary (Szikra, 2013; Lugosi, 2018; Kováts, 2020; Stubbs & Lendvai-Bainton, 2020; Fodor, 2022). The difficulties of Roma families and women are not on the political agenda. This discrimination and exclusion along with their experience of multiple vulnerabilities can be better understood in the context of violence against Romani women.

A specific sub-field in scholarship on domestic and sexual violence and prostitution/sex work, violence against Romani women, remains a controversial issue. It is self-evident that women from disadvantaged and socially excluded minority populations are at higher risk of experiencing violence. However, public and political narratives on the Roma are strongly divided along ideological and political lines, such that conservative and nationalist or far-right discourses blame Roma for their disadvantaged social position. They often deploy essentialist, paternalist, and criminalizing discourses while ethnicizing social problems. Especially in the case of discussions on domestic violence and prostitution/sex work, Romani women are often stereotyped and victimized. Liberal or leftist discourses take a social constructivist approach and treat social and ethnic factors separately. Instead of blaming the victim, the effort is to contest stereotyping minority groups to offer a more nuanced reading of complex power relations in society (Buchowski, 2012; Vidra & Fox, 2014; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2018). However, this brings with it the dilemma of whether or not to highlight the ethnic background of Romani men as perpetrators and Romani women as vulnerable victims, which can result in patronizing them by invisibilizing the specific forms of inequality they face. In resisting the typecasting of Romani men as violence-prone and Romani women as victims to be rescued from their traditional culture, there is also the danger of falling into the trap of cultural relativism (Vincze, 2014; Wasileski & Miller, 2014; Lombardo et al. 2016; Erickson, 2017; Vidra et al., 2018; Merhaut, 2019; Rác, 2020; Molnar, 2023). On the one hand, it is argued that being open about ethnicity in cases of violence against Romani women is imperative to not fall prey to "political correctness." On the other hand, it is asserted that this

feeds into hate speech discourses about minorities. Drawing on intersectionality, it is maintained that ethnicity implies a vulnerability factor in gender-based violence. The multiple intersecting systems of inequality, such as gender, class, and ethnicity, engender poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination, which results in a higher risk of victimization. This also limits access to social services, public education, and employment (Chong, 2014; Asztalos Morell, 2015; Nelson-Butler, 2015). Romani women face acute disadvantages due to patriarchal relations within the community and discrimination in the larger society. Violence against Roma women is culturalized, and this further hinders Romani women from receiving the necessary support from institutions (Kutálkova, 2004; Poucki & Bryan, 2014; Asztalos Morell, 2015; Vidra et al., 2018).

In light of these considerations, several civil society organizations and advocacy groups emphasize divulging the victims' ethnicity as essential in assisting them and designing targeted policies. It is argued that "[t]he failure to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity in the anti-trafficking field constitutes a major barrier to tracing this human rights violation and consequently to developing appropriate policies on prevention and victims assistance" (European Roma Rights Centre, 2011, p. 32). Organizations such as the European Roma Rights Centre or the Human Rights Watch do collect disaggregated data and publish them, as well as focus on ethnicity in reaching out to victims of violence.[8] Romani victims face far more challenges than non-racialized women when seeking help. For example, distrust in the police is stronger as a consequence of experiences of maltreatment by the authorities, and internalized patriarchal norms hinder Romani women from going outside the community for support.[9]

In contrast to this approach, ardent critics of "wokeness" claim that problems related to poverty and disadvantages affecting the Roma should be discussed openly. They argue that it is well-known that violence is more prevalent in segregated ghettos, that Romani women hesitate from help-seeking, and are exploited within their community. These positions decry the "romanticization"[10] and relativization of the problems by practitioners of "political correctness".[11] Political strategies of omitting ethnicity result in more stereotyping than less. Disregarding focus on ethnicity, it is claimed, causes more harm and obstructs advocacy and policy. It is contended that "color-blind" human rights discourses are problematic as they obscure the reality of experiences of Romani women in the name of protecting them. For example, not mentioning where the victims come from (ghettos) and what happens to them (being exploited and violated by the male members of their community) is counter-productive in helping victims.

It is important to consider the difference between the intersectional approach and "political correctness." While both focus on the importance of ethnicity, the former emphasizes

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[8]European Roma Rights Centre's comments on Hungary. The United Nations on discrimination against women. 39th session of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/03/7B/m0000037B.pdf (Last accessed June 2023)

[9] Hungary: persistent domestic violence: //www.hrw.org/hu/report/2013/11/06/256489 (Last accessed June 2023)

[10] Round table discussion on Roma: if a well-dressed Roma speaks, don't think how well an Indian has learned Hungarian: https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20220921_magyar_maltai_szereteszolgalat_maltai_tanulmanyok_vecsei_miklos_miniszterelnoki_biztos_a_magyar_maltai_szeretetszolgalat_alelnoke_fabinyi_tamas (Last accessed June 2023)

[11] I am the voice of Roma women: https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20221128_forgacs_istvan_cigany_nok, "Vera Mérő's book is important, but it would be even more important if a hundred Vera Mérő's visited the Roma settlements" https://civilek.info/2023/02/06/fontos-mero-vera-konyve-de-meg-fontosabb-lenne-ha-szaz-mero-vera-jarna-a-ciganytelepeket/ (Last accessed June 2023)

internal and external exploitations and discrimination. In contrast, the latter focuses less on the external constraints and factors contributing to Roma women's victimization. Even as gender-based violence is not exclusive to any one culture, socio-economic group, or country, withholding ethnicity in the case of gender-based violence can, on the one hand, prevent stereotypical representations of the Roma community, but simultaneously, can also perpetuate cultural relativism.[12] Drawing on intersectional, postcolonial and queer feminist insights, it is advisable to explore ways of considering the role of ethnicity without ethnicizing the problem of gender-based violence (Kóczé, 2014). Intersectional, postcolonial, and queer feminist approaches warn against the deployment of gender-based violence to reinforce racist and patriarchal structures in transnational contexts (Dhawan, 2016). Discussions of gender-based violence, as in the case of Romani women, within minority communities, risk being strategically co-opted to perpetuate racism in the name of "protection" from gender-based violence. Ironically, the proliferation of discourses on violence may also simultaneously make the contestation of gender-based violence impossible. Alliances between different communities and movements against gender-based violence could offer a platform for future transnational feminist projects that contest gender injustice.

[12] The natural habitat and lifestyle of Roma women: https://merce.hu/2020/12/05/a-roma-nok-termeszetes-elohelye-es-eletmodja/ (Last accessed June 2023)

IV. Democratic Pushback & Gender Justice in a New Age of Democracy

In the face of backlash against gender scholarship and activism and democratic backsliding, the pursuit of gender justice is as urgent as ever. As discussed in detail in this report, the feminist theory of democracy acknowledges the global nature of gender inequality and highlights the importance of international solidarity and collaboration. It seeks to challenge oppressive practices and policies within nations and across borders, recognizing that gender equality and gender justice are universal goals. Although access to justice through legal reforms guaranteeing the right to education or criminalizing sexual violence has admittedly empowered and protected vulnerable women; however, the effort is to move beyond the mere legal granting of rights or reinforcing of punitive notions of justice to achieve economic and political equality. The field of gender justice aims to make social institutions accountable for achieving social and political parity (Mukhopadhyay, 2007, p. 5). The role of rights cannot be underestimated in mitigating gendered vulnerability and discrimination; however, the law does not always guarantee justice (Kapur, 2005, p. 37).

Current debates on gender justice seek to address numerous aspects, including philosophical discussions on agency, autonomy, rights, and capabilities; economic debates around access to and control over resources; deliberations on legal reforms and practice-related issues regarding access to justice (Goetz, 2007, p. 27ff.; Mukhopadhyay, 2007, p. 1); as well as political discussions on substantive participation, representation, and citizenship. Varying interpretations regarding the role of governments, transnational organizations, and international civil society actors produce very different strategies for gender justice, such as empowering vulnerable people by enabling political participation or economic independence through the provision of microcredit or gender mainstreaming. Similarly, the nature of gender inequalities has been located in interconnected socio-political institutions such as the family, the community, the market, and the state. Therefore, understanding the ideological and cultural justifications for the subordination of vulnerable groups within each setting can help identify how unjust structures can be critically challenged (Dhawan, 2011, p. 11).

The feminist concept of justice identifies and outlines how, historically, women and other marginalized genders and groups/communities have been systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. Gender justice aims to challenge and dismantle the existing structures and systems perpetuating gender-based discrimination and oppression. It seeks to create a more equitable and inclusive society that values the rights and experiences of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, and seeks to address and rectify these inequalities. As argued in this report, gender justice represents more than just gender equality; instead, an intersectional approach helps strengthen our understanding of gender relations as relations of power and social force. Gender justice is not just about benefiting women; it recognizes that achieving gender equality is crucial for society's well-being and flourishing. It promotes social justice and the realization of the material and symbolic conditions for all individuals to access justice as members of, participants in, and represented in democratic processes.

Current discussions on justice increasingly draw on the model of intersectionality. Considerations from this perspective seek to explain and show how different forms of discrimination overlap and intersect, producing uniquely vulnerable subject positions. Here,

power is not understood as having one source or origin. The various diverse forms of power interact and manifest themselves in context-specific ways. An intersectional approach exposes how equality is not just a matter of gender equality; it also includes other factors such as ethnicity, race, class, religion, and able-bodiedness, to name a few. This implies that women (or men, or trans and non-binary people) cannot be identified as a coherent or homogeneous group. Instead, gender runs across all social categories and produces different conceptions of justice. What is clear, despite the controversies, is that gender justice is about more than treating men and women equally. One challenge here is defining and understanding the complex manifestations of discrimination, exclusion, and violence, namely how economic, sexual, racial, and gender-based violence are intimately intertwined and intersect to generate particular entanglements of oppression (Dhawan, 2011, p. 11).

Although feminist organizing is increasingly transnational and supranational, as in the case of the European Union, oppression based on ethnicity and class is still reproduced and maintained in institutional political discourses and practices that are country and region-specific. For example, the inequalities between Eastern and Western Europe are instructive. The notion of shared interests or "global sisterhood" among women, regardless of class, race, religion, migration status, able-bodiedness, and nationality, has led to the advocacy of general solutions to many problems assumed to be universally applicable to all women. Transnational gender programs or national domestic policies often misrepresent marginalized and excluded women or otherwise invisibilize them, as argued by Roma Feminism and Feminist Disability Studies. To the extent that Western feminists have participated in these forms of universalizing political discourses and denied or hindered the possibility of specific women or minorities' access to gender justice, they have abetted, to some extent, the reinforcing of global inequalities in the struggle for justice. Postcolonial-queer-feminist politics and agendas attempt to formulate and enact counter-strategies that can effectively contest intersectional inequalities.

In Western democracies, marginalized individuals such as migrants, ethnic minorities, and racialized people are expected to draw on the constitutional mechanisms of liberal nation-states to challenge their exclusion. The assumption is that this mechanism would strengthen the universal norms of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. However, as has been shown, postcolonial, decolonial, queer, and feminist approaches outline the limits of this liberal approach, which promises a corrective attitude to problems of inequality and injustice. Without the outright rejection of democratic ideals of freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, and human rights, they highlight the implicit biases and flaws in these approaches. The attempt is to deploy the master's tools to dismantle the master's house (Lorde, 1984, p. 111) by deploying norms of women's human rights and gender justice. Foregrounding the epistemic and material obstacles for women and LGBTQI+ groups, the focus is on broader geopolitical structures and challenges threatening contemporary democracies in Eastern and Western Europe and beyond. In order to prevent and countervail the erosion of democracy, efforts are made to broaden democratic citizenship, participation, and representation so as to formulate alternative models of democracy. Particular attention is on subaltern subjects in Eastern Europe, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and marginalized groups such as people with disabilities and trans people. Democratic education plays a crucial role both in encouraging privileged subjects located in the global North to engage responsibly with the periphery and in enabling subalterns and excluded groups to think of themselves as part of the public sphere and democratic interactions,

as well as to enable them to access democratic infrastructure and make their interests count in parliamentary structures.

It is equally important to examine specific democratic concepts and practices that shape our normative understanding of justice. As we have argued, feminist democratic and intersectional critical ideals of citizenship, participation, and representation can reshape and inform alternative concepts of democracy and justice. In the context of our discussion, gender justice can only be achieved in a new age of democracy through persistent questioning of its underlying assumptions. This implies that justice is a process of righting past wrongs and securing a just future by engendering democracy through diversifying and pluralizing the processes by which specific norms become hegemonic (Dhawan, 2011, p. 13). Normative ideals structure social, political, and cultural worlds discursively and materially through institutions such as courts or legislative bodies that are responsible for policy making. As hegemonic gender norms allow certain practices and actions to be understandable or natural while stigmatizing, marginalizing, or rendering invisible and unintelligible those behaviors, relationships, and practices that deviate from the norm, it is imperative to contest the "normative violence" that accompanies our understanding of ideals of human rights, equality, freedom, emancipation, and democracy. As Judith Butler (1999, p. 23) argued, non-normative subjects and practices that fall outside the norms of recognition and, thus, the realm of legitimacy, are vulnerable to "normative violence." Thus, in place of the universal understanding of the normative as a guideline for action, Butler foregrounds the link between violence, norms, and subject constitution (Mills, 2007, p. 134). Norms enable and hinder survival through normative framing of "lives worth living."

In the context of discussions on women's human rights, a normative understanding of who qualifies as a legitimate subject of rights excludes subaltern women from claiming rights, as they are merely coded as objects of benevolence. If norms shape both the agency and vulnerability of the subject, then it becomes clear that hegemonic norms must be contested (ibid., p. 141). Women and minorities or marginalized groups have historically been excluded from the sphere of politics and economy, denied access to the public sphere, and secluded in the private sphere. Accordingly, feminist scholarship and activism challenge not only the norms that enable democratic recognition but also the conditions that produce and reproduce the misrecognition of women and LGBTQI+ groups as political agents. A critical contestation of hegemonic framework thereby results in a more inclusive politics of recognition and deliberation regarding the conditions of that recognition (Butler, 2009, p. 139).

We have outlined how norms of recognition determine what qualifies as unjust, what mechanisms and instruments are deemed appropriate and legitimized to judge injustice, who is heard, and who has the power to listen (Dhawan, 2011, p. 16). This invites us to critique hegemonic norms of recognition and examine how recognition is historically constituted and articulated. The goal here is not simply to reform norms to make them more inclusive but to explore how it might be feasible to enable new norms to transform practices of recognition (Butler, 2009, p. 6). The pursuit of justice, especially gender justice, compels us to persistently engage with what is overlooked, excluded, erased, and silenced by institutions and policy. This requires a permanent process of revision, reinvention, and re-justification of the law in its effort to exercise justice. It is important to note that this by no means entails a rejection of norms of justice or democracy because of their intersectional bias; instead, the challenge is how these norms can be negotiated to make them meaningful for a new age of democracy. It is imperative

to consider how the perspectives and insights of marginalized subjects such as women and LGBTQI+ expand the boundaries of ideas of justice. Despite claims of "tolerance" and "openness," current paradigms often hinder the emergence of alternative non-canonical perspectives that can contribute to the democratic pushback needed by the European Union to aid against the backsliding enforced by antifeminists and anti-gender movements, parties, and policies.

One touchstone for determining the legitimacy of collectively enforced norms is whether those subjected to the agreements agree and have a say in the decision-making, and realization processes. Many of the feminist theories of democracy and intersectionality, which have been considered in this report, emphasize not only the reform of liberal democracy but further a radical transformation of its historically biased concepts and practices into alternative views of democracy. This new age of democracy is understood as a form of governance and a political regime informed by gender equality and gender justice. It is understood in terms of redistributive and transformative justice, politics of recognition, and representation. An important contribution of postcolonial and Eastern European feminists is to bring the question of representation into the discussion, whereby we must reevaluate the criteria of what will or will not count as a plausible demand for justice. We must address the following questions: Who is authorized to speak for those on the receiving end of justice, and from what will that authority be drawn? Which voices will be heard by whom? (Dhawan, 2011, pp. 19-20).

At the heart of the process of democratic pushback is the feminist contestation of the marginalization and exclusion of women, racialized people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants, and LGBTQI+ groups from justice claims. As highlighted in our comparison of Eastern and Western European contexts, the pursuit of economic justice must be supplemented with social, cultural, and political empowerment (Spivak, 1993, p. 63) and recognition. Gender justice is not just about organizing goods for the suffering classes, access to institutions, and formal equality before the laws, but also about enabling each member of society to exercise their rights and duties towards each other. It is the collective engagement with the ideals, norms, and institutional practices of democracy and equality that would guarantee dignity to all members of society. Herein lies the promise of a democracy to come.

Summary of findings

Key findings of the feminist diagnosis, critique, and transformation of liberal democracy:

1. In the face of the backlash against gender equality sought by anti-feminists and anti-gender movements, parties, and policies, the European Union faces an erosion of democracy and democratic backsliding.
2. Western and non-Western feminist scholarship and activism seek to challenge and transform political discriminatory and exclusionary structures and practices and promote gender equality and gender justice in democratic practices and processes.
3. Western and non-Western feminist theories of democracy encompass a range of approaches that highlight the *gendered* dimensions of political power within democratic systems.
4. While feminist theories of democracy can vary in their specific emphasis and approaches, some central concepts feature prominently such as citizenship, participation, and representation.
5. A feminist theory of democracy seeks to empower women politically by making their membership, participation, and representation efficacious and promote their active engagement and influence in political processes.
6. Foregrounding gender equality recognizes that women have historically been marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes with the aim of challenging and transforming these power imbalances. It is not sufficient to have women in political positions; their presence should also lead to meaningful changes in policies, priorities, and decision-making processes that address women's concerns and interests.
7. Feminisms from the global South challenge the reified notion of women as a group with shared experiences. They object to the universalization of the Western idea of state, society, and politics, highlighting local gender and racial power relations and dynamics.
8. Black, Roma, Post- and Decolonial feminist theories of democracy challenge and aim to transform liberal democracy in Europe by questioning its eurocentric bias.
9. *Gendering democracy* means a substantive practice of democracy understood as 1) a form of government that protects and enforces values such as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality; 2) a political regime that commits to *pluralism*.
10. Effective and extensive democratization is unattainable without substantial citizenship, participation, and representation.
11. Feminist contemporary analysis of democratic theory engages with an intersectional approach, transnational perspectives, political-economic questions, planetary and environmental concerns, social reproduction and care ethics, and the challenges and possibilities presented by technology.
12. A *feminist intersectional analysis of democracy* studies how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, migratory status, and disability, to produce specific forms of inequality and discrimination within democratic practices and processes.
13. Feminist approaches from both the global North and South emphasize the importance of expanding participation and inclusivity in democratic processes. They argue for a

participatory democracy, which fosters the active engagement of marginalized groups and subaltern subjects in decision-making and policy formation, creating spaces for diverse voices to be heard and fostering a more inclusive and representative democratic grammar.

14. Critical feminist theories not only emphasize the reform of liberal democracy but further a radical transformation of its historically biased concepts and practices into alternative views of democracy. The *new age of democracy* is understood as a form of government and a political regime informed by gender equality and gender justice, which implies redistributive and transformative justice and a politics of recognition and representation.

Key findings of the feminist analysis of inequalities and justice from an intersectional and global perspective:

1. The differences in the historical development and political economy of the various countries of the EU must be considered when studying and comparing them.
2. To better understand inequality, it is imperative to focus on the co-constitution of multiple categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability, migratory status, and religion.
3. Intersectionality as a "traveling concept" has made remarkable contributions to feminist scholarship and activism. It helps to understand the current challenges of transnational feminist scholarship and activism.
4. An intersectional approach to gender inequality focuses on gender-based discrimination, power relations, and the interconnected nature of different forms of oppression and discrimination, seeking to rectify them.
5. Intersectional theory acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple intersecting systems of oppression and privilege simultaneously and that these overlapping identities and experiences shape their lived realities.
6. Intersectional politics significantly contributes to the analysis of and struggles against inequality. This framework helps to understand the complexities and contingencies that characterize the coexistence of domination and resistance.
7. For intersectionality theory, the goal is to rectify historical wrongs and empower disenfranchised groups, whose experiences have been previously disregarded by single-issue politics and policy approaches.
8. Intersectionality and postcolonial studies identify and examine the flaws and shortcomings that structure the asymmetry and non-reciprocity between feminisms from the global North and South and outline the challenges of transnational feminist alliance-building.
9. Intersectionality and Feminist Disability Studies foreground the importance of people's experiences for scholarship and how these insights help challenge oppressive hegemonic discourses and structures. The bridging of theory and practice functions as an essential political tool that helps reclaim alternative forms of identity and personhood that are not framed by abelist norms.
10. Intersectionality and Roma Feminism reveal the deep inequities between Western and Eastern societies. They explain how the intersection of gender, ethnicity, class,

nationality, and migratory status impacts women's vulnerability and contributes to the ethnicization of gender-based violence, thereby reinforcing racist and patriarchal structures in transnational contexts.

11. Intersectional analysis and politics contribute to engendering democracy and spaces of democratic participation by identifying the mechanisms and relations that produce specific forms of inequality and discrimination within democratic practices and processes.
12. Feminist approaches to democracy acknowledge that although the role of rights cannot be underestimated when it comes to mitigating gendered vulnerability and discrimination, law does not always guarantee justice. Contemporary feminists challenge existing legal systems, advocating for transformative justice approaches that address gender inequality and violence and ensure accountability and gender justice.
13. Normative arguments for advancing gender justice are confronted with backlash and backsliding that beset a new age of democracy.
14. Feminist, democratic-critical ideals of citizenship, participation, and representation reshape and inform alternative concepts of justice by reimagining democracy intersectionally.

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