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Performative democratic practice: An ethnographic study of the Women's Rights Centre in Montenegro

Thesis

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Performative democratic practice: An ethnographic study of the Women's Rights Centre in Montenegro

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Abstract

This thesis explores how democratic practice is enacted by non-governmental organisation (NGO) practitioners in a country in transition and seeks to unpack the embodied experiences of people who are increasingly perceived by international stakeholders and scholars as being important actors in processes of democratisation. I offer an in-depth ethnographic account of the work of practitioners within a women's NGO in Montenegro, the Women's Rights Centre, as they seek to enact democratic practice within and through a context of patriarchy and corruption. Whereas the extant literature on democratic practice in relation to NGOs offers insight into the processes of democratisation in countries in transition, it does not, by and large, account for the lived experiences of practitioners as they strive to democratise their societies. Bearing this gap in mind, I turn to contemporary theories of democratic practice, deliberation and agonism, perspectives that explore democracy as participative engagement between people, groups and governments. I interrogate these from a poststructuralist perspective. Specifically, I interpret them through Judith Butler's theory of embodied performativity, an account of agency within a matrix of re-iterative norms, which is adopted as my theoretical framework. Pursuing a participant-observer research identity, I draw on my own observations generated through a 30-month-long ethnography, 11 of which were spent in the field. I adopt a multimodal discourse analytic approach in analysing the multifaceted and embodied sense of what it means to enact democratic practice as an NGO practitioner. I present three broad democratic practices. The first, *embodying democratic practice*, surfaces the bodies of practitioners as sites through which democracy is enacted. The second, *navigating corruption*, illustrates the struggle of practicing democracy within a ubiquitous context of corruption. The third, *the aesthetics of assembling*, offers insight into how democratic practice can be enacted through the entanglement of different aesthetic mediums, connecting and drawing diverse people into a public assembly.

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I Introduction

1.1 Thesis introduction

In this thesis I explore how non-governmental practitioners enact democratic practice in a country in transition[1]. In particular, my focus is on how people within a civil sector organisation in Montenegro experience and struggle with practicing democracy within a new democratic context. This is an important topic because democracy has played a central role in the adaptation and restructuring of countries in transition, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adopting an increasingly active part in the process of democratisation (Mair, 2013). Yet democracy is a contested concept (Laclau, 2014: 20), and little is known about how the ideas, practices and identities implicit within democracy are experienced and enacted by NGO practitioners.

In this ethnographic study I explore in depth the work of an NGO called the Women's Rights Centre (WRC), whose members seek to influence the democratic processes of Montenegro by generating "gender-equal democratic practice" (WRC, 2017). The purpose of the research is to explore: how NGO practitioners influence and inform practice, and *vice versa*; how practitioners inter-relate with the dominant discursive fabric of the context in which they live; and how practitioners relate and work with larger discourses and norms of democracy. Within this study, practitioners are

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[1] Countries in transition are deemed to be countries undergoing a process of democratisation, i.e. a shift from (often) autocratic regimes to democracies. Such a process involves major social, economic and political adjustments, such as the transformation/establishment of democratic institutions as well as a change of people's mindsets (Rustow, 1970).

approached as agents of democratic practice, who enact democracy through their day-to-day engagements and within the context of discursive norms they co-constitute.

In this chapter I outline the aims and rationale of the research, before presenting and discussing my research question.

1.2 Aims, Rationale, Research Question and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore the enactment of democratic practice. Specifically, I focus on the ways in which subjects performatively construct democracy in a country in transition through reinterpreting, resisting and re-performing discourses in an embodied way. I pursue this research drawing on two theories of participative democracy, deliberative (Habermas, 1984; 1987; 1996; 1998) and agonistic (Mouffe, 1999; 2009a, 2009b 2013 and 2014), which I interpret as generating a series of performative norms (Butler, 1999; 2004; 2011; 2015). I employ Judith Butler's concept of performativity as my theoretical framework – an account that allows us to see how subjects enact practice agentically within and through a matrix of norms.

This research is important because while much is known concerning the influence and growth of NGOs in countries in transition (e.g. Clarke, 1998; Fowler, 1993; Mair, 2013; Mercer, 2002), what remains unexplored is an underlying sense of how people both conceptualise and enact democratic practice. There is much more to understand about how practitioners work with, adapt and reinvent discourses of democracy via their practices, in novel and valuable ways within a context of democratic norms.

I pose the following research question (RQ), which I develop theoretically and methodologically as the thesis proceeds:

How do people working within an NGO in a country in transition performatively enact democratic practice?

This question is based on an assumption that exploring the practice of these subjects will enable an understanding of their commitments in relation to larger discourses of democracy and the implications of these commitments for practice. The RQ is addressed via a poststructuralist onto-epistemological perspective and an ethnographic methodology, paying close attention to the entanglement of text and visual, with an emphasis on embodied experience. In order to answer the RQ two salient research objectives are proposed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

The first objective is to identify the broader practices created through embodied enactments of NGO practitioners in relation to a range of participants, such as civil sector practitioners, the country's residents, politicians, government workers and international representatives, within a context of a country in transition. Practitioners are approached as subjects situated within a larger context of assumptions and norms regarding the meaning of democracy and what it means to be a democratic practitioner: e.g. those generated by government, the political context of the research site and the identifications of those people NGOs work with. However, they are simultaneously approached as agents of democratic practice who actively shape such a context. I identify two bodies of literature as relevant to this objective, deliberative and agonistic accounts of democracy. These accounts offer insight into performing democratic practice from the bottom up, via

civil engagement, rather than via formal democratic institutions. I argue that they offer a range of performative norms relating to democratic practice, which may be adopted, rejected or reconfigured through embodied practice.

The second objective is to explore WRC practices in depth, paying attention to dimensions that constitute the broader democratic practice enacted by practitioners. This is significant for understanding the embodied ways in which NGO practitioners enact, reproduce and shape practices of democracy in a context where democracy may be in its nascent stages and inevitably entangled with other socio-political norms (e.g. 'democracy' is often associated with violence and civil war in Yugoslavia). I employ the theory termed performativity by Judith Butler to make sense of the second objective, which serves as the theoretical framework for this research.

1.3 Contributions to knowledge

My main contribution to knowledge is to provide rich insight into the experiences of NGO practitioners who enact democratic practice. I offer an embodied and performative account of what it means to generate democratic practice within a country in transition, whose normative framework is marked by hostility and patriarchy. I achieve this through weaving insights from Judith Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1999, 2006, 2011 and 2015) with theories of deliberative and agonistic democratic practice (e.g., Habermas, 1984, 1987 and 1996; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 1999, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2014 and 2018), as well as my own ethnographic account. The NGO literature relating to democracy tends to overlook practice in favour of outcomes. Further, it does not offer a gendered account of how women NGO practitioners might

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enact democracy within a context of misogyny and patriarchy. These are insights I seek to offer to the NGO literature and the broader literature on democratic practice.

Within this overall frame I make four contributions to the literature pertaining to democratic practice and NGOs. The first is to introduce an embodied account of democratic practice, outlining how practitioners' bodies act as sites for generating and contesting democratic practice within a context of constraints and possibility. The second contribution is to foreground corruption as something co-constitutive of democratic practice. Corruption is largely overlooked in terms of practice by both the NGO literature and by theories of deliberation and agonism. Yet, I found that navigating corruption, while not succumbing to it, was a key practice of NGO practitioners. My third contribution is to further develop knowledge of the aesthetics of democratic practice. Aesthetics is again not addressed by the NGO literature and receives only high-level conceptual treatment within theories of agonism.

My fourth contribution is to offer a lived and everyday understanding of democratic practice from the perspective of women operating within a patriarchal and corrupt setting. While this is a piece of research that explores and contributes to knowledge in the area of the democratic practices generated by organisations in general, it is worth acknowledging that this particular context is overtly gendered, given the empirical setting of a women's organisation. While other studies may erase gender entirely as a consideration, often presenting heavily male and masculine contexts as being generally representative of democratic practice, this research aims to contribute to broader knowledge, while also acknowledging that such practices often take place within hostile, and in this case, heavily patriarchal, environments. Focusing specifically on the work of a

women's organisation is valuable for achieving a more nuanced understanding of the tension that exists between the prevailing patriarchy within a context of transition and the democratic principles of liberty and equality.

1.4 Thesis outline

The remainder of the thesis contains nine chapters. In *Chapter 2*, I describe the broader context within which the study is situated, the relatively young liberal democracy of Montenegro; a country that also suffers from endemic corruption and patriarchal social norms. I next offer an account of the relevant socio-historical context relating to women's engagement in the democratisation of Yugoslavia, long before the formal institution of democracy. In doing so I draw attention to a rich discursive history of women's activism in the region, which informs contemporary struggles. Finally, I describe the research setting, that of WRC, providing detail concerning its overall focus of enacting democratic principles and how such a focus translates into its various programmes of work.

In *Chapter 3*, I review the relevant literature pertaining to democratic practice. I do so by exploring how scholars have researched NGOs as democratic actors within countries in transition. I find that while these studies illuminate some important foci of NGOs, such as combating corruption and patriarchy, ultimately the literature does not offer insight into the lived experiences of practitioners as they seek to enact democratic practice. I therefore turn to contemporary theories of participative democratic practice, deliberation and agonism, in order to extrapolate a set of norms that might be perceptible in the field as informing democratic practice.

In *Chapter 4*, I offer my theoretical framework for exploring the research question – Judith Butler's theory of embodied performativity, which represents an account of agency within a matrix of reiterative norms. I argue that while theories of democratic practice tend to offer a somewhat disembodied account of how practitioners might engage, Butler provides a means through which I can develop an account of democratic practice that is enacted through: the entanglement of bodily/speech acts; the working of continuously reiterating norms; the process in which people come to recognise themselves as viable democratic subjects; and embodied and relational connections and co-dependencies between vulnerable humans.

In *Chapter 5*, I discuss my methodology, a discourse-based ethnography, which seeks to combine rich, critically engaged and in-depth insight into the lived experience of practicing democracy. I outline my participant-observation, which lasted 30 months, 11 of which were spent in the field. I describe my role as an organisational equal, in which I enacted democratic practice with research participants and they, in turn, helped me make sense of my ongoing theorising of knowledge. Providing an account of my multimodal discourse analytical approach, I make the case that this is a suitable means for drawing out the richness of the discursive community I was embedded within.

In *Chapters 6, 7 and 8*, I offer my findings, which are organised as three overarching democratic practices. *Chapter 6*, 'Embodying democratic practice', focuses on the body as a site of practice, where the possibilities and tensions of democratic engagement are played out with and through bodily acts. I also emphasise the physical struggle involved in performing democratic practice and how it bears on the bodies of practitioners.

Chapter 7, 'Navigating corruption', explores the ways in which practitioners confront and work around corruption, as they strive to generate democratic practice in a setting where endemic corruption pervades nearly every segment of people's lives. I identify and analyse the corrupt practices that practitioners encounter, as these exist in a co-dependent relationship with the democratic practices they offer in response. *Chapter 8*, 'The aesthetics of assembling', explores the artful ways in which practitioners facilitate, shape and influence assembly. I outline how collective agency emerges out of the entanglement of diverse aesthetic mediums and articulations.

In *Chapter 9*, I relate my findings back to the NGO, democratic practice and performativity literatures to surface and enrich my contributions to knowledge, which all build towards the production of a rich account of what it means to enact an embodied form of democratic practice. First, I highlight theories of democratic practice as disembodied and build upon their performative assumptions to theorise how we can interpret practitioners' bodies as sites upon which democratic practice unfolds. Second, I theorise democratic practice as inextricably linked to its scene of endemic corruption and in the process I emphasise how corruption informs and shapes democratic practice, and vice versa. Third, I apply a performative and aesthetic perspective to theorising how alliances and connections in democratic practice are formed. In doing so, I conceptualise the rich and sensory ways in which disparate people are brought together in democratic assembly.

In *Chapter 10*, I conclude the thesis by returning to my research question and objectives and consider the contributions in light of these. I also offer some practice-relevant contributions emerging from the research. I highlight some of the limitations of the study

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and thereby also avenues for future research. I end by offering some reflections on the methodology pursued, presenting modest insight into the possibilities of assuming such an embedded research identity in the work of an organisation intensely committed to enacting democratic practice.

II The scene of study and sociohistorical context

I begin this chapter by exploring the current socio-political context of Montenegro as a country in transition in order to draw attention to the role of NGOs in such an environment. I argue that while a vibrant civil sector is posited as an important driver of democratisation in countries in transition (Ahmeti, 2010; Gunther et al, 2006), in Montenegro the work of these organisations is often inhibited by endemic corruption in the public and civil sector, where patriarchy frequently appears as a symptom, or even cause, of such corruption. Second, I offer a brief overview of women's activism in Yugoslavia from pre-WWII to the present day in order to highlight the continuous efforts of women towards democratisation. Such a historical overview helps situate the work of WRC, linking its practice to the enduring continuum of the struggle for liberty and equality in the context of the former Yugoslavia. Finally, I provide a detailed account of the research setting – WRC - and the work it undertakes.

2.1. Broader context within which the Women's Rights Centre is situated

A republic of the former Yugoslavia, Montenegro is a valuable context for the research because it has been seeking to introduce and normalise liberal democracy since the 1990s and NGOs are at the centre of these efforts. This section outlines some of the main features of attempts to democratise Montenegro, some of the obstacles to doing so and the role of NGOs in this process.

Montenegro has been an electoral democracy since 1990, which makes it one of the youngest democracies in Europe. It is often described in positive terms by members of the international community[2] as "a leader in the European integration [process]" (European Western Balkans, 18/05/2017), "the unchallenged champion of [the EU] accession negotiations" (Marković, 2016) and even a "success story" when it comes to the process of democratisation (CDM, 2016). It is a country that officially complies with many of the legal requirements of a democratic country (Diamond, 2015): it distributes its powers across three separate pillars of democracy (legislative, executive and judicial); it holds national and local elections regularly; and it has a broad civil sector (European Commission, 2016; Freedom House, 2013).

Yet, despite such a positive evaluation of the country's democratisation process, it has also been recognised as suffering significant corruption (see Bieber, 2003; Igrić, 2010; Trivunović, 2007; Williams et al, 2017). Montenegro scores 46 out of 100 on the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (2017), which focuses on the perceptions of citizens of corruption in the public sphere, where 0 represents extremely corrupt and 100 "very clean" (TI, 2017: 1). As many as 72.25% of its citizens perceive corruption as all-encompassing and unavoidable in Montenegrin society (CEMI, 2014), and in 2015 the off-on recurring Montenegrin Prime Minister, Milo Đukanović, was (sardonically) awarded the Man of the Year in Organised Crime Award by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) for "promot[ing] uncivil

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[2] The international community here stands for various international and supranational representatives and bodies.

society [and] build[ing] one of the most dedicated kleptocracies and organised crime havens in the world" (OCCRP, 2015).

Endemic corruption in Montenegro developed hand-in-hand with the advent of democracy, a phenomenon fostered and enhanced in the 1990s, as Yugoslavia limped through a civil war (Bieber, 2003). Running in parallel with democratisation was a drive to liberalise the economy and to privatise state services, "a process which strengthened the link between the business oligarchy and the political elite" (Igrić, 2010: 22) and is now considered "one of the major obstacles to the country's democratic development" (Vuković, 2017: 3) as it strengthened and formalised links between government and organised crime (Radulović and Ćalović, 2015). Although the European Commission recognises that Montenegro has made certain improvements when it comes to battling corruption (EC, 2016), significant challenges remain to the democratisation agenda, indicated by the simple fact that there has not yet been a change of government (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2014; Diamond, 2015) in the country, with the same party ruling, under different guises, for the past 60 years[3].

Nevertheless, a vibrant civil sector in the Balkans region is often posited as a 'counterforce' to an otherwise corrupt environment (Ahmeti, 2010: 56), a "crucial component" for building democracy (EC, 2016: 9), and 'indispensable' to the process of democratisation (Vuković, 2017: 11). In common with other countries in transition,

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[3] With the introduction of multiparty democracy, The Communist Party, from the era of one-party rule in Yugoslavia, transformed into the Democratic Party of Socialists, a party that has held power in Montenegro for almost three decades.

Montenegro has experienced a proliferation of NGOs: 3,589 registered in 2015 [4] (Montenegro Government, 2015), meaning that, in theory, there is one NGO per 175 people in the country. In practice, of course, many of these organisations are either dormant (Vuković, 2017), have limited outreach (CSOSI, 2015), or operate as GONGOs [5] – "government-sponsored civil society organisations" (Belskaya, 2017). Simultaneously, genuinely independent organisations are often sabotaged and incapacitated by the government [6] and publicly presented as 'enemies of the state' (Jovićević, 2012; Malidžan, 2012; Tomović, 2015).

Montenegrin NGOs often state the three main inhibiting tactics utilised by the government as: financing, exclusion and smear campaigns (CGO, 2016; CEDAW, 2017; GREVIO 2017; MANS, 2017). Even though NGOs are eligible for public funding by law, money is often allocated in a non-transparent and even illegal way (Đonović, 2016). For example, the Centre for Civic Education claims that the illegal application of laws resulted in NGOs being denied almost €4m between 2013-2015 (CGO, 2016: 10). In terms of foreign funding, the view prevails that NGOs receive abundant funding from the EU and other international donors (CDM, 12/05/2017; RTCG, 2017), yet a great portion of these funds is not issued directly to NGOs but to larger international organisations, which hold power over further channelling of funds to local NGOs (see the example of UN Women, 2018). Moreover, some of these funds are reserved for government institutional support, rather than the civil sector (see CoE, 2017; UNDP, 2018).

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[4] The Ministry of Interior has not published the number of registered NGOs since 2015.
[5] The Centre for NGO Development has recently criticised the Government for its "lack of transparent procedures in [the area of collaboration between the government and civil sector] which allows the Government discretion to decide which NGOs are to be allocated [resources] according to their political agreeability" (Zeković, 2017).
[6] For example, in 2012 several thousand NGOs were erased from the official register of NGOs by the Ministry of Interior (Jovićević, 15/08/2012).

Those organisations that manage to prevail despite restrictive financing arrangements often have to fight hard to be included in working groups of government and NGO actors tasked with developing new policies, processes and strategies (GREVIO, 2017: 52; MANS, 2017: 112). For example, collaboration between NGOs and the national Anti-Corruption Agency would seem crucial, considering the prevalence of corruption in the country and in government. However, "the government does not strive to establish meaningful cooperation with the NGOs in the field of anticorruption…[and] during 2016 no one from the civil sector participated in the board for anti-corruption" (MANS, 2017: 63), even though the European Commission praised the government for making advances in combatting corruption by establishing an Anti-Corruption Agency (EC, 2016: 15).

In addition to exclusion, civil sector organisations are often slandered in the pro-government press (Vuković, 2017) and individual activists "targeted on a personal basis by the media through smear campaigns" (EC, 2016: 9), 'intimidated' (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2016) and 'harassed' (TI, 2014). The smear campaigns are often directed against female activists (Kvinna till Kvinna, 2016), which emphasises yet another impediment to the generation of democratic practice in the country – the presence of widespread and deeply embedded patriarchy.

Indeed, patriarchy is recognised as one of the main inhibitors to attaining a democratic society by the participants in this research, but the same argument can also be found in the testaments and writings of pre- and post-WWII activists and historians, which demonstrates the scale and persistence of the problem. I will briefly outline the efforts of women to secure democracy in Yugoslavia in an attempt to sketch a continuum of similar

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issues women have faced throughout more recent history and the issues my research participants currently face.

2.2. Women and democracy in Yugoslavia: a brief overview

This section offers insight into the historical context of the research, placing the present within a lineage of struggle for democracy on the part of women's groups in Yugoslavia. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, I highlight the enduring tension that exists between the prevailing patriarchy and the main principles of democracy: liberty and equality (Mouffe, 1991). Second, I demonstrate that women were always at the forefront of the struggle to establish democratic practice in the context of Yugoslavia, as those who experience first-hand what it means to be treated unequally in both practice and within legal frameworks (Božinović, 1996: 119).

I offer a partial account of democratisation in the country from the perspective of women; however, it ought to be noted that although Yugoslavia was not officially democratic after WWII (in the sense of the head of state being elected), in most ways it created democratic practices, such as active industrial democracy, policymaking through trade unions, the establishment of co-operative ownership, and so on (Whitehorn, 1978). Although women's engagement in democratic practice fluctuated during the 20th century, it was a narrative of gradual progression, which was curtailed in the build-up to, during, and after the country's civil wars of the 1990s – and the institution of formal democracy (Đokanović et al, 2014).

Women's struggle for democracy in Yugoslavia can be traced back to pre-WWII Yugoslavia. The role of women in society had changed immensely as a consequence of the two Balkan wars (1912 and 1913), as well as WWI (1914-1918). The dramatic loss of life within the male population meant that the task of rebuilding the nation, a constitutional monarchy at the time, fell predominantly on the shoulders of women. Unpaid housework and traditionally feminine professional roles (e.g. teachers, nurses) were extended to include unpaid (or underpaid) labour in the mines, building sites, factories and fields (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014; Stefanović, 1921). Yet when it came to formal recognition of women as equals in the newly rebuilt country, they were overlooked (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014; Obrenić, 2008).

As a reaction to such treatment, the Society for the Emancipation and Protection of Women's Rights called for an urgent assembly of women in Belgrade on 8 May 1921 in order to express resentment and to encourage action (Ženski pokret, 1921). The women communicated their dissatisfaction with being used as a free and/or cheap labour force (Petković, 1921); not being recognised as full citizens in law (Milčinović, 1921); and their lack of suffrage. Indeed, at the time, the right to vote was issued to some women as a "kind of gift" (Štebi, 1921: 16) by the government - a strategic and cynical means of strengthening the ruling party's electoral support. Women held similar gatherings all over the country in the years running up to WWII and organised themselves into numerous bodies, alliances[7] and eventually a movement (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014;

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[7] Some of the most prominent were: Alliansa jugoslovenskih društava u kraljevini SHS (1923) that became Alijansa ženskih pokreta in 1926; Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena(1927); Ženska stranka (1927); Jugoslovenska liga žena za mir i slobodu; Jugoslovenski ženski savez (1929) (Stojaković, 2014a).

Božinović, 2017a), while simultaneously building alliances with international (predominantly pacifist) organisations (Stojaković, 2014a).

In the mid 1930s many women, having struggled for recognition as workers who rebuilt the country after several wars, perceived the tenets of communism as close to their own fight for liberty and equality and so their membership in the early, and then illegal[8], communist organisations does not come as a surprise (Barać, 2016). Women communists were also motivated to fight the rising threat of fascism in this era, which was viewed as catastrophic for the realisation of democratic values (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953). Unlike their male communist comrades, however, who gradually prepared themselves for the upcoming war, women largely promoted pacifism, urging "active participation in the prevention [of war]" (Mitrović, 04/03/1937). Taking this position meant that they were sometimes excluded from communist circles (ibid). Women's groups were also perceived as a 'threat' to other democratic alternatives to the communists, such as the Democratic Party (Štebi, 1921: 23), even though they advocated for more democracy: equality for all and the freedom to be a full citizen (Petković, 1921).

The women's struggle was gradually equated with the class struggle, however, and the key notions that a society cannot be democratic unless everyone is treated equally (Pejanović, 1984) and unless exploitation and privilege are eradicated (Božinović, 2017b) became widely accepted within the communist left. The absorption of the women's movement within the communist left occurred firstly through joint combat

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[8] The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was founded in 1919 under the name of the Socialist Labour Party of Yugoslavia but it became a proscribed organisation under the royal government in 1921 and it remained so until the beginning of WWII (Vujošević, 1985).

efforts against the occupying fascist forces and subsequently through the rebuilding of the new socialist country (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014).

The annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938 brought fascism to the border of the Yugoslav monarchy, which practically marked the end of the pacifist efforts on the part of women's organisations, which now committed to a militaristic strategy. As war appeared imminent, the lines between women's activism and communism blurred further. The existing monarchist government began to fortify an alliance with fascist Germany and Italy, which had severe consequences for the women's antifascist movement, whose activists were hunted, imprisoned in newly opened concentration camps, and murdered (Božinović, 2017b). When Yugoslavia capitulated in 1941, women were well represented within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), amplifying resistance to the fascist invasion (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014). Women participated equally in the liberation struggle, fighting shoulder to shoulder with their male comrades, attaining high military positions (Malinović and Petakov, 2011) and acting as "professional revolutionaries" (Mladenović, 1979: 32). Very quickly women organised themselves politically via the 'People's Liberation Committees', which were predominantly in charge of providing resources for the liberation army and in some cases assumed the role of a local government (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953), especially in occupied territories (Stojaković, 2014b), connecting previously isolated women's groups (Božinović, 2017b). Owing to this connectedness, women were able to organise the first conference of women as soon as 1942, an event that attracted women from all over the country (Stojaković, 2014b). The most important outcome of the conference was the birth of an organisation called the Antifascist Front of Women (AFŽ), which

became a powerful vehicle for women's emancipation, formal political engagement and equal economic participation for over a decade.

Women's formal political engagement during the war, and subsequently, unfolded largely through AFŽ but also via the Narodni Front[9] and the aforementioned liberation committees (Stojaković, 2014b). Such engagement brought advancements to the position of women in wartime and subsequently in the socialist society that Yugoslavia became. For example, some of the first procedural policies issued in 1942 by the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army were drafted upon the principle of equality – women gained the right to be formally elected as heads of the liberation boards (which they were), and in Montenegro the Declaration on the Rights of Citizens formally recognised women as free and equal citizens (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953: 9).

At the end of the war, women were included within the Constitution of the newly formed Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia: "women are equal in all areas of state, economic and socio-political life" (ibid: 10). While these documents represented an important milestone for women's struggle for democracy, they also liberated women from the shackles of remaining within the private sphere and introduced them formally (legally) into an egalitarian relationship with men in the public sphere. However, social equality was yet to be achieved and so women continued to work towards the "democratisation of the country [and] betterment of the economic position of the

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[9] Narodni Front (People's Front) is short for the Socialist Workers' Alliance of the People of Yugoslavia, a political organisation active between 1945 – 1960. The main purpose of the organisation was establishing socialist relations between citizens upon the basis of socialist democracy (Boričić, 1990)

working class" after the war (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953: 4) through AFŽ (Bonfiglioli, 2012).

In a by now familiar pattern, the first Congress of AFŽ in August 1945 invited all women to rebuild the country and organise day-to-day life post-war (Bonfiglioli, 2012). The challenge set was to "protect peace and democratic values" (Božinović, 1996: 119). Yet this time, such an effort would be conducted hand in hand with the KPJ and the newly formed People's Government (Stojaković, 2013; Ždralović, 2014).

It is important to acknowledge the fact that AFŽ was a widespread and engaged organisation (Stojaković, 2011 and 2014b), which accelerated the social and organisational democratisation of the country – even if national governance continued along single party lines - and via which women saw a period of "rapid emancipation" (Đokanović et al, 2014: 104). Božinović and Snuderl (1953) offer an account of women's manifold participation, gained via AFŽ's campaigning and influence, in rebuilding the country's infrastructure (roads and railways), factories, agricultural mechanisation, houses (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina predominantly women worked as builders), schools and hospitals; their work as smiths, engineers, mechanics, tool-makers, farmers, teachers and medical professionals.

However, in this period women also started – again via AFŽ - to enact their constitutional provisions, entering local and national governments, drafting and amending laws and founding and participating in trade unions (Đokanović et al, 2014). AFŽ also had international ambitions and scope, initiating the Democratic Federation of Women, yet ceasing membership when the body became heavily influenced by the politics of the

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Soviet Union. AFŽ continued to maintain and strengthen alliances with antifascist movements in the United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, France, and other countries (Božinović, 1996).

Undoubtedly, AFŽ was a powerful force for the democratic transformation of the country, which is why it is surprising that the organisation came to an abrupt halt in 1953. Stojaković (2011 and 2013) states that even though the formal dissolution of AFŽ happened in 1953, the actual process of dismantling had been initiated three years earlier. In 1950 a new law on managing state enterprises transformed the economic basis of the country by enabling collectives of workers to run enterprises themselves. However, such a change generated significant redundancies within the female workforce under the pretext that women workers were insufficiently qualified[10] and that as such they presented a burden to the profitability of the enterprise (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953). Very quickly, workplaces began closing the auxiliary facilities (nurseries and clinics) AFŽ had helped to establish in the factories in order to enable women to participate equally in the workforce, under the pretext that these facilities were a great burden to the economy (ibid).

Alongside the new law on managing state enterprises and the closing of auxiliary facilities, the federal government issued policies that guaranteed generous benefits for the birth of a third child, which was supposed to be paid partially from the federal budget and partially by employers. The policy seemed to incentivise employers not to employ

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[10] After WWII people were employed regardless of qualification as the country needed a workforce to rebuild, however, when the economy started to improve, a qualifications argument was used as justification for making cuts in order to make enterprises more profitable (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953).

women with several children, while simultaneously incentivising some women to stay at home (Stojaković, 2013). At the same time, older discourses portraying women as the 'weaker sex' began to re-emerge in the workplace; women were labelled as 'non-profitable' because of their allegedly weaker constitution, and as mothers whose place was at home caring for their families (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953). Such labelling appears cynical in its deployment considering how women rebuilt the country practically on their own after the country's four wars (two Balkan and two world wars), often working up to 15 hours a day performing household and caring work alongside their regular labour (Stojaković, 2013). In the following decades, the steadfast revival of patriarchal narratives and attitudes gradually started to erode the democratic practice women fought so hard to achieve.

AFŽ was also heavily scrutinised by the KPJ, which started to become suspicious of the momentum the organisation was developing all over the country, in both urban and rural areas (Bošnjak and Gavrić, 2014). In Vojvodina, Serbia, for instance, Stojaković (2013) reports numerous warnings from the party to the branch of AFŽ in that region, cautioning against what was viewed as AFŽ's tendencies towards becoming an organisation detached from the party's agenda. Finally, at the Fourth Congress of AFŽ (26-28/10/1953) a conclusion was agreed upon that the organisation was too centralised, in contradiction to what was viewed as the continuous democratisation of the country, and that AFŽ should be dissolved in order to allow for the establishment of smaller, decentralised Women's Societies, which would be better positioned to tend to women's issues locally (Dobrić, 1987). It is interesting to observe that the women's issues AFŽ focussed on differed dramatically from those undertaken by the newly formed Women's Societies, which prioritised domestic themes: household efficiency

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improvements, education for mothers, support for bringing up children, the opening of school kitchens and nurseries, etc.

Those women who did participate in the work of the Women's Societies had an opportunity to engage politically via the Narodni Front (a broad political coalition of left-wing members and groups), Narodna Omladina (a left-wing youth organisation), various unions, as well as the communist party (Jovanović, 2014). However, their overall political engagement started to drop dramatically after 1952 (Božinović and Snuderl, 1953), which coincided with the dissolution of AFŽ. Magazines that previously played a significant role in the political liberation of women and helped women stay informed about their position in society and to organise started featuring domestic texts in place of those celebrating a working, politically engaged and emancipated woman (Stojaković, 2011). The position of women was gradually eroded, their activism largely absorbed into the political apparatus, where their actions could be scrutinised and regulated.

Women's fight for liberty and equality did not cease entirely in the following few decades but their organisations were weakened and social activism that did not align with the official political discourse was thwarted. Đokanović et al (2014) attribute the success of the "process of repatriarchalisation" (p.134), which took place in the decades preceding the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, precisely to this weakening of the women's movement that followed the dissolution of AFŽ. Nevertheless, women still maintained a far greater degree of equality in law and in practice than had been the case prior to WWII and subsequently in the officially 'democratic' republics of the former Yugoslavia.

Despite these regressive events, it was the rise of ethno-nationalism after 1980 that dealt the heaviest blow to women's activism and the quality of their daily lives and, by extension, to the entire country, which was relapsing into yet another war. The discourses of conservative religious nationalism gelled well with those of patriarchy. The fight for liberty and equality, in the words of Đokanović et al (2014: 134-135): "became replaced with political and social efforts to return women to the private sphere and reaffirm women's roles as mothers in charge of the reproduction of *ethnia*". Paradoxically, the civil war that ensued led to the institution of formal, liberal democracies in the former republics of Yugoslavia, while at the same time marking the death of a more qualitative social democracy.

Apart from a single written reference to women's protests in Montenegro against the recent wars (GONG, 2018), a short publication (Anima, 2018) and sporadic accounts of some of the research participants, little information exists on women's activism during the war years in the 1990s[11]. However, there is evidence proving that a group of women in the coastal town of Kotor organised a peace protest in 1991, termed Call to Reason and Peace, which fostered the formation of a group called Krug, opposing the wars (Anima, 2018). Krug facilitated weekly meetings over the course of the five war years, yet the short publication does not provide the content and purpose of these meetings. What is known is that Krug gave birth to a women's organisation, called Anima, which to this day advocates for peace and conflict resolution.

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[11] Two of the Anima members explained to me that hard copy material on peace protests and women's activism in the 1990s is kept in the organisation's library in Kotor, but unfortunately there are no electronic editions available.

Presently, women in the republics of the former Yugoslavia, including Montenegro, have to fight against the consequences of "rapid repatriarchalisation" (Đokanović et al, 2014: 134), a process in which the democratic fight for liberty and equality was replaced with the corrupt and repressive practices of a political elite. But they also have to fight against new trends that fortify this 'repatriarchialisation', such as the masculinisation of the public sphere, selective abortions (i.e. abortions of female foetuses) and the revival of an aggressive nationalist discourse, to name only a few (CEDAW, 2017; GREVIO, 2017).

2.3. Women's Rights Centre: the scene of study

The research setting I chose as the focus of this study is an organisation called the Women's Rights Centre (WRC). It is worth noting, though, that in searching for a data set to explore the RQ, I initially focused predominantly on larger organisations with a longer track record within Montenegro's civil sector, especially those with a derivation of the word 'democracy' in their titles. However, the more I searched and spoke with NGO actors, government officials, grassroots practitioners, academics and journalists, the more I started hearing about WRC as a potentially suitable place to explore the challenges and enactments of democratic practice. I gradually started immersing myself in the organisation's work via its website, its Facebook page, where it posts its reactions to the various events taking place in society, alongside news of its own work, and eventually via emails and other messenger services.

More detail on the work of WRC will be provided in the methodology section but for now it is worth noting that it is one of the organisations in Montenegro that tasks itself with

the democratisation of society. Faithful to their heritage, WRC practitioners perceive themselves as "champions of democracy in a country in transition" (Ina, a research participant) and as campaigning women, "who have a true, rich and honest legacy of democratic struggle to connect with" (Mina, a research participant). It is a relatively young organisation, founded in 2012; however, organisation members have long-standing experience of working in and with other civil sector organisations (in some cases for over 15 years). The organisation is small, counting only six permanent employees, although it attracts a sizeable number of volunteers and associates, who support its work pro bono. Yet, even though WRC is small in size, many of those who work with it describe it as "an army of a few" (Nikola), "a big-small organisation" (Milica), "a powerful force for equality and protectors of women's lives" (Jasna). For a few years after founding the organisation, WRC members worked for free, investing all the funds they could secure into programmes and working pro bono.

With their "selfless, intelligent and dedicated work" (a donor), WRC managed to attract the attention of the Swedish foundation, Kvinna till Kvinna (KTK), which is known for providing assistance to women in conflict and post-conflict zones, such as the Balkans (KTK, 2018). It is worth noting here that WRC was approached by the foundation rather than the usual other way around, which is "a testimony to WRC's integrity and genuine dedication to liberty and equality" (KTK member). The assistance provided by KTK helped WRC further develop its programmes and the foundation remains one of its main donors to this day.

WRC also relies on funding from another major donor – the OAK Foundation, which provides assistance in the area of strengthening the women's movement and civil

organisations' capacity building (see OAK, 2018). WRC also received assistance in the past for individual, smaller projects (e.g. educational seminars for the judiciary or workshops for domestic violence survivors) from foreign embassies. In addition, a more modest financial resource is secured through a small enterprise WRC initiated a few years ago, namely, the organisation makes and sells shopping bags, t-shirts, jewellery and stationery boxes featuring its own designs, the proceeds of which go towards psychological and legal support for the survivors of gender-based and family violence.

WRC has brought about a change in the mandate of women's organisations in Montenegro: instead of focusing exclusively on family and gender-based violence and pacifism, like the majority of women's organisations in the country[12], WRC, similarly to its predecessors in the former Yugoslavia, focuses on the proactive generation of democratic practice for everyone and not solely upon ameliorating the consequences of the power imbalance between genders. The work of WRC is rooted in democratic principles of liberty and equality and the overall aim of the organisation is to create a more equal society. Its mission statement closely aligns with the concerns of the RQ and reads as follows:

> WRC is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-religious organisation that fights for the elimination of all forms of violence against women, helping women access justice, and developing gender-equal democratic practice in cooperation with all relevant national and international stakeholders (WRC, 2017).

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[12] E.g. Most of the women's organisations, such as the NGO Safe Women's House and SOS NGOs in different municipalities, specialize in the provision of assistance to survivors of violence, with the exception of ANIMA, another influential organisation, which focuses predominantly on pacifism.

Broadly, the work of WRC can be categorised as taking place via three interconnected concerns: supporting the legal and psychological wellbeing of women; influencing the country's legal framework; and, challenging patriarchal culture. Each area has a corresponding programme, designed to feed into and complement one another, and they are all directed at addressing the problem of inequality, albeit from different perspectives. These are: the programme for the provision of legal and psychological assistance; the advocacy programme; and the cultural programme. It is worth noting that even though the activities of WRC are formally divided into these three programmes, there is a significant overlap between them and they should not be perceived as discrete.

II Summary

I first explored the current socio-political context of Montenegro as a country in transition in order to underline the role of NGOs in the process of democratisation. I argued that while civil sector organisations are perceived as important drivers of democratic practice in countries in transition, their work in Montenegro is often inhibited by endemic corruption and patriarchy. Second, I provided a historical overview of the fight for liberty and equality by women in the context of the former Yugoslavia in order to situate the work of WRC within the lineage of its predecessors. In particular, I argued that women occupied, and continue to occupy, a central role in democratisation struggles in Yugoslavia. Finally, I provided a more detailed account of the work of WRC in instigating "gender-equal democratic practice" (WRC, 2017) in the country.

I now move on to present a literature review relevant to addressing the topic of how NGO practitioners enact democratic practice, paying particular attention to the discursive norms generated through studies and accounts of democracy.

III Literature review – Democratic practice

Introduction

I begin the chapter by reviewing the literature that relates to NGOs and democratic practice, searching for insight into the work of NGO practitioners. Finding little explanation or exploration of democratic practice, I explore two contemporary participative theories of democratic practice – deliberation and agonism – as a means of surfacing norms of democratic engagement that may be observed in the field. In particular, I interpret agonism and deliberative democracy as generating a series of similar, yet also in many ways divergent norms, which aim to guide democratic practice. Read from a performative perspective, such norms provide a series of expectations, even guidelines, regarding what it means to be a democratic subject.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to clarify how I approach studies of internal organisational democracy, which are related, but not central to, the focus of this research. There is a substantial literature relating to internal organisational democracy and the building of "alternative practices of organisation" (King and Land, 2018: 2). Such studies focus on how people *within* organisations can generate more egalitarian relations and forms of decision-making (e.g. Griffin et al, 2015; Parker and Parker, 2015). They also tend to focus on organisational structure and its effects (e.g. Blaug, 2009), rather than upon the practices of organisations in democratising the societies in which they are situated, although some organisations, particularly ones informed by an anarchist ideology, seek to model their visions for society internally, within the organisation (e.g.

Lagallise, 2010; Land and King, 2014; Sutherland et al, 2014). While internal organisational democracy is not the focus of this research, studies that inform and enrich the conceptualisation and understanding of democratic practice more generally are included in the section of the literature review relating to deliberation and agonism.

3.1. NGOs as democratic actors

This section of the review focuses on better understanding the role of NGOs in the process of democratising the environments they are embedded within. I begin by offering some of the definitions necessary for understanding the focus of my research – of civil society in general and especially NGOs, organisations that can task themselves with building democracy in transition contexts. Second, I establish an evidence base from the literature that NGOs indeed play a major role in generating democratic practice in countries in transition. Third, I offer an exploration of dominant approaches to NGO-specific research in the context of democratic practice. Fourth, I consider what the literature tells us about the role of NGOs in corrupt environments. Finally, I explore NGO research that studies the relationship between patriarchy and democracy.

The majority of this literature seeks to make general claims about democratisation programmes or initiative effectiveness based upon measuring impact and participation. Personal accounts or narratives relating to the practitioners of democratic practice are largely missing from these studies, together with a sense of how practitioners generate democratic practice. Likewise, the conceptual positioning of democracy is found to be lacking in sophistication. The notion that democracy might be a rich, multi-dimensional and contested concept is absent from the literature.

3.1.2. Civil society and NGOs

Civil society is often described as occupying the space between the private sphere, state and market (Dagher, 2017) – a space commonly referred to as the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), although its borders are fluid and changing. Such society is usually thought of as a backbone of communal life, "a pluralistic...self-developing system, which influences all the spheres of society" (Ershova, 2015: 33); an organisation of community life, which is "open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules" (Diamond 1999: 221). As such, civil society can feature more structured formations, such as: "non-government organisations...grass-roots organisations" (Sahoo, 2013: 259), but also loosely structured "groups of people...informal networks [and] associations" (Crotty et al., 2014: 1255).

Yet in the context of post-communist societies, civil society is often used interchangeably with 'NGOs' (see Jordan, 2010; Mercer, 2002) and understood as an "assemblage of NGOs" (Drażkiewich-Grodzicka, 2016: 346), or a "wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations" (Dagher, 2017: 55). Such conflation between the two terms is predominantly a result of the mushrooming of NGOs in the post-communist countries in the 1990s, often labelled as civil society "by both academics and activists" (Jezierska, 2015: 835). Organisations such as these came to fill a gap in civic and social life in countries ravaged by uncertainty and violence (El-Kassem, 2008).

Crotty et al. (2014) describe NGOs as "voluntary, self-governing, non-profit formations" (p. 1255), or "formal civil society groups" (ibid.), which are established for the purpose of realising the common goals of a particular group – e.g. ethnic, political, religious, and so on. This description corresponds to the definition provided in the Montenegrin Law on NGOs, which states that: "non-governmental organisations are voluntary, non-profit organisations…founded by either local or foreign private or legal entities, with the purpose of realising common goals and interests" (Službeni list CG, br. 039/11). These organisations often mediate between the state and people, especially in a transition context (Dagher, 2017; Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2016; Grodsky, 2012). Such mediation usually involves close monitoring of the government's work, on the one hand, and fostering people's interest in, and engagement with, socio-political issues, on the other (Ennaji, 2016).

NGOs that task themselves with generating democratic practice are frequently described as organisations "serving as watchdogs against government abuses" (Antlöv et al, 2010: 419; Herrold, 2016: 191; Jezierska, 2015: 844). However, in new democratic contexts, NGOs also operate as "conduits of citizen interests" (Herrold, 2016: 191) into the public sphere, ensuring that those interests are heard and acted upon by decision-makers. Yet these organisations are not merely messengers and watchdogs, but are also perceived as responsible for "empowering marginalised and disadvantaged societal groups, providing civic education, engaging in advocacy, and lobbying for public goods" (Antlöv et al, 2010: 419). Moreover, they are perceived as crucial for the process of democratisation in countries in transition (Mair, 2013), as I elaborate upon in the next section.

3.1.3. The importance and role of NGOs in generating democratic practice

The generation of democracy in countries in transition has attracted the attention of scholars for a number of decades. Major geopolitical shifts, such as the collapse of communism and the liberation of former colonies in the 1970s and 1980s, placed NGOs at the heart of the process of 'democratisation' in these countries (Clarke, 1998; Fowler, 1993; Mair, 2013; Mercer, 2002). Democratisation is a term used to denote a process of transition from a non-democratic (autocratic) to democratic form of government (Antlöv, 2010; Gershman and Allen, 2006; Papaloannou and Siourounis, 2008). Such a transition is envisaged to involve major social, economic and political adjustments, such as the transformation and/or establishment of democratic institutions, as well as a change of people's mindsets (Rustow, 1970).

Transition towards democracy can be a turbulent process (Lokar, 2007), and just because a country has opted for a formally democratic form of governing does not necessarily mean that its government is committed to democratic norms and values (Gershman and Allen, 2006). Hybrid regimes (those that hover between autocratic and democratic) often suffer from "manipulated elections, a weak parliament, an overweening executive branch, state-controlled media, rampant corruption, and no recourse to an independent judiciary." (ibid: 37). Therefore, one of the main tasks of NGOs in a process of democratisation is to "pressure, prod, and advise transitional government institutions to become more transparent and accountable to citizens" (Harrold, 2016: 192). The underlying justification for an increase in the involvement of NGOs in the public life of countries in transition, provided by scholars and practitioners, is threefold. First, as governments can be seen as problematic (repressive, corrupt or

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simply possessing a partisan political agenda), NGOs can offer a critical stance and insist on accountability (Herrold, 2016; Mountford, 2009). Second, NGOs can be viewed as possessing technical knowledge (often supplied by various international organisations' guidelines, brochures and manuals) largely absent within the governments of countries in transition (Blaug, 2002; Carothers, 2009; Ennaji, 2016). Third, NGOs are viewed as part of a broader civil society, whose vitality is held as essential for the maintenance of economically and socially healthy nation-states (Mair, 2013; Shipper, 2012; Todor, 2017).

Such a positioning of NGOs has contributed to their widely perceived identity as "agents" (Fowler, 1993: 325) and/or the "new political actor[s]" (Clarke, 1998: 37) of socio-political transformation within countries in transition. Some scholars have gone as far as to describe NGOs as an essential ingredient for the "formula" of developing democratic practice (Mair, 2013: 11) or a force that mobilises civil society and thus generates a more inclusive and diverse "political sphere" (Mercer, 2002: 10). Thus, the task of generating democratic practice in countries in transition has increasingly been characterised and practiced as the responsibility of NGOs, rather than only governments (Feltes, 2013; Mair, 2013; Suleiman, 2013; Todor, 2017).

3.1.4. Democratic practice and the work of NGOs

The focus in the literature is largely on measuring the degree and quality of democracy 'attained' through the formal programmes of NGOs and government, rather than on exploring the practices of people delivering these programmes (see, Fuchs and Roller,

2018; Sigman and Lindberg, 2018). Such an approach means that the meaning of democracy tends to be assumed, rather than explicitly stated and interrogated, defined in an ex-post manner through categories of measurement. For example, Kneuer (2016) presents a model for measuring the quality of online democracy by breaking participative democracy into three clusters (information, dialogue and monitoring of decision-making) and then measuring an individual indicator for each (e.g. the existence of regulations pertaining to freedom of expression, blogs, government's tools for the inclusion of citizens, etc.).

Where defined, democracy tends to be understood as representing a series of values held as universal, e.g. 'liberty', 'freedom', 'equality', 'justice', etc., (see Carbone, 2009), which authors translate as a series of indicators (e.g. number of women in various tiers of government, etc.) that can be measured and compared across contexts (Altman, 2013; Bogaards, 2012; Blair, 2003; Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Munck, 2015). Relatedly, democratic practice tends to be understood as a set of procedures, e.g. 'the rule-of-law', 'responsiveness', 'elections', 'accountability' and 'participation', which can also be defined through a series of indicators (e.g. ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, etc.) and quantified (see, Bland et al, 2013; Mechkova et al, 2017; Morlino, 2004; Todor, 2017).

No doubt this quantitative (usually positivist) approach to democratic practice has value in confirming or disconfirming a number of trends, providing an assessment of the 'state' of democratic practice (e.g. statistical analysis provides us with a description of preference trends in voting, differences between demographics, the effectiveness of NGOs, etc.) but, often, statistics mask as much as they show. Doorenspleet (2015) states

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that a lack of practitioner voice in accounts of democracy skews perceptions, providing 'expert' opinions on the kinds of democratic practice performed, without consulting the people who perform it, which may privilege an "elitist notion of democracy" (ibid: 479). With a taken-for-granted assumption of the meaning of democracy and democratic practice, the literature reveals less about the work by practitioners who deliver programmes and the rich and contested meaning attached to 'democracy' and 'democratic practice' (Doorenspleet, 2015; Mercer, 2002; McHenry and Mady, 2006; Hogstrom, 2014; Ohanyan, 2012; Seeberg, 2014). The impression is conveyed that democratic practice exists as a discrete object, free from contest and set apart from the people who work with it and generate it.

A small number of qualitative researchers in this area argue that the emphasis on generalisation in quantitative studies inevitably misses a more nuanced understanding of democracy and associated practice (El-Kassem, 2008; Feltes, 2013; Sahoo, 2014; Suleiman, 2013). The argument of these scholars of NGOs and democratic practice is that qualitative research may play an important role in highlighting previously masked dynamics in the work of NGOs, such as the capacity of initiatives labelled as 'democratic' to disenfranchise, as well as empower (Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka, 2016; Sahoo, 2014). For example, Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka (2016) reports on her experiences working in an organisation in Poland in the post-accession period (when Poland became a member-state of the EU), which now acts as a democracy support fund for neighbouring countries. The author argues that the organisation supports only those NGO initiatives that are technical in character (e.g. workshops for managers and leaders) and/or politically neutral and devoid of activism (e.g. service provisions for gender-based

violence victims) but never those that can be perceived as challenging the status quo, which has the potential to render these NGOs "institutionalised" (p.346) and passive.

An account of people's experiences and enactments of 'democracy' remains absent in these studies, which favour a focus on the socio-political environment surrounding specific initiatives (see Antlöv et al, 2010; Crotty et al, 2015; Herrold, 2016). While it is important to acknowledge that NGOs and their programmes play an important role in democratising formerly autocratic states, it would be naïve to take these processes as challenge-free and devoid of human involvement. Acknowledging that democracy is a contested concept and exploring how people experience, grapple and struggle with putting 'democracy' into practice is of value for understanding the generation of democratic practice in a transitional context.

3.1.5. Corruption, NGOs and democratic practice

Public corruption is frequently defined as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (Epperlon and Lee, 2015: 176; see also Kolstad and Wiig, 2016; Lennerfors, 2007). Such abuse can manifest in the form of "state capture" (Sadiku, 2015: 42), where powerful individuals influence and control political decisions (e.g. laws, votes, rules, etc.) through private payments such as "bribery" (Granter, 2017: 98) or "racketeering" (ibid: 97). Another manifestation of corruption is termed "clientelism" (Johnson et al, 2013: 181), where political decisions are influenced through the exchanging of favours. For instance, political party representatives may offer favours to hesitant voters in exchange for support, and so influence the outcome of elections (Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009).

However, Johnson et al (2013) explore a more covert form of clientelism – as patriarchal associations of patronage, where men support one another through a network of quid pro quo relations, which further entrenches inequality in formally democratic environments. In clientelist settings, corrupt practice is driven by "egoism, selfishness, greed and abuse of trust" (Lennerfors, 2007: 387), which bear material consequences for the lives of women (Roberts, 2012).

The NGO literature that explores the relationship between democratic practice and corruption is predominantly quantitative and could broadly be grouped into three streams: research that explores the positive impact of NGOs in fighting corruption; research that recognises NGOs as contributors to corruption; and, a body of research that explores the gendered nature of corrupt practices, positing women as a potential counterforce in new democracies. Each is addressed in turn below.

NGOs as counterforce to corruption

Democracy is recognised by some researchers as a solution to corruption, which is why advocates for the development of democracy urge more investment in strengthening democratic institutions (Kolstad and Wiig, 2016; Madeley, 2003). However, some authors argue that a problem arises when 'democratic' government institutions themselves become the major generators of corrupt practices, most notably in the 'new' democracies of countries in transition (Chandler, 2010; Nahan and D'Cruze, 2004; Sadiku, 2015). In contexts where democracy is in its early stages of development, NGOs are recognised as a "watch-dog" – a powerful force for reducing corruption and keeping

institutions accountable (Sadiku, 2015: 36). Yet, research demonstrates that in practice NGOs often lose battles with corrupt institutions, which undermine the legal and financial capacities of NGOs regarded as oppositional (Dupuy et al, 2015; Epperly and Lee, 2015; Mietzner, 2012). While most researchers in this stream of literature recognise the difficult position of NGOs in countries in transition to fulfil their role as the main combatants of corrupt institutional and social practices, such research offers no insight into experiences of NGO practitioners in relation to corrupt practices in their day-to-day work.

NGOs as contributors to corruption

Some authors argue that NGOs not only fail at their task of combatting corruption but sometimes actively perpetuate the problem (Rakner, 2011; Smith, 2010). Many NGOs receive funds from foreign donors (various foundations, international and supranational organisations) for the purpose of promoting and developing democratic practice, which makes these donors directly implicated in the work of local NGOs. However, such funding rarely comes without specific caveats, which can wield significant influence on the policymaking of governments.

The phenomenon of the "GONGO" (Smith, 2010: 250) – a governmental non-governmental organisation – is important for better understanding how NGOs can perpetuate corruption. GONGOs operate through funds donated to government via foreign aid agencies and international donors but are in reality 'shell' organisations established to pursue the private interests of corrupt government actors, promoting

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political causes that will result in the private financial profit of the political elite (ibid). In contrast, NGOs that succumb to the agenda of their international donors are sometimes referred to as "briefcase NGOs" (Dupuy et al, 2015: 419) due to their excessive attention to 'carrying' the political agenda of donors, which may or may not be relevant to the local context. In societies in which corruption is widespread, even NGO practitioners deemed trustworthy and respectable "frequently get caught up in corruption" (Smith, 2010: 249) simply because operating in such environments means that it is impossible to avoid dealing with corrupt officials.

Women as a counterforce to corruption

A number of researchers claim that women are more likely to be impervious to corruption and generally orientated towards "promoting honest government" (Dollar et al, 2001: 423), advocating for "human rights, tolerance...conflict-resolution" (Mulalić, 2011: 53) and fighting against "discrimination, inequality, deprivation, exploitation and oppression" (Nazneen et al, 2010: 240). In the developing world, including young democracies, "women have become the awaited saviours of countries afflicted by poor governance" (Sung, 2012: 196), and increased representation of women in decision-making processes has been advocated for as a strategy for combating corruption (Mulalić, 2011; Stockemer, 2011; Sung, 2003 and 2012).

Even if such stereotypical assumptions concerning women were to hold true, in practice, the public sphere globally is still dominated by men, who are "given precedence in [constructing and] interpreting reality" (Crevani and Lennerfors, 2009: 127). It is a

'reality' in which patriarchal relations reproduce, reinvent and reinstitute practices that are unequal, restrictive – and, by extension, corrupt, according to liberal democratic standards of liberty and equality (Baxter and MacLeod, 2005). Perhaps such patriarchal dominance explains why women may be "reluctant to enter the world of government" (Croegaert, 2015: 29), because when they do, they are left exposed by weak democratic institutions that fail to "promote equality, fairness, and meritocracy" (Sung, 2003: 718).

Much research focuses on the institutional representation of women and the programmes designed for fostering the inclusion of women in politics and business, rather than the day-to-day experiences of female NGO practitioners within the milieu of socio-political corruption or the experiences of practitioners in seeking to change the system itself (e.g. Dollar et al, 2001; Haukenes and Freyberg-Inan, 2013; Johnson et al, 2013; Stockemer, 2011). In the Yugoslav context, Mulalić (2011) recognises the importance of women's NGOs in democratising Bosnia and Herzegovinian society, during and after the wars of the 1990s. However, even though the author states that women's NGOs employed anti-corruption initiatives, Mulalić does not provide a glimpse into practitioners' engagement with corrupt practices, individuals and groups in their work, something common to other similar studies.

In summary, the NGO literature, while exploring empirically the connections between corruption and democratic practice, does not address the everyday experiences of NGO practitioners in navigating their way through such an environment, issues which I seek to address through my performative focus.

Patriarchy is recognised as being "inconsistent with democracy" (Richards, 2013: 178) because it goes against the principles of liberty and equality, privileging certain men and masculinities with a 'natural' form of authority, exempt from the requirements of democratic scrutiny or mandate. Indeed, the patriarchal mindset has been identified as stifling equality throughout history in societies deemed officially democratic (Gilligan and Richards, 2008). The NGO literature shows that patriarchy can inhere in a range of ways. Tsetsura (2013), in a post-Soviet context, highlights restrictive legislation relating to funding, as well as the patriarchal attitudes of decision-makers, as barriers to change. Lazda (2018) likewise argues that the active promotion of patriarchal attitudes is a practice characteristic of transition leaders in post-socialist countries, who advocate for "neotraditional gender roles" (p. 425). Such a patriarchal climate, the author states, is responsible for bringing women's NGOs to the forefront of democratisation efforts.

In contemporary societies, patriarchy has been closely linked with the 'neoliberalisation' (Ayers, 2006: 321) of democracy, where "national and global policymaking bodies...continue to adhere to principles of market-led development and good governance" (Schech and Mustafa, 2010: 126). Neoliberalism is defined as a particular form of capitalism, which involves "economic liberalisation...deregulation, privatisation and allowing market forces to reign" (Sahoo, 2013: 258), one that also bears on the structures of the democratic state and civil society. Namely, in the process of neoliberalisation, states are pressured to shrink the scope of their provisions by stripping all functions that "could conceivably be carried out by the private sector" (ibid: 259), while civil society organisations often become "public service contractors" (ibid.),

further entrenching neoliberal ideology (Jezierska, 2015). Such (neo)liberal democracies (Ishkanian, 2007; Jaquette, 2001; Jezierska, 2015) can have the effect of bracketing off what is valid or invalid (or, indeed, possible) terrain for democratic engagement and debate.

The connection between neoliberalising societies and patriarchy has been explored by the NGO literature. The transition towards democracy is ideally envisaged by academics and policymakers to unfold as an "open and constructive dialogue" (Börzela and Risse, 2005: 7) between assisting parties (e.g. EU and various US development agencies) and aspirant countries, taking into consideration the contextual nuances of the transiting states (e.g. one might expect the former republics of Yugoslavia to maintain an affinity for state ownership and running of certain provisions regarded as central to society, such as welfare, infrastructure, health and education). However, in practice, Yugoslavia, like other countries in transition, became a neoliberal project (Lokar, 2007), part of the "liberal international political order" (Cooley, 2015: 49). Lokar (2007) argues that the transition to liberal democracy, in the Yugoslav context, has led to the destruction of the previously established welfare system, which acted as the "guarantor of women's social, economic and political equality" (p.111), rendering women "the biggest losers" (ibid) of transition. In general, the lack of structural support in the form of welfare systems and support services largely condemned women in countries in transition to the private sphere.

Moreover, the transition to democracy has not only expunged some of the structural systems of support for equality, but has also enforced fiercer patriarchal attitudes, due to the masculinisation of the public and feminisation of the private spheres, brought about

precisely by the destruction of systems of state support and, often, violent conflict (Lokar, 2007). In Yugoslavia, the transition to a neoliberal form of democracy also gave birth to savage attacks on women (e.g. rape as an ethnic-cleansing strategy) and other forms of patriarchalisation, such as the division of labour according to traditional gender roles, sexism, etc., which resulted in the institution of a "democracy without women" (ibid: 111).

The NGO literature identifies the prominent role of women's NGO's in building democracy (Lazda, 2018; Lokar, 2007; Schech and Mustafa, 2010; Shircliff and Shandra, 2011; Tsesura, 2013), but offers little detail in terms of the practices adopted by these organisations and practitioners. As a result, we can learn much about the achievements of these organisations but less about their methods (e.g. Ennaji, 2016; Schech and Mustafa, 2010). However, there are some hints of the practices of women's NGOs perceptible in the literature. Tsetsura's (2013) study of post-Soviet communication practices of women's NGOs highlights the assembling of discursive coalitions as significant. She examines the strategy of framing the women's struggle as one of general human rights as having achieved important gains but questions the ability of such an approach to adequately represent the specificity of women's experiences (see also Lazda, 2018). The reader gains a sense of the strategies organisations employ to combat patriarchy (e.g. building alliances with international organisations, realigning equality narratives with those from abroad, etc.), and the numerous achievements of organisations, but the detail of how practitioners go about their work remains absent.

The literature reviewed so far is useful for understanding the role NGOs play in democratisation and the broader context in which they operate. However, what is yet

unclear is what democratic practice entails, as well as what practitioners of democratic practice do. This is why I now turn to examine the notion of democratic practice in more depth. In particular, I review two theoretical accounts of democratic practice: agonism and deliberation, and supplement these accounts with relevant studies drawing on organisational democratic practice. I read these accounts in order to identify how authors seem to position and construct the desired enactments of practitioners and, therefore, by extension, to surface the discursive practices and norms of participative democracy that may be encountered in the field.

3.2. Theories of democratic practice: Introduction

Descriptive, normative and aspirational theories of democratic practice abound, each offering different aspects or outcomes of a democratic process as being of salience (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2014). Democracy is often spoken of as if it is a given mechanism for governing, underpinned by values such as liberty and equality (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2014; Dahl, 2000; Mouffe, 1991 and 2013). Moreover, democracy is usually taken as standing for the 'rule of the people' (popular sovereignty), or "the possibility of large numbers of people coming together in some form to make collective decisions about major issues" (Gilbert, 2014: loc303). Broad agreement exists about the principles that democratic practice should be founded upon, such as: the peaceful transition of governments following elections; universal suffrage; representation and citizenship (Morlino, 2004; Terchek and Conte, 2001). Yet, any attempt at defining democracy and unpacking these assumptions brings into focus a number of

contestations over the meaning and practice of each principle, as well as differing views on whether – and to whom - these are valuable principles in and of themselves.

Democracy theory is often presented as manifesting in two historical eras: the traditional/ancient and the contemporary/modern (see Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2014; Dahl, 2000; Terchek and Conte, 2001). Broadly, what is usually cited as the break with older conceptions of democracy is the radical turn towards a more inclusive and participatory democracy, which was, until the end of WWII, sporadic at best in western countries (Dahl, 2000; Graeber, 2014). Such a break with traditional conceptions of democracy also involved a shift in focus for theorists from exploring democracy as a system designed for governing, to democracy as a 'form of social idea' (Dewey, 1946: 143). Civic engagement, greater inclusivity and building democracy from the bottom up became central to scholarly debate (Benhabib, 1996; Dahl, 2000; Young, 2011). This shift can be thought of as the difference between democracy as a system of government and democracy as a practice.

I consider two contemporary accounts of what it means to practice participative democracy: deliberation and agonism. Both offer a series of assumptions and norms for practice. These two particular theories were selected for further critical exploration because they are: analytical (and thus applicable to any democratic context); rooted in liberal norms (and thus appropriate for the research context of Montenegro, a country that has officially adopted liberal democracy as a form of governance); social (drawing attention to civic engagement rather than institutions); and, performative (suitable for an exploration of the enactment of democratic practice). I review both theories, and studies adopting these theories, first, to critically unpack each as offering a particular

exposition of what it means to practice democracy and, second, to surface the set of assumptions made about the practitioner and participants within these theoretical areas.

3.2.1. Deliberative democratic practice

Forms of deliberative, direct and participative democratic practice have gained prominence in public attention in recent years through the rise of social movements claiming alternative, more egalitarian models of social relations and organisation (e.g. Munro, 2014). Informed by anarchist principles, studies of such 'prefigurative' organisations and movements have adopted a practical emphasis, exploring ways in which organisations may generate internal forms of democratic practice that can act as organising exemplars for broader societies (Graber, 2014; Lagalisse, 2010; Maeckelberg, 2011; Reedy et al, 2016). Proponents of prefigurative forms of organising are interested in building alternative models of democracy – indeed, in alternative social relations more broadly – and by definition are therefore not interested in how organisations engage and overlap with the state, as their focus is ultimately in overthrowing the state as we know it. Such studies of prefigurative forms of democratic practice will be included in the discussion below where they help enrich an understanding of the processes of deliberation.

The main focus will be upon Habermas' account of deliberative democratic practice, which seeks to address not only the internal dynamics of deliberation but also the relationship between deliberative practice, civil society and the state, concerns that are more closely related to my research setting and question. Habermas is sceptical of an

overbearing of philosophy on knowledge; he believes philosophy should guide the interpretation of social reality but also act as its critique (Habermas, 1987b). He envisages his theory of communicative action (CA), which underpins deliberation, as a scholarly endeavour, in which philosophy and empirical evidence inform one another for a social purpose, transforming social relations. In practical terms, CA is an action in which social actors (at least two) seek to reach mutual understanding, as well as agreement, and coordinate social action via the means of rational argument (Habermas, 1984: 86).

In this section, I first address the overarching principles that inform Habermas' theory of deliberation. Second, I proceed to discuss CA, a conceptual resource that underpins the process of deliberation where people orientate themselves towards reaching understanding, and ultimately a consensus, on issues of common interest. In contrast, I then discuss 'strategic action' as a process in which consensus is reached by means of influence and authority, where actors orientate themselves towards reaching success and benefit, rather than understanding. Fourth, I explore the relationship between the civil sector (lifeworld) and formal institutions (system) as central to understanding the relationship between communicative and strategic action. Finally, I discuss Habermas' notion of the public sphere and forums within which democratic engagement is envisaged to take place.

Overarching principles of Habermas' deliberative democracy

In this section I aim to provide an outline of the overarching principles that underpin Habermas' democratic deliberation – rationality, the mediating role of language and consensus – in order to provide a way into my reading of his theoretical account. While in this research I assume a different paradigmatic position to Habermas, filtering his account through the lens of poststructuralism, it is nevertheless important to explore his foundational assumptions.

Deliberative democratic practice extends the notion of participatory democracy through deepening an understanding of what it means to deliberate over particular issues (Crespy, 2014; Habermas, 1996). Deliberative democracy scholars, however, not only emphasise the inclusion of the wider population in decision-making processes but also focus in depth on the intersubjective communication adopted in participatory decision-making (Griffin et al, 2015; Hampton, 2013; Mansbridge, 1999).

Habermas' (1984) social theory of CA is inspired by Enlightenment principles, both through an account of progressive history and the centrality of reason. Yet, unlike Enlightenment philosophers, Habermas believes that a "philosophy of consciousness is exhausted" (Habermas, 1987b: 296) and that "communicative reason is expressed in a decentred understanding of the world" (ibid: 314). Habermas' account of deliberation through CA theory is informed by the notion of 'communicative rationality', which is particularly salient for understanding his outlining of a respectful, democratic process of deliberation. Rationality is understood broadly as the acknowledgement that reason is the only legitimate source of knowledge, evaluator of standards and guide to action

(Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). Yet it would be difficult to explicate 'rationality' without an exploration of "what is actually experienced as a rational life or is claimed to be as such" (Schnädelbach, 1991: 8). For this purpose, Habermas (1984, 1996) attempts to develop a theory that will account for both the processes of rationalisation in society, as well as the application of various concepts of rationality to social life that arise as a result of these processes.

Rationality, for Habermas, is grounded in language and denotes a communicative process (dialogue) between three domains of rationality (Seel, 1991), which are: "objective facts, social norms and personal feelings" (Blau, 2011: 46). Within communicative rationality each of these three domains (objective, social and subjective) corresponds to three rationalities: theoretical-instrumental; moral-practical; and aesthetic-expressive (Habermas, 1984). These provide the architecture for communication between social actors. What this view of rationality represents is a philosophical shift from the philosophy of consciousness (subjectivity), where knowledge is produced through the medium of the solitary subject's reason, to the philosophy of communicative rationality (intersubjectivity) where knowledge is a product of the intersubjective communication of social actors (Habermas, 1996). Therefore, communicative reason is accepted if what is said can be characterised, but yet still contested, as true (objectively), just (socially) and sincere (subjectively) (Habermas, 1984: 398).

Habermas (1984; 1996) establishes the deployment of language as crucial in deliberation, focusing on what he views as the internal structure of language, which he believes enables social interaction and provides conditions for mutual understanding and agreement, regardless of the context within which communication occurs. In other

words, Habermas' CA is an exploration of the conditions of communication, which could enable rational deliberation upon issues, rather than upon the substance of communication. Therefore, for Habermas (1984; 1996), possession of specific knowledge is less important than the means of acquiring it, and the ways in which the acquired knowledge is deployed, by speaking democratic actors engaged in dialogue.

Ultimately, deliberative democratic practice is orientated towards reaching consensus on matters of common concern (Dryzek, 2010; Fryer, 2012; Griffin et al, 2015). Such consensus is to be accomplished through the medium of communicative rationality, where participants are free to express their views, but are also open to hearing the views of others, and where consensus is reached on the condition of mutual understanding, rather than some form of "strategic bargaining" (Habermas, 1996: 330). Habermas argues that reaching understanding is the telos of CA: communication in itself supplies and accrues the reason necessary for reaching understanding and potentially an agreement (Habermas, 1998). Moreover, CA is dependent on the illocutionary performativity of language, that is, the intention of the speaker, which is crucial because it acts as a binding force between interlocutors (ibid: 127).

Having provided an overview of Habermas' account of deliberative practice, I now move on to explore the main concepts contained within Habermas' work.

Communicative Action

Communicative action (CA) holds a central position within deliberative democratic practice, as it is the conceptual resource for conducting and justifying a form of respectful decision-making (Niemi, 2005). Habermas believes that social transformation is possible through acts of communicating (speech acts) between interlocutors, aimed at reaching understanding about issues of common concern (Habermas, 1984; 1996). Here, I highlight three aspects that are important to understanding CA: the role of language, validity claims and consensus.

The role of language:

CA takes language to be the medium through which social action, orientated towards reaching understanding on issues of common concern, is accomplished (Honeth and Joas, 1991). Yet the "communicative model of action does not equate action with communication" (Habermas, 1984: 101). Rather, language is only a conduit for communication aimed at reaching understanding, whereas "actors, in coming to an understanding with one another so as to coordinate their actions, pursue their particular aims" (ibid). Utterances we use in our day-to-day talk are termed 'speech acts', which can lead to the conflation of the two: action and communication. However, 'speech acts' denote only the performative potential of communication (Habermas, 1984:101-102). Habermas treats language as a vessel for communication and actors as those who perform action via language. Language does not possess an agency in and of itself; rather, agency is infused in language by speaking actors and their intentions. CA therefore "takes place when [deliberating] participants achieve mutual understanding through dialogue"

(Chang and Jacobson, 2010: 633), but also "when participants have expectations that their discussions are aimed at reaching mutual understanding" (ibid).

How participants determine the soundness and intelligibility of their own articulations in language, as well as those of others, is made sense of in Habermas' writing through the notions of validity claims and consensus, which I now explore.

Validity claims:

As a precondition to the process of assessing the validity of utterances made, social actors need to be, first and foremost, familiar with the context within which the claims are uttered (McCarthy, 1991)[13]. Provided that such a precondition is fulfilled, the social actor (the hearer) may proceed to assess the conditions of deliberation via 'validity claims' (Chang and Jacobson, 2010; Flynn, 2011; Habermas, 1984; O'Donovan, 2013).

Understanding, within a Habermasian account of democratic practice, can be reached only if four validity claims are redeemed through dialogue (McCarthy, 1984). The first validity claim is elementary in character and refers to the grammatical soundness of the claim made. Simply, if the claim made is not intelligible the interlocutors may not proceed with deliberation (Raelin, 2012). The second validity claim refers to the truth of the utterance (Habermas, 1984: 38). This validity claim is rooted in instrumental-theoretical rationality and draws on scientific/factual evidence as the criteria for the

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[13] Placing an accent on the importance of the context may sound counter-intuitive considering that Habermas favours universal rationality and the *conditions* of communication over the content of what is being communicated. However, it is important to note here that Habermas understands rationality, in the first place, as the product of socialisation throughout history and not as something created in a vacuum (Habermas, 1984).

assessing the truth of the claim raised. These two validity claims can be assessed as empirically credible (Hammersley, 2009). The first is credible in the sense that it is likely that a non-intelligible utterance will lead to either misunderstanding or confusion. The second claim is credible in the sense that it is generally accepted practice to support claims with evidence if we want them to be respected. This is not a backdoor for the privileging of positivism, as the content of the claim, in Habermas' work, is less important for communicative action than the question of whether the claim can or cannot be redeemed by evidence regarded as valid within a certain paradigmatic context.

The third validity claim refers to the cultural and empirical soundness of the claim and is closely tied to moral-practical rationality (Habermas, 1984: 38-39). If the claim made is not intelligible in terms of the cultural/social context in which it is raised, the claim cannot be regarded as valid. Yet the third validity claim has been complicated by globalisation and increasingly multicultural societies. In a more globalised world, in which national borders no longer define cultures as neatly as they perhaps once did (Yuval-Davis, 2011), increased migration has resulted in the formation of a new "working-class", of "cosmopolitans" (Kothari, 2008: 505), and people who often cross borders in search of better living conditions. In multicultural communities there will likely be a variety of cultural 'standards' in play, as well as definitions of fair practices and moral prescriptions (Taylor, 1994), and these are not fully addressed by Habermas.

While the standardisation of what is moral or fair is possible to a degree, and Habermas (1990 and 1996) does acknowledge this through his elaboration of how a public opinion becomes 'universalised' into a law, it is difficult to imagine that all cultural norms within a community could be accepted as universal. Does this mean that deliberation would be

locked until a particular interlocutor concedes? Habermas does not seem to provide a sufficiently 'rational' or 'irrational' means of escaping such a deadlock. The issue of discursive closure in respect of norms in general is not dealt with by Habermas particularly well, and the "force of the better argument" (Habermas, 1996: 306) that is supposed to prevail, as assumed by CA theory, appears somewhat weak here.

The fourth and final validity claim refers to the sincerity of the expression, or the "genuine intentions" (Chang and Jacobson, 2010: 664) of the interlocutor. This validity claim is closely related to aesthetic-expressive rationality and is the most subjective of all validity claims and thus the most difficult to assess. However, provided that there is enough time for the interlocutor to assess the sincerity of the claim, it is assumed that judgement about the claim can eventually be reached, for example, if I claim to be a feminist and yet engage in an activity such as women-shaming, my claim would be judged as insincere.

Consensus:

Consensus is assumed to be both a precondition to deliberation and an ideal result of a deliberative process (Chang and Jacobson, 2010). In terms of consensus acting as a precondition to deliberation, following the tenets of CA, Habermas begins with the assumption that social actors will enter deliberation respectfully, i.e. there will be an assumption regarding good intentions, on the orientation of deliberators towards reaching understanding (Dux, 1991; Erman, 2012). Without such a condition there can be no CA. In terms of consensus as an ideal outcome, there is a pragmatic acceptance

within Habermas' theorising that consensus will not be reached all the time and on all matters deliberated upon (Habermas, 1996). Although consensus might appear as an ideal end-point, the argument established is that the process of working towards consensus in and of itself provides sufficient justification for pursuing such a course.

CA may be realised even if consensus is not reached, so long as the deliberation process is assessed as valid (Habermas, 1991). Such a position can be thought of as respecting the underlying justifications and validity of an opponent while also disagreeing on the conclusions drawn. Yet, it is assumed that consensus will eventually be reached through the process of CA, "given enough time" (O'Donovan, 2013: 132). The pragmatic concern of how public actors will ever be able to reach fairly idealistic conditions of sufficient time and space to reach consensus is not addressed, however (Sager, 2014).

Such a concern connects to a broader problem with direct and deliberative democracy: that "the level of effort and involvement in politics that direct democracy demands leads to problems of sustainability…endlessly ramifying…meetings over every detail of life – hardly the inspiring stuff of utopian visions" (Srnicek and Williams, 2016: 48). This critique is recognised by Graeber (2014) in relation to Occupy, which is why he insists upon ways in which to make deliberation more efficient, through the adoption of working groups and efficient tricks of communication, such as the live microphone. Yet none of these solutions manage to overcome the central critique of deliberative democracy as needlessly time consuming – as the further one moves towards more efficient solutions, the further one moves away from CA – and also, by extension, the principles of deliberative democracy. Instead, one gets closer to a form of representative democracy.

Deliberative democratic practice, with its emphasis on consensus, has also been criticised for downplaying the affective and embodied identifications of democratic participants (Mouffe, 2009a; 2013). The theory recognises a plurality of opinions, beliefs and people, yet the identity of democratic participants is not regarded as salient. The accent placed on rational communication in reaching consensus suggests that democratic practitioners need to relegate their 'irrational' identities in order to be able to perform democratic practice effectively. Considering that rationality is often understood as the "transcendence of the feminine itself" (Lloyd, 1984: 104), insisting on rational communication can also signal a favouring of the masculine over other ways of framing practice (Pullen and Rhodes, 2014; Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004).

Strategic Action

Habermas (1996) recognises that CA has eroded during the modernisation of society, something he terms the "colonisation of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1987a: 322). Instead of acting communicatively, social actors act strategically – a process in which consensus is reached by means of influence and/or authority (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003; Griffin et al, 2015). Whereas communicative actors orientate themselves towards reaching understanding, strategic actors orientate themselves towards reaching success (Habermas, 1996: 166). Moreover, the orientation of actors towards success is characterised as undertaken in pursuit of individual and not common goals, or in favour of a corporate agent rather than a diverse community (Dux, 1991).

Whether an action is communicative or strategic will depend on the usage of speech acts as well as the intention of the speaker (Niemi, 2005). For the purpose of distinguishing the two actions, Habermas draws on the speech acts theory developed by John L. Austin (1962), which treats language as performative (Habermas, 1984: xxv). In other words, speech is action. The central core of the theory is that language is to be studied according to the type of action that utterances perform. Austin (1962) distinguishes between the following speech acts: a) locutionary (action is performed simply through the means of uttering), and is contained in all other speech acts; b) illocutionary (a subject performs a dual action: uttering and expressing something specific in addition, such as a promise, or an order), and can be said to parallel communicative action, as the intended action of an utterance is to enable the hearer to understand the utterance; and, c) perlocutionary (an effect the utterance has upon the hearer, such as comfort or irritation). The latter corresponds, according to Habermas (1984: 328), to strategic action (SA) as the action performed by an utterance is always aimed at eliciting a particular effect/result upon the hearer by the way of language.

Habermas also states that the intention of the speaker may be more or less obvious and for that purpose he distinguishes two ways in which strategic communication may be employed: latent and manifest (Habermas, 1984: 294). Both manifest and latent actions are orientated towards success, rather than reaching understanding, as is the case with CA (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). Manifest SA is often very obvious and overt and the result of such an action frequently entails a tangible empirical outcome (Niemi, 2005). An example of such action could be a threat, command or blackmail. Understanding reached in manifest SA refers solely to the intention of the speaker. For instance, if an armed mugger requested possession of my wallet under threat of physical harm, I would

understand that if I did not sacrifice my wallet s/he would harm me. We would reach consensus on an action orientation; however, such a consensus would have been achieved through coercion. Having said that, SA could also manifest in more benign ways, e.g. openly asking someone for a favour.

Latent SA is less overt and yet, just like manifest action, is always orientated towards reaching success, "a desired result" (Niemi, 2005: 518). Such success is often reached through means of deceit, trickery, lying, etc. The main difference between manifest and latent SA is that the intention of the speaker is not evident. As an example of such an action, Habermas (1984: 294) talks of a military officer who lures his troops into a trap via the means of a deceitful command. However, latent SA may be enacted by something less dramatic, such as the phenomenon of Munchausen's, feigning illness in order to fulfil certain needs for attention, affection and love.

In both manifest and latent SA, the performative effect of language is narrowed: the speaker passes information to a hearer for the purpose of achieving a desired, personal goal. The performative effects of language in CA are much broader: a) the aim is to reach an understanding, but more importantly b) to instigate social change through mutual action-coordination based on mutual understanding. Of course, in practice CA and SA may both operate in the same context and may interact with one another. This may particularly be the case in corrupt contexts, such as Montenegro, and as such may be useful concepts for understanding democratic practice.

There is one lacuna that needs to be addressed at this point; namely, the way in which Habermas understands the performativity of language. Habermas (1984: 101) explicitly

states that communication and action are two separate categories. The author further adds that while language has a performative potential, it is ultimately a conduit of communication. What drives social transformation are social actors who are communicatively orientated towards one another. Yet, drawing on Austin's (1962) speech acts theory in developing the concept of strategic action, Habermas shifts his understanding, claiming in fact the opposite. Communication, in this instance, is action.

If language is understood as performative and not merely a vessel for communication, it would mean that spoken utterances do not only describe the world but that they simultaneously create and change it. Claims can no longer be judged as simply true or false according to a validity claim but must also be considered performative, as shaping the terrain of what could be considered as true or false in the first place. Even by making a declaration (e.g. 'women are leaders') we are performing an act of informing, which may have an effect on how 'reality' is created or how 'reality' is known (Hall, 2000: 184). To reframe the point in Habermasian language, understanding language as performative leads to an erosion of communicative rationality, as there is always an effect of construction inherent in speech acts (foreseen or unforeseen) which does not necessarily lead to a position of mutual understanding.

So far the focus of this section has been upon the basis of, and the acts of, communication unfolding between deliberative interlocutors. The forums and spheres in which such acts are envisaged as taking place have been elided. These dimensions of Habermas' theory will now be addressed.

Lifeworld and system

Lifeworld and system are central concepts for understanding the distinction Habermas makes between strategic and communicative action (Schnädelbach, 1991: 10). Even though lifeworld and system are discussed separately in the literature, it is worth stating at the outset that these two spheres of modern sociality are interconnected and inform one another. How these spheres interact with one another will be explored after each is addressed in turn.

Lifeworld:

Habermas (1996) links lifeworld with everything that makes our social life, beyond formal institutions, such as: "family, household, culture, political life outside of organised parties, mass media, voluntary organisations" etc. (Finlayson, 2005: 51). These spheres of social life provide a reservoir of meaning and a space for cultural exchange, which, through the means of CA, create social unity (Alexander, 1991; Finlayson, 2005). A lifeworld should be perceived as "a culturally transmitted framework, which...binds together individuals and society...it communicates the stock of ideas which gives identity to the individual and collective" (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003: 46).

Unity, however, Eriksen and Weigård (ibid.) warn, should not be interpreted in a totalising way, as the content of a lifeworld is always open to challenge and critique through the process of thematisation (Habermas, 1984: 18). Thematisation simply means that certain parts of social life are brought "into view [for the purpose of] revision

and change" in CA, through validity claims (Finlayson, 2005: 52). This means that some sort of finite understanding may never be reached and that CA is an ongoing process.

The concept of a lifeworld should be read in generative terms as one that creates, preserves and revives a society. Through communicative interaction with one another over time, social meaning is created (Alexander, 1991). The meaning social actors agree upon (via the process of CA) streams back into the lifeworld, thus preserving a stock of social context (Finlayson, 2005: 53). And finally, every agreement, once made, is open to challenge (Raelin, 2012) and can serve as a basis for further reflection by social actors, thus reviving and renewing the lifeworld – performing the function of social integration (Graeber, 2014; Niemi, 2005).

Habermas does not elaborate much on the process of thematisation (or dissent) and how disagreements may be resolved and this is a weakness in his work that has been noted by some scholars (e.g. Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006; Mouffe, 2009a; Mouffe, 2013). However, he does state that the conception of the lifeworld as circular, where CA feeds into the social context and where social context, in return, feeds into CA, reduces the chances of *fatal* dissent emerging (Habermas, 1996). Envisaging a lifeworld as a pool of shared knowledge does not guarantee that members of a given society predominantly agree about the meaning of that knowledge.

Advocates of deliberative democratic practice address the relationship between lifeworld and the production of self within such a context. Eriksen and Weigård (2003: 46) argue that a common identity is the outcome of CA within a lifeworld. Yet, while the claim that social context 'produces' identity can be substantiated to a large degree

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(Knights and Clarke, 2017), it is doubtful that any context (even a relatively homogenised one) will produce an identity capable of being generalised as common in any kind of defining way. Surely even in relatively homogenised societies a common identity will be at best relatively common. Although Habermas, in his circular theorisation of lifeworld, allows for shifting views – and, by extension, identifications and dissent – his focus on dissent as something to be overcome through CA, rather than surfaced and nurtured, could be interpreted as limiting for the generation of democratic practice. Namely, overcoming dissent seems to work towards the goal of a more harmonious and even homogenous society and against an embrace of difference as a source of value.

System:

Habermas' notion of system stands in opposition to his conception of lifeworld and refers to the two subsystems of administration and economy (Habermas 1984; 1996). Whereas the lifeworld is viewed as responsible for social integration, socialisation and cultural production, as stated earlier, systems are responsible for the material reproduction of a society (Habermas, 1987a). While a lifeworld consists of civil society, a system consists of formal institutions, such as the judiciary or the market.

Systems are underpinned by an instrumental rationality, which means that action is coordinated strategically rather than communicatively (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). The communication that unfolds in systems is always directed towards reaching a particular benefit and therefore social actors do not need to justify their actions as they do in a lifeworld. However, strategic action (SA) is not to be seen as an undesirable form of

action coordination as, indeed, the efficacy of a system depends on a successfully achieved strategic action (Habermas, 1996). SA is desirable as long as it does not encroach upon and dominate a lifeworld (Habermas, 1987a: 322), a process framed by Habermas in strong language as a 'colonisation' (Habermas, 1987a: 196).

Whereas in pre-modern societies, decision-making power lay in the hands of predominantly religious, royal or tribal leaders, decision-making in modern societies, Habermas states, rests upon communicatively orientated social actors (Habermas, 1984). Communicatively coordinated action is desirable but may be a long and exhausting process, as stated earlier (O'Donovan, 2013). Therefore, a material reproduction of the social (which does not require communicative action coordination) falls onto systems (Habermas, 1987a: 179). Yet an increased reliance on systems by social actors, as well as an increased infringement of SA upon a lifeworld may lead to the distortion of a lifeworld:

> In the end, systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration even in those areas where a consensus-dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas, the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of a colonisation (Habermas, 1987a: 196).

Questions of how views are represented and whose views are represented in and via formal institutions seem to be further complicated by the implied shrinking and colonisation of the lifeworld. If a lifeworld is in danger of being 'colonised' by an instrumentally rational system, that would mean that views of democratic social actors are in danger of being tokenised. Moreover, the procedures via which decision-making

are performed (e.g. elections) would enjoy a "mock-legitimacy" as social actors' opinions (expressed via the act of voting) would not carry any real influence (Vetlesen, 1991: 6). So what are the ways in which colonisation of the lifeworld may happen and what can prevent such a regressive outcome?

The inter-relationship between lifeworld and system:

As stated at the beginning of this sub-section, lifeworld and system do not exist separately from one another but rather overlap in a number of ways. For example, the family is an informal institution of the private sphere (lifeworld), but is regulated via legislation in formal institutions (system) (Jütten, 2011). Put simply, formal institutions exist as products of the social evolution of norms (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). For example, according to Habermas' theorising, marriage and elections exist as institutionalised procedures only because people have communicatively agreed that they are desirable ways of organising themselves socially (Outhwaite, 1996 and 2009).

Institutionalising forms of social life draws from the social organisation already formed in a lifeworld. Yet, such an evolution leads to a paradox: the more society evolves rationally, the more a lifeworld shrinks, as shared understanding and consensus grow. In time, instrumentally rational systems may overpower the lifeworld, and decrease the need for acting communicatively (Finlayson, 2005). Some of the ways in which the shrinking of a lifeworld might occur involve:

[F]ormalising interaction and networks that used to have an informal structure (legalisation)…[by] redefine[ing] the family sphere and leisure activities as markets with an insatiable need to consume entertainment articles (monetisation, commercialisation)…[by] obtaining support for political decisions that are made independently of a public exchange of opinions (Vetlesen, 1991: 6).

In sum, a lifeworld becomes colonised by instrumental rationality when systems perform decision making via formal, institutionalised procedures that bypass the CA of social actors. However, while a high degree of system rationalisation is a desirable goal, Habermas states, it is necessary for systems to receive continuous input from the lifeworld for the purposes of meaningful social progress (Habermas, 1984, 1987a, 1991 and 1996). The next section addresses Habermas' propositions for maintaining generative forums of deliberation within lifeworlds.

Public sphere

Habermas first provided an overview of the public sphere in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989[1962]). In this work Habermas broadly characterises a public sphere as a place where members of society can come together to freely discuss issues of social concern and so influence political decisions regarding the creation and adoption of public policies. He traces the concept of the public sphere back to 18th century liberal democracies, stating that public discussions unfolded in public forums, such as literary clubs, pubs, salons, etc. – places that enabled members of the public to participate in the politics of the time.

The book was met with praise as a first attempt to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the public sphere (Honneth and Joas, 1991). However, it has also been criticised for Habermas' somewhat superficial presentation of the public sphere as inclusive and participatory, due to the fact that the public sphere in the 18th century belonged predominantly to upper class white males and is, as such, unrepresentative of the public in its totality (Outhwaite, 2009). Yet, Habermas, in his later work (1996), does reflect upon the exclusionary character of the public sphere and tries to define its main features, which includes a revised interpretation of the boundaries between public and private spheres. It is his later work (Habermas, 1996) that I will draw upon in what follows.

The performativity of the public sphere:

Structurally, a public sphere spans lifeworld and system (in particular, the administrative sub-system) and links the two via processes of bureaucratisation (Habermas, 1987a). In ideal terms, what is communicatively agreed upon in a lifeworld amongst social actors should feed into the administrative system in the form of various regulating mechanisms (e.g. agreeing upon the way to choose a government in the lifeworld results in institutionally established electoral procedures in the administrative system). Similarly, what is established as an institutionalised procedure (in this example, elections) regulates how a government is chosen by the social actors in the lifeworld (through the act of casting a vote). Such a trajectory of the agreed upon issue, from lifeworld to a regulated procedure in the administrative system, is not straightforward,

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however. In order to understand how a communicatively agreed upon issue travels to the administrative system, one needs to explore the sites identified for deliberative practice.

The sites of public deliberation:

Habermas (1996) distinguishes between the formal and informal public spheres as sites of deliberation. Formal public sphere refers to parliamentary assemblies as well as other formally established institutions (system), whereas informal public sphere refers to the deliberation that unfolds outside the boundaries of formal institutions (lifeworld) often, but not exclusively, in what is referred to as civil society (Habermas, 1996: 307-313).

The lifeworld aspect of a public sphere (an informal public sphere) consists of a multitude of temporally and spatially overlapping sites of deliberation (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). Habermas maintains that these public sites "still cling to the concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered" (1996: 361). However, other scholars of deliberative democratic practice insist that lifeworld public spheres also include virtual sites of deliberation, such as social networks and even written texts (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003: 185). Habermas does acknowledge that new technologies enable people to deliberate virtually, but claims that deliberators may become detached and the discourse may become 'abstracted' in these digital forums, which is why he advocates for deliberation in person (Habermas, 1996: 361). While being present physically in deliberative forums can be useful (e.g. one can 'read' an interlocutor's body language when assessing validity claims), the emphasis on being physically present in deliberative

forums can be interpreted as a manifestation of privilege (Butler, 2015), i.e. not everyone is able to travel regularly to meetings and dedicate as much time to deliberation in a single sitting. Such normalising of privilege comes in the guise of 'participative' practice but it can also have the effect of exclusion (Srnicek and Williams, 2016: 49).

Summary

I discussed the theory of deliberative democratic practice as elaborated by Habermas. It was established that deliberative democratic practice is underpinned by the theory of communicative rationality, which represents a dialogical account of three types of rationality: theoretical-instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive (Habermas, 1984; Honneth and Joas, 1991). Each of these rationalities is incorporated into the form of communicative rationality, according to Habermas (1984), to influence the way we understand the world, as well as the way we relate to it.

CA, informed by communicative rationality, is the modus operandi of deliberative democratic practice. The main tenet of the theory of CA is the positing of language as the medium for coordinating action aimed at reaching understanding regarding issues of common concern (Habermas, 1984). Language is here understood merely as a structured conduit for passing information between interlocutors (ibid). SA is a mode of communication where interlocutors are orientated towards attaining certain goals, either latently or manifestly (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003).

Habermas seeks to better understand the relationship in democratic practice between state and civil society. Lifeworld and system are stated as the two major domains of modern sociality (Finlayson, 2005: 47). The lifeworld represents the informal sphere of social life in which the social fabric is weaved communicatively. The system, on the other hand, represents that formal domain of social life in which action is coordinated strategically. Although seemingly separate, lifeworld and system overlap and inform one another in complex ways.

The public sphere spans both lifeworld and system (the administrative sub-system in particular) and represents 'a network' of communication that expresses the kind of life people wish to live (Habermas, 1996: 360). Metaphorically, the public sphere represents an umbilical cord between lifeworld and system.

In terms of critique, Habermas' deliberative democratic practice overlooks the embodied and affective aspects of engagement, and its emphasis on rationality can leave the impression of a particularly masculine set of norms (Knights, 2015). It also heavily focuses on conditions of communication, rather than content exchanged in deliberation, meaning that it relegates passionately held beliefs and identifications as secondary to processes of consensus. Its emphasis on face-to-face communication and its acceptance of heavy time commitments imply a preference for more formal and bounded forums, rather than viewing democratic practice as an ongoing, informal and everyday practice. However, it might be possible to interpret some of the norms of deliberation through a performative lens, as aspects of democratic practice folded into more embodied and everyday acts (Butler, 1999, see Chapter 4). The critique of Habermas as overly focused

on consensus and rationality can partially be addressed through a consideration of an alternative account of democratic practice, that of agonism, which I now explore.

3.2.2. Agonistic democratic practice

Introduction

In this section I first address the onto-epistemological grounding of agonism, that of post-foundationalism. From this basis I outline and critically evaluate five key concepts within agonism: pluralism (vs. universalism), conflict (vs. consensus), relational identity (vs. essentialist identity), passion (vs. reason) and the aesthetics of democratic practice. Overall, I conclude that agonism injects some vigour into the notion of what it means to be a subject of democracy, supplementing the somewhat conflict-light account of deliberative democratic practice.

The theory of agonistic democratic practice as envisaged by Chantal Mouffe has recently provoked a lively discussion within academic circles. For example, the journal *Parallax* (2014) has dedicated an entire issue (20:2) to an exploration of various aspects of the theory. Yet, so far there has been little attempt to explore empirically the theoretical assumptions made by agonism, with only a few authors supplying evidence and analysis from fieldwork (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; Spencer, 2012; Purakayastha, 2014). Where there have been empirical contributions or contributions seeking to relate the

theory to areas outside politics, those contributions seem to hold significance for theory and practice (e.g. Rhodes, 2016) and will be referred to as this section unfolds.

Ontological assumptions of agonism: post-foundationalism

Broadly, post-foundationalism can be understood as a more radical version of poststructuralism, where 'grounds' such as "totality, universality, essence" are continuously questioned and examined (Marchart, 2007: 2). However, within post-foundationalism the ontological grounds of any social phenomena are weakened, rather than erased. Post-foundationalists assume that there is a possibility that some social phenomena could stabilise to a degree; however, such stabilisation should not be perceived as the definite and final ground of meaning (Marchart, 2007; Parker and Parker, 2017).

Specifically, the case made by post-foundationalists is that language should be viewed as "contingent all the way down", with words and constructs always and indefinitely dependent on other words and constructs for meaning (Cederström and Spicer, 2014: 198; Mouffe, 2014). Holding this view does not mean that all words and communication acts are entirely groundless and therefore meaningless. Final closure of meaning, for agonists, does remain impossible and hence there is a core of incompletion that remains at the heart of all communication, which is why post-foundationalism has been described as a 'negative ontology' (Kelly, 2014). It is this very impossibility of final completion in language that results in meaningful investment (Cederström and Spicer, 2014); it is the process of chasing meaning and circling incompletion that interests agonists.

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An enduring, seemingly stable, phenomenon (e.g. democracy) is achieved via

> repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of [phenomena], but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground' (Butler, 1999: 192).

Against the post-foundational ontological backdrop of agonism, democracy is approached as a contingent and empty floating signifier (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 113). It is empty, agonists argue, because in and of itself it means little unless combined and complemented with other signifiers. It is also a contingent signifier whose significance lies in the fact that it knits together other associations and chains of signification in order to generate meaning (Laclau, 2014). It is floating because its meaning is contested and fought over between a number of competing interpretations: e.g. neoliberal democracy and socialist democracy. This is not a licence for a free-for-all in meaning construction but does acknowledge that meaning is based on what can be accomplished between actors and discourses in a specific context.

The main features of agonism

Agonism is an analytical approach to democratic practice envisaged predominantly against more consensual approaches, such as deliberative democracy (Mouffe, 2014). It aims at radicalising liberal democracy through placing conflict at the fore of democratic practice. Agonism is a way of performing a democratic practice by and amongst diverse

populations regardless of their political preferences (at least within the broad framework of liberal democratic norms, discussed in more depth later) and/or other forms of identification (Hansen and Sonnichsen, 2014). Such democratic practice is imagined as a vibrant struggle between democratic participants, but a struggle that does not lead to violent conflict (Mouffe, 2009a).

While all agonistic theories of democracy share a number of common features, they differ in some ways (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). All theories of agonism stand in sceptical and critical relation to liberal democracy; they all maintain that conflict is ineradicable in any pluralist society; each theory is situated within post-foundationalism; and, all of the theories argue that exclusions in democratic practice are inevitable. However, some differ in their approach to the institutions of liberal democracy. I focus here predominantly on the work of Chantal Mouffe, and to a lesser extent, William Connolly, as they argue that the framework of liberal democracy is suitable for agonistic practice and, unlike some agonists (e.g. Badiou, 2005), they do not reject liberal institutions but instead argue that these can be transformed through a process of agonistic engagement (Connolly, 2002, 2004 and 2005; Mouffe, 2009a, 2009b and 2013).

Decisions concerning whether or how to engage with official government institutions are echoed in the practice context of this research. The Women's Rights Centre (WRC) has a longstanding adversarial relationship with various government institutions, often challenging decisions (e.g. it publicly challenged the recently adopted law on benefits for mothers, which the organisation found to be discriminatory (see CDM, 2015)). However, WRC often collaborates with government institutions alone or in partnership with other civil sector organisations. Such an emphasis bears more in common with a stream of

agonism that seeks to 'transform' (Wingenbach, 2011: 38) liberal democratic institutions through continuous engagement, rather than abolish them.

I will now turn to explore the key concepts within agonism relevant to my research question.

Pluralism

Pluralism refers to a conceptualisation of social relations as a "pluriverse" of democratic projects rather than a 'universe' of the 'Western'[14] vision of democracy as the only legitimate one (Mouffe, 2009a: 561). Mouffe (2009b; 2013) argues that the Western version of democracy is globally promoted and accepted as the only valid form of democracy and that such an attitude supresses and diminishes alternative understandings of democratic practice and values in countries that do not share the same politico-historical development. This is why, the author argues, it is necessary to take into account that other contexts have the potential to develop their own interpretations and that scholars and practitioners should embrace a diversity of different forms of democratic arrangements (Mouffe, 2009a; Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2012).

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[14] 'Western' democracy is understood here as "multiparty electoral democracy, accompanied by an individualistic conception of human rights and...free market policies." (Mouffe, 2009a: 561)

However, agonistic pluralism does not refer solely to the plurality of different forms of democracy worldwide but also to potential varieties of pluralist orderings of particular societies (Connoly, 2005; Mouffe, 1991). For agonists, there is an "irreducible plurality of social values in society" (Legget, 2013: 303), enacted as different and/or opposing democratic identities (Mouffe, 2009a) that might stand in potentially antagonistic relation to one another (Mihai, 2014; Tully, 2008). Pluralism signifies an interpretation of the social as "open and porous", which "gives rise to the creation of multiple social identities" (Jones, 2014: 15).

Plurality is an "axiological principle" connected to agonisms's emphasis on contingency (Mouffe, 2009a: 19) – a value that is fundamental to the conception of agonistic democracy. Contingency occurs due to the pluralism of systems of values that democratic participants ascribe to, which always escape complete homogenisation (Jones, 2014; Parker and Parker, 2017; Smolović Jones et al, 2016): there will always be an 'us' and 'them' amongst whom differences cannot be finally resolved (Mouffe, 2005 and 2013; Rhodes and Wray-Bliss, 2012; Tambakakaki, 2014). This is why Connolly (2004) prefers the notion of 'pluralisation' to 'pluralism', connoting a process of pluralising relations between people that never truly ends, whereas pluralism suggests a state of plural relations, something more static: pluralising and pluralism are to be viewed as locked in a relationship of opening up and closing down democratic identities.

There has been some work conducted seeking to translate agonistic pluralism as relevant to organisational settings. Rhodes and Harvey (2012) posit agonism as a useful framework via which depersonalised and controlling ethical norms in organisations (viewed as established via a dominant discourse of Human Resources Management)

could be challenged. The authors claim that in the present day "globalised economy" (ibid: 49), which is reflected in increasingly multicultural organisational settings, there is a pluralism of "potentially incommensurable interests, interpretations and ethical standpoints" (ibid: 50), that could offer a range of ethical alternatives to managerialism. If drawn upon agonistically, the authors state, HRM could be read and worked with as part of a broader set of 'socio-ethical relations' (p.56).

Such an understanding of pluralism, as a way of ordering the social via a multiplicity of social identities, denotes yet another important aspect of agonistic democracy; namely the impossibility of reconciling the different values that social actors may attribute to democratic practice (Jones, 2014). In the words of Mouffe (1991: 81):

> plural democracy recognises the impossibility of the complete realisation of democracy and the final achievement of the political community. Its aim is to use the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition to struggle for the deepening of the democratic revolution, knowing that it is a never-ending process.

Agonists are therefore sceptical about the possibility that differences amongst social actors may be ultimately reconciled via democratic engagement.

This issue of the impossibility of reconciling difference leads us to the second principle of pluralism for agonists – that it serves to channel potentially violent clashes of difference. To enable pluralism, it is necessary for differences "not just to be acknowledged and affirmed, but also expressed" (Tambakaki, 2014: 2). However, since such an expression of differences amongst democratic participants will most likely involve a degree of

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struggle (Rhodes, 2012), it is necessary to ensure that such a struggle does not escalate into violence. Mouffe therefore seeks to channel pluralising differences through what she views as the two most important principles of liberal democracy, liberty and equality, noting that that there will always be contestation concerning the interpretation of these principles in practice (Erman, 2009; Fletcher, 2003; Mouffe, 2013; Rhodes, 2016). One could interpret this presupposition of consensus in relation to the importance of liberty and equality as running counter to a core tenet of the agonistic project (Erman, 2009; Knops, 2007 and 2012; Rhodes, 2012). Indeed, some advocates of deliberative democratic practice argue that Mouffe "commits a performative contradiction" (Knops, 2012: 151) through building her pluralist democratic theory on a critique of, and opposition to, consensus, while at the same time relying on an assumption that social actors will cohere around the principles of liberty and equality for all (Erman, 2009; Knops, 2007). Yet from the ontological perspective of post-foundationalism, and in defence of Mouffe's theorising, these principles (liberty and equality) could be understood as products of a relative stabilisation of two 'signifiers' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), acquired through a repetition of discursive practices (Butler, 1999), the final closure of which is impossible to attain (Cederström and Spicer, 2014).

These two signifiers (liberty and equality), Mouffe states, are representative of two different, if contested, traditions: "liberalism, with its emphasis on individual liberty and universal rights, and democracy, which privileges the idea of equality and…popular sovereignty" (Mouffe, 2009b: 556-557). The impossibility of finalising the meaning, to settle the ground for these two signifiers, is the result of continuous and competing interpretations over what they might represent to different people and groups. Each

actor in an adversarial relationship will likely have their own interpretation of what each of these principles should represent (Mouffe, 2005; 2009).

Conflict and consensus

Agonists grant pre-eminence to a generative and open form of contested relations as offering a kind of vitality to democratic practice (Connolly, 2005; Tully, 2002), as subjects attempt to renegotiate the borders of "common symbolic space" (Hansen and Sonnichsen, 2014: 268). Central to this foregrounding of contestation is the idea of a conflict of "adversaries", rather than "enemies", each side fighting to establish its own 'hegemonic order' (Mouffe, 2009a: 13). Mouffe differentiates adversaries from enemies, as, unlike enemies, "[adversaries] share a common allegiance to the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality for all'" (Mouffe, 2013: 7), even though they may disagree about the meaning of these principles in practice (Maeckelberg, 2011). In agonism, each group will aim to establish its own understanding of democratic principles via a "vibrant democracy" of continuous debate (Mouffe, 2013:7). Similarly, Connolly (2005) speaks of 'agonistic respect', a phrase that describes relations of contest built upon a basic awareness that one's own identity and way of seeing the world is necessarily incomplete.

What is more radical about this view is the recognition that although some agreement can be reached on democratic principles, a core of negativity will always inhere in any agonistic relation: while proponents hope that agonism may act to channel people away from antagonism, it does not pretend to heal the basic negativity within language that

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prevents full closure (Connolly, 2002; Fossen, 2008; Tully, 2002). Conflict will always be present, and should be encouraged, as no worldview or system of language will be capable of fully unifying an identity or society (Legget, 2009; Wingenbach, 2011).

Given the centrality of conflict to agonism, the question of how alliances capable of being stable enough to engender change are formed needs to be addressed. Mouffe (2009a and 2013) argues that any hegemonic constellation, understood broadly as a diverse collection of groups, people, organisations and discourses, will of course act as a means of stabilising democratic practice, and that this occurs through a 'chain of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 144). Use of the word 'chain' signals connections between groups and discourses that may have previously been disconnected. For example, Occupy was comprised of diverse individuals and groups who related to one another in a number of ways: these chains might be said to have consisted of common discourses suspicious of 'political elites' and favouring 'direct democracy' (see Occupy London, 2011). Equivalential chains are characterised by Laclau (2007) as synonymous with populist movements. They are defined against an external 'enemy' or 'adversary'. In the words of Laclau, "there is a specific negativity which is inherent to the equivalential link" (ibid: 96), which means that a chain of equivalence depends on a negative outside against which the chain of groups and discourses can define themselves. The aim of such chains is to radically challenge the dominant order (represented by the negative outside), through demands that cannot be met by the ruling system as it is currently constituted. This connecting of groups and causes in relation to an outside offers a degree of stabilisation, if not closure.

As language itself is considered to be ultimately contingent, this process of contestation through chains of equivalence is inescapable and unending (Brown and Dillard, 2015; Fletcher, 2003; Jones, 2014; Legget, 2009; Mouffe, 2009a, 2013, 2014). That is not to say that contestation may not be marginalised or subdued through superficial or public consensus. Yet, agonists maintain, conflict and dissensus are unavoidable and a constitutive part of any democratic engagement, even when such processes appear relatively consensual (Mouffe, 2014; Reedy et al, 2016; Rhodes, 2012 and 2016). Agonists perceive the establishment of any order as an act of power and argue that there will always be attempts to establish a counter-order, a counter-hegemony, through which conflict/dissensus will emerge (Carpentier and Camaerts, 2006; Jones, 2014; Mouffe, 2014).

Agonistic identity

Mouffe (2014) places 'negativity' at the heart of her agonistic theory, which opens up "the ever present possibility of antagonism" (p.155), of questioning and destabilising one's own and others' identifications, in a discursively constructed society. Within this logic, social actors' democratic identities are devoid of essence and are instead continuously performed and re-performed via a myriad of identifications (Mouffe, 2014). Hence, identifications become a battleground for agonistic democratic practice[15].

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[15] Both Laclau and Mouffe tend to be suspicious of the word 'identity', using the term more often than not for something settled, for an essentialist view of the world, or qualifying the term as one that should be interpreted as lacking coherence, assembled from a range of contested subject positions (e.g. Mouffe, 1991: 80-81).

Agonists treat every identity (of a person or collective) as relational, temporary and contested. Identity is approached as assembled from hegemonic constellations of discourses, which are all partial and contingent (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). I, as a person, am an assemblage of "subject positions, constructed within specific discourses and always precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions" (Mouffe, 1991: 80). Moreover, identity is always dependent on an antagonistic outside, knowable only in relation to and against an other: the hegemonic constellation of 'us' stands in adversarial relation to a hegemonic constellation of 'them' (Mouffe, 2013). Identity is therefore relational and contested: groups or people will always stand in a dependent relationship to one another, as their very formation is contingent upon the other, even, and perhaps especially, if that other is identified with in antagonistic ways (Mouffe, 2009a).

Mouffe (1991; 1995; 1999; 2009a; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) is interested in collective identity, as befits her commitment to relationality; she argues for a conflictual dialogue that unfolds between diverse groups rather than diverse individuals – subjects are to be read as assemblages of discourses, as collectives. Mouffe interprets agonism not merely as concerned with a process of debate, but with seeking to alter the ground upon which people base their identifications. Therefore, in order to participate agonistically people need to be prepared to "undergo a radical change in their political identity [which] has more of a quality of conversion than of a… persuasion" (Mouffe, 1999: 755). Through relating with others agonistically, Mouffe argues, contingencies are surfaced and challenged and the 'order' of subject positions is brought into question – brought to its discursive limits (Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Smolović Jones et al, 2016).

Agonistic passions

Underlying conflict for agonists is the passionate investment in certain values democratic subjects hold as important. Passions are understood as an important driving force for identity construction and social mobilisation (Jones, 2014; Legget, 2013; Machin, 2014). In the words of Mouffe:

> The model of 'agonistic pluralism' that I am advocating asserts that the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions…but to mobilise those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs" (1999: 755-756).

Mouffe places the passions at the heart of collective identity formation, stating that they play a "crucial role" in performing democratic practice (Mouffe, 2013: 6). She argues that various rationalist frameworks of democratic practice (e.g. deliberative) have wrongly relegated passions, or tried to overcome them, thus potentially overlooking what people hold as most vibrant and meaningful. Such an emphasis is potentially dangerous, Mouffe asserts, leading to "apathy and to a disaffection with political participation" (Mouffe, 2013: 7).

For Mouffe, passions are to be distinguished from emotions[16], as emotions are often associated with individuals and not groups (Mouffe, 2014: 149). Passions, in Mouffe's view, are more specifically political, derived from the politico-historical identifications of

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[16] It is important to note here that emotions such as "boredom, envy, fear, love, anger, guilt, infatuation, embarrassment, nostalgia, anxiety" (Fineman, 2000: 1) have also been analysed within organisations as necessarily relational.

the group, contingent in relation to a particular context. It is passions, rather than emotions, that have "more violent connotations…[which] allows me to underline the dimension of conflict and to suggest a confrontation between collective political identities" (Mouffe, 2014: 149).

It is through confrontational passions that the distinction between us/them emerges i.e. our interpretation of liberal democratic principles (based on politico-historical experiences with the context) versus their interpretation (Legget, 2013; Mouffe, 2014). Yet the violent effects of passions may be ameliorated and 'tamed' through the framework of agonistic democratic practice (Roskamm, 2015). In such a framework violent enemies are transformed into adversaries through allegiance to the same over-arching ethico-political principles (Mouffe, 2013).

Mouffe has been criticised for offering a vague category of 'passion' and doing so without also offering a more precise understanding of how affect can be approached in practice. Mihai (2014) argues that 'passions' have too negative a connotation to be ever deconstructed as positive and states that 'taming' passions holds "strong disciplinary connotations" (p.36). The latter, the author argues, contradicts the agonistic conception of "citizens as agents engaged in collective processes of contestation" (ibid.). However, it is difficult to envisage any democratic process – or any organisational process for that matter - that does not, to one extent or another, attempt to channel passions. That said, Mouffe's account is somewhat underdeveloped, a problem that may be partially overcome through considering the embodied nature of democratic practice, something I will explore in more detail through Butler's work.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is an emerging area of interest for agonists, particularly for Mouffe and Jacques Ranciére. Writing about the role of art in agonistic politics, Mouffe (2007 and 2013) recognises artistic practice as a force for battling "neo-liberal hegemony" (2007: 5). Although she recognises that art has been increasingly co-opted into contemporary capitalism, which may have dampened its power to challenge the status-quo (Mouffe, 2007; 2013), she still believes that art can make visible "what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate…giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the…existing hegemony" (Mouffe, 2013: 93), especially when enacted collectively (see Elias et al, 2018, for a discussion of similar collective meaning construction in relations between art entrepreneurs and their customers)[17].

Art offers an alternative means for the "articulation of different…struggles" (ibid.) and as such can disturb and unsettle taken-for-granted sedimented practices, but it can also "play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order" (Mouffe, 2013: 91). The role of artistic practices is not to uncover some hidden 'truth' but to foster "the inscription of the social agent in a set of practices that will mobilise its affects in a way that disarticulates the framework in which the dominant process of identification takes place" (Mouffe, 2013: 93; see Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004, for a discussion of the overlap between the aesthetic and affect in organisations). Understood in this way, art cannot be easily distinguished from the political, as there is "an aesthetic dimension

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[17] Aesthetics has likewise been drawn upon in organisation studies as a means for understanding how people develop practice and produce knowledge together beyond words, and through more artful means – shared sensemaking through relating to the visual, audio and text (e.g. Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018; Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007).

in the political and there is a political dimension in art" (ibid). Artistic practices, therefore, can be a battlefield of passionate politics, of sedimented and emerging identifications, where diverse articulations of people's beliefs vie for authority in public spaces.

Yet, Mouffe argues that for "artistico-activist" (2013: 97) practice to be critical *and* generative it is not sufficient for it to remain on the "deconstructive level" (2013: 93). It must also supply a means of articulating new identifications that are not as of yet available. "Artivists" need to abandon "the modernist illusion of the privileged position of the artist" and engage in "constructing new practices and new subjectivities" (Mouffe, 2013: 106).

However, while Mouffe underlines the importance of artistic practices for socio-political, democratic transformation and recognises the entanglement of art and politics, she does not offer a nuanced conceptual understanding of how such entanglement unfolds. This is why I make recourse to Ranciére's (2012) twin concepts of the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics. Ranciére's understanding of these concepts is more embodied than Mouffe's account of art in democratic practice, which is a welcome interpretation for this research and compatible with its performative theoretical framework. This embodied aspect of the two concepts is, perhaps, best explicated through a third concept from Ranciére, that of the "distribution of the sensible" (Ranciére, 2012: 9).

'Distribution of the sensible' demarcates the borders around any order, which is made intelligible through the "apportionment" (Ranciére, 2012: 12) of bodies, spaces, objects, discursive practices, routines, etc. For example, the sensible order of a 'workplace' in

academia – and office space in general (see Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, 2018) - is etched through the selection of objects (e.g. desks, computers, whiteboards, etc.), spaces (e.g. open-space offices, lecture theatres, classrooms, online discussion forums), discursive practices (e.g. writing papers, lecturing, etc.), routines (e.g. marking assignments, etc.), bodies (e.g. students, lecturers, etc.) and so on. Such a distribution of the sensible of the 'academic workplace' renders it intelligible to us as an 'academic workplace' and not, say, a gym or a surgery, and so may appear to us as common-sensical.

However, there is another aspect to the sensible here – that which can be perceived through the senses, can be sensed, but is not necessarily "sayable" (Ranciére, 2012: 63) in the present political climate. Using the same example, I may perceive an academic workplace ordered by a masculine distribution of the sensible through a sense of discomfort (e.g. feeling cold as the heating system is set according to the thermal needs of my male counterparts, etc.) or I may simply accept that cooler workplaces are common-sense and wear a duvet at work. This image of me wearing a duvet in the office can be interpreted as an aesthetic-political act, which brings us to the concept of the politics of aesthetics.

Ranciére (2012) theorises three regimes of art historically in order to help us understand its role in society: ethical, representational and aesthetic. These regimes are tied to specific and sequential historic eras, yet they are not theorised as necessarily successive, as "each continues to exist alongside another" (Sayers, 2005: 2). We could also understand regimes of art as imposing organisational principles and restraints on groups seeking to enact democratic practice (Ortmann and Sydow, 2018). Drawing on
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Plato, Ranciére (2012) envisages the ethical regime of art as one that regulates the distribution of the sensible through offering ethical norms of being in the world (e.g. literary, visual, audio art that espouses virtues). The representative regime "breaks away from the ethical regime...it identifies the substance of... the arts" (ibid: 21). Such a regime purports to imitate ways of "doing, making, seeing, and judging" (ibid: 22) as they 'really' exist in the world. However, Ranciére argues, this regime also organises what is regarded as sensible in a particular order – it is a "regime of visibility [rather than] an artistic process" (ibid.) – and as such dictates what and whom is to be included, heard and recognised in an order of the sensible. It is a regime that seeks to establish power relations and hierarchy (ibid: 24-25).

In contrast, the aesthetic regime is closely linked to the process of "rupture" (Ranciére, in Arnall et al, 2012: 289) between symbol and association, unsettling power relations through disturbing a particular distribution of the sensible. It involves "disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable" (ibid: 63). Such a regime "devotes itself to the invention of new forms of life" (Ranciére, 2012: 25), as critique gives way to the generative. Art and artistic practices are "no longer the codified expression of a thought or feeling [or] a double or a translation [but] a way in which things themselves speak and are silent" (Ranciére, 2009: 13). Art here performs the political function of resistance, unsettling and opening up possibilities for new subjectivities to emerge (Ranciére, 2012: 9). Although not a directly Ranciére-informed study, Munro and Jordan (2013) draw attention to how art, performed through embodied public acts and drawing on the aesthetic dimensions of the visual and audio, can re-order how we conceptualise shared, common space – overlapping aesthetic interventions can re-order, in other words (see also Michels and Steyaert, 2017).

The aesthetic regime is therefore closely linked to the democratic principle of equality that denotes an "equality of the communicated" (Ranciere, 2012: 54), of a newly imagined relationship to space and ideas. Art offers a way for novel meaning-making to occur through virtue of "silent speech" (Ranciere, 2009: 13), which is understood as "the eloquence of the very thing that is silent, the capacity to exhibit signs written on a body, the marks directly imprinted by its history" (ibid.). Such a definition of silent speech denotes the capacity of bodies and objects to evoke contextual meaning, to provide a sense of "familiarity" (2009: 35). However, art can also evoke "the strangeness of the familiar" (2009: 57), by incorporating "foreign" elements within the familiar (2009: 57), either through combining mediums (image, word, colour, sound, etc.) or symbols in unexpected ways, and so fostering novel inscriptions and subjectivities - for example, combining the traditional symbols for 'male' and 'female' and adding new elements to them in order to denote fluidity of genders: ♀☿♂⚲⚥ (see Ray Marquez, 2018).

Ranciére argues that politics is an aesthetic activity "not because there is a specific aesthetic to politics…but because within any specific social arrangement there are words and images in constant circulation…whose proper order is a perpetual source of disagreement" (Deranty, 2010:100). Such a 'proper' order can be challenged through introjections of the previously excluded, invisible and silent (Ranciére, 2012). Ordering the sensible is an ongoing battle "of domination and subjection" (Ranciere, 2009a: 12) where exclusion is inevitable, as for Ranciére equality is not an end result but a principle upon which democracy is enacted – it is a continuous struggle for inclusion. Such exclusion in an order always renders some elements recognisable and obscures others,

through legitimising what is an "utterance rather than a gutterance, speech rather than noise, language rather than blabber" (Deranty, 2010: 102).

The aesthetics of politics is therefore not only perceptible in the "epideictic oratory"[18] (Ranciere, 2016: 4) of politicians, propaganda posters, campaign videos and so on, but also in the distribution of bodies in any particular order – of those who can be recognised as political subjects - and so democratic practice can be understood as the insertion of bodies into a sensible order, of people previously invisible demanding to be acknowledged. A good example of this would be the suffragette movement, where women physically, through the aesthetic presence of their bodies, encroached upon the existing political order of the time, which recognised only men as political subjects, and reordered what was considered valid political decision-making (e.g. both men and women voting). Such reordering did not take place simply through the implementation of a new law (although law could be perceived as a kind of malleable aesthetic medium), but also through other, more evocative forms of writing (e.g. pamphlets, magazine articles, etc.), and through occupying public spaces (e.g. street marching, protesting, chaining bodies to railings, etc.).

Summary

Agonism is a theory informed by post-foundational onto-epistemological assumptions, and is devised against more consensual forms of democratic practice, such as

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[18] Epideictic oratory refers to a type of rhetoric, in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that entails a ceremonial, dramatic style of speech usually used to bestow praise or to judge.

deliberation (Mouffe, 2014). Proponents of agonism propose the idea of an irreconcilable pluralism of ideas, values, identifications and people that cannot and should not be tamed (Connoly, 2005; Mouffe, 1991; Roskamm, 2015). A pluralism of differences will inevitably lead to conflict, agonists argue, which serves to invigorate the political and lead to a more vibrant democratic practice (Mouffe, 2013:7). Mouffe, in particular, argues that emergent conflicts will not escalate into violence as long as practitioners subscribe to the two main principles of democracy: liberty and equality.

Those who subscribe to principles of liberty and equality but engage in a conflictual interpretation of them are termed 'adversaries' and are to be distinguished from 'enemies', who aim to collapse democracy altogether (Maeckelberg, 2011; Mouffe, 2013: 7). However, such contestation is not to be viewed as an endless bickering of all-against-all and agonists indeed recognise the possibility of hegemonic constellations forming through chains of equivalence (Laclau, 2005; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

Identity is at the heart of democratic practice for agonists, and is something conceptualised as relational and dependent on an antagonistic outside: the hegemonic constellation of 'us' stands in adversarial relation to a hegemonic constellation of 'them' (Mouffe, 2013). Identity is therefore contested through democratic practice at the ontological level (Connolly, 2002; Mouffe, 2009a).

Mouffe places passions at the heart of collective identity formation, stating that they play a "crucial role" (Mouffe, 2013: 6) in performing democratic practice and social mobilisation (Jones, 2014; Legget, 2013; Machin, 2014). Yet, even though Mouffe

recognises the importance of passions, this aspect of democratic practice is somewhat underdeveloped in her account of agonism.

Mouffe offers a view of art as holding potential for instigating change but it is the work of Ranciére that supplies a more in-depth account of aesthetics in relation to agonistic democratic practice. Using the notion of the 'distribution of the sensible', Ranciére (2012) helps us understand the interplay between exclusion and inclusion in the never-ending struggle for equality between different groups (intelligible and unintelligible). Through his concept of the politics of aesthetics (ibid), he argues that art may serve to disrupt some sedimented, taken-for-granted practices and lead to the emergence of new subjectivities. On the other hand, through his concept of the aesthetics of politics, he invites us to observe democratic practice as an entanglement of a myriad of embodied, visual and discursive acts.

I now proceed to more explicitly draw deliberation and agonism back to the research question through seeking to extrapolate their performative norms for practice, highlighting some of their similarities, differences and shortcomings in the process.

3.2.3. The performative norms of agonism and deliberation and their shortcomings

In this section I focus on drawing out the norms of democratic practice from theories of deliberation and agonism, and reflect on the implications inherent for the work of NGO practitioners. I also explore the shortcomings of the theories, in the process justifying a

more embodied, performative and everyday view of democratic practice that crosses between – and beyond – deliberation and agonism.

First, I consider the gendered normative implications of both theories for practice. The theory of deliberative democracy could be understood as traditionally 'masculine', as it assumes a practitioner who engages in rational dialogue based on a set of discursive rules (Erman, 2012). Rationality has a long history of associations with men, masculinity and "good…practice" (Dougherty and Hode, 2016: 1734) against which passion and emotion, usually associated more with women in organisations, are usually positioned as inferior, 'other' and as bad practice (Dougherty and Drumheller, 2006). In a similar vein, agonism can be perceived as traditionally 'feminine', as it assumes a practitioner involved in a passionate discursive struggle. The former theory foregrounds reaching consensus through reason and the latter the perpetuity of conflict and lack of stable ontological foundations (Marchart, 2007).

Second, both theories convey norms of intersubjective engagement, a dialogical character to the democratic bearing of subjects. For deliberative democratic subjects, decision-making processes in the context of democratic practice should be underpinned by understanding and agreements made in the public sphere by rational social actors (Estlund, 2012; Habermas, 1996). Moreover, it is essential for deliberative democrats that deliberation is based on a set of discourse rules (Erman, 2012). This means that the interlocutors involved in discourse must be in a position to justify any of the claims made according to rules of rational communication (ibid). For agonists, however, decision-making should be characterised by passionate and conflictual discussions throughout which democratic actors will be willing and open to questioning the ontological basis of

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their identities in order to arrive at a common decision (Legget, 2013; Mouffe, 2009a; 2014). They dispense with the idea that language is underpinned by a set of rational rules that can guide discussion and instead believe that democratic actors ought to be engaged in continuous struggles around the meaning of democratic principles and values (Mouffe, 2009a).

Third, there is an "educational" (Cooke, 2000: 948) quality perceptible in both theories; namely, people learn about others' opinions, beliefs and values but they also improve their capacities to learn and debate, meaning that subjects commit to a process of ongoing change in their opinions and identifications (Connolly, 2002 and 2005; Dryzek, 2010). Advocates of deliberative democratic practice hold that interests, opinions and beliefs can be influenced via a process of deliberation (Estlund, 2012), that "if exposed to new facts and different points of view, citizens may choose differently from how they would do on their own" (Chappell, 2012: 101). For agonists, however, learning from engagement with others means challenging the ontological basis of the identifications of others while simultaneously questioning one's own (Connolly, 2002 and 2005; Jones, 2014; Mouffe, 2014).

The fourth norm refers to the attitude of participants of democratic practice towards reciprocity, an openness to the views of others and the factoring in of others' views when speaking or making decisions. Chappell (2012: 7) characterises such a debate as "other-regarding". Possessing such an attitude manifests in not only holding private reasons for a particular preference, but also sharing these reasons with, and justifying them to, others in a comprehensible way while simultaneously keeping others' interests in mind (ibid). However, such an attitude also refers to an openness to hear and take into account

the reasons and justifications of others (Benhabib, 1996). Deliberative debate aims to disclose and promote fairness, respect and honesty amongst people, kept alive through an ethos of reciprocity. Agonists also insist on openness and respectfulness, yet instead of deliberative rational persuasion, they emphasise a more radical conflict, and attempted conversion, between adversaries who subscribe to foundational democratic principles of equality and liberty (Mouffe, 1999).

Fifth and finally, both deliberative and agonistic theories of democratic practice assume that subjects will engage with official government bodies and institutions, rather than seeking to overturn these structures (Connolly, 2002; Dryzek, 2000; Habermas, 1996; Mouffe, 1991; 2014). Such a position necessarily involves abiding by the norms prescribed by government, to a greater or lesser degree, and hence a tension persists in both theories regarding the extent to which they may compromise with the very institutions they seek to reform: do democratic acts truly subvert unequal norms or might they simply re-enforce them (Bloom and White, 2016)?

The first shortcoming I identify relates to the fact that both Habermas and Mouffe favour language as the primary means of understanding and doing democratic practice. While the act of debate comprises a great deal of democratic practice, language in isolation seems insufficient for understanding and accounting for the everyday interactions and engagements between people in a variety of settings. Ranciére's injection of aesthetics into democratic practice partially accounts for the body, but his framework is broad and does not allow for an interpretation of the detail of how such embodied work is performed. As I discuss later in the thesis, the emergence of democratic agency can be positioned as a more embodied experience.

The second shortcoming relates to how Habermas and Mouffe envisage agency. In the work of Habermas, agency is sometimes written about as enacted by deliberators (when he theorises CA), which clashes with his view of a decentred subject. At other times he claims that agency resides in language (when he theorises SA), using Austin's (1962) account of performativity to support his position. Neither is sufficiently theorised for deeper understanding of the relational and embodied ways in which people enact their democratic agency. Mouffe's writing, on the other hand, seems to overlook agency entirely. Movement in subject-positions and commitments occurs when participants come face-to-face with difference. Differences will emerge when they clash, and the identity/practice re-configuration will then commence. Yet the meeting of difference, face-to-face, does not seem an adequate explanation for how agency emerges, as the process in practice could be more gradual or subtler, experienced over time and not always occurring within formal, face-to-face contexts. Both Habermas and Mouffe envisage democratic practice unfolding as people gather together in respectful places called 'forums' for the purpose of 'doing' democracy (either to engage in a rational, civilised dialogue or to passionately renegotiate their identifications), rather than as something that is enacted on a day-to-day basis in a wide range of mundane settings.

Finally, both authors assume that democratic practice unfolds in a benign environment in which most are dedicated to the project of generating democratic practice. In Habermas' case, the corrupt are excluded from the category of democratic practice and classified instead as engaged in a form of SA; in Mouffe's case, the corrupt are written off as enemies. In this erasure they both underplay the potential significance of corruption, particularly of contexts where it may be widespread, embedded within institutions and

inescapable, as well as the possibility that commitment to liberty and equality might not be widespread in certain societies.

I now move on to consider a performative account of agency as a valuable means of interpreting how democracy is practiced within the context of Montenegro. Such a focus does not dismiss deliberative and agonistic accounts but enriches them by providing insight into how they might surface as normative acts within a broader normative framework of a country in transition. I also move beyond agonism and deliberation – and their shortcomings – by seeking to understand how democracy could manifest in embodied and everyday ways. I approach democracy as a rich discourse that can serve as a resource for a more 'agential' generation of practice. From this perspective, discourses of democracy suggest certain ways of being, thinking and acting in the world that might be accepted, reconfigured or rejected.

IV Theoretical framework – Judith Butler's Performativity

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss Judith Butler's account of agency termed performativity (1999; 2004; 2006; 2011; 2015) as a perspective that can enhance understanding of democracy as an embodied and everyday practice, thus overcoming some of the 'formal', binary and normative prescriptions of deliberation and agonism. Butler's account provides a framework through which to understand how subjects become a site for democratic contest, defy conventional norms, respond to others in vulnerability and assert a certain collective presence. Moreover, Butler's account of the body is a useful way of helping me write my own embodied presence into the research, and in necessary relation to participants. Performativity allows me to offer an interpretation of democratic practice beyond the strictures of democracy theory and as something enmeshed in the practices of everyday life and work. Its relationship to theories of democracy can be positioned as viewing processes of deliberation and agonism as sedimented norms. The process of 'rational' deliberation can be re-interpreted as a series of practices aimed at asserting certain 'correct' and 'right' means of engaging democratically. Likewise, the borders between antagonism and agonism, when interpreted performatively and through the lens of everyday practice, can be viewed as more porous and ambiguous than assumed by Mouffe.

Judith Butler's focus on gender means that many scholars using her framework are drawn in their work to a gender "temptation" (Borgerson, 2005: 65). However, some

authors argue that Butler's writing is applicable to different spheres of life, not only gender, and that her concept of performativity can help us understand different kinds of phenomena, such as age, ethics or management (Borgerson, 2005; Kenny, 2010 and 2018; Riach et al, 2014 and 2016). Moreover, for Butler the subject cannot be observed outside practice (and vice-versa) as these are inextricably intertwined, and in this thesis I approach subjects and practices as entangled 'subject/practice', where subjects become intelligible through practice, and practices through agential acts. Gender in this thesis is explored as a set of norms interconnected with democratic practice but is not the sole focus.

The review of Butler's performativity unfolds via four interconnected sub-sections, each representing an important aspect of the theory in relation to democratic practice. The first offers an exploration of language as performative and of how language relates to subject formation. The second consists of a discussion of reiterative norms in Butler's work. The third offers an elaboration of the concept of recognition and the ways in which norms make certain subjects and practices (un)intelligible. The fourth enhances the first by building upon an understanding of practice as discursively constructed by contributing an account of embodied performativity. This section offers a more rigorous and detailed account of the body as a site for democratic practice.

4.1. Butler and language

Considering that scholars of both deliberation and agonism rely heavily on language for understanding democratic practice, it is important to explore the role of language as

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envisaged by Butler. In doing so, I begin by exploring the specific theoretical source from which Butler derives her understanding of language, Austin's (1962) account of performative language, and then focus on the way she builds on Austin to craft her own account of performativity.

Poststructuralist identity and language

In line with the broad sentiments of poststructuralism, Butler's account of performativity is reliant on language for an understanding of the construction of subjects (Butler, 1999; 2004; 2011; 2015). Subjects, Butler argues, are necessarily born into regimes of language not of their making, which inevitably shape them; yet, in turn, subjects also possess some power to shape their own language (Butler, 1999). Butler uses the term 'subject' to denote the restricted power of the individual to craft an identity: namely, the identity of a subject is performed as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, 2004: 1). Such constraint refers to the character of language as limited (i.e. not being able to signify all referents and make all subjects intelligible) and limiting (i.e. bearing on subjects: acting as regulatory mechanisms for their identifications).

Subjectivity is understood as a person's experience of 'reality', which is both shaped and expressed via language, i.e. a subject comes into subjectivity through speaking (Butler, 1999: 159), or "theorising about the self" (Harding, 2008: 48). Through speaking about themselves, subjects bring out the "aspect of the self to the 'I'" (ibid: 47), which would not be possible without language. Language enables us to explore how the:

social penetrates the language used in discussing the 'I'…how each version of the 'I'…interacts in different ways with the other and the different versions of the 'I' presented by that other (ibid: 55-56).

The term 'identity' is not understood as something stable and whole (Butler, 1999): 'identity' is not a "condition" but a "process" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 17) and should be understood as a myriad of identifications that are continuously and "discursively mediated" via language (ibid. 16). How these seemingly distinct identifications are fused into identities is, in part, discursively and diachronically negotiated between the subject and others through practice (Butler, 2004, 2011). The subject is always "in formation" (Borgerson, 2005: 68); it is a "linguistic occasion" (ibid) striving to become intelligible.

Butler argues that subject formation through language is an ongoing process that may have unforeseen consequences. Specifically, she holds language to be performative (Butler, 1999; 2004; 2011; 2015). The subject is continuously enacted via iterative speech acts (2011: 39) and is always a "doing", always in a state of becoming (1999: 34): speech acts become intelligible through continuous reiteration and:

> [l]earning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalised language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself (Butler, 1999: loc266).

The rules that govern intelligible speech acts refer to the "grammar" and "style" of speaking, which are not "politically neutral" (ibid). The 'I' expressed through speech acts

is "in part a consequence of the grammar that governs the availability of persons in language" (ibid: loc362). For example, the prevalence of only two gender-specific pronouns in the English language make 'female' and 'male' partially intelligible. Such a limited intelligibility of gender through language norms reflects, as well as constitutes, a binary social organisation of gender relations but is, on the other hand, restrictive, as it does not allow for alternative understandings of gender (e.g. a pronoun for transgender), which would make "it possible to understand people as genderful or ungendered, and gender as multiplicity" (Knights and Thanem, 2011: 23). The more speech acts are repeated, the more sedimented the intelligibility of a subject becomes, and this continuous reiteration of speech acts means that identity is never a condition, never fixed and static, but is rather a process that unfolds unremittingly via language, even when it appears stable (Jenkins and Finneman, 2018).

Considering that much of democratic practice is purported to take place through debates, according to theorists of democratic practice, understanding language as performative is important for understanding how subjects (and the demands they raise) of democratic practice emerge and become (or not) intelligible.

Austin's account of performative language and Butler

In her reading of performative speech acts, Butler draws upon, but also departs from, the work of John L. Austin (1962) who developed a speech act theory that treats language as performative. The core of the theory is that language is to be studied according to the type of action utterances perform. Austin (1962) distinguishes between three kinds of speech acts – locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary (see section 3.2.1, Chapter 3).

These speech acts enact an effect through utterances, such as comfort or irritation. Thus, performativity refers to "that characteristic of linguistic utterances that in the moment of making the utterance makes something happen" (Butler, 2015: 28). In each case, there is an assumption that there is a performer behind the utterances who intends the speech acts to arrive at particular outcomes.

Although Austin's classification of speech acts renders them performative, i.e. as something that "brings some phenomena into being [or] makes a set of events happen" (Butler, 2015: 28), he differentiates between utterances that are descriptive (e.g. my name is Nela) and those that instigate some process or effect a change (e.g. when a judge pronounces a defendant 'not guilty').

Butler builds on Austin's (1962) theory in three ways. First, she places a poststructuralist emphasis on Austin's work by drawing attention to the disciplinary effects of repetitive speech acts performed in familiar environments (de Souza et al, 2016). For example, we come to think of democratic practices as closely tied to elections, rather than more informal day-to-day practice, through familiar speech acts of results announced in public halls, of victory and concession speeches made. Such routines and rituals of speech reify meaning and influence future practice and identities: for instance, we come to think of democracy as embodied in elected politicians and our act as voters of either voting for, against, or not voting at all.

Second, drawing on Derrida (1988), Butler argues that words are not tied solely to particular contexts and that they may put something in motion even when they are not spoken in a traditionally 'corresponding' context. She has been criticised for her claim

that words can performatively exceed their originating context, for the effectiveness of words, it is argued, depends precisely on the 'convention' a particular word is tied to (e.g. a judge uttering: 'I pronounce you guilty' in the context of a court is performative, yet outside a court the utterance will not be effective) (Boucher, 2006: 126). However, even though speech acts derive much meaning from the context of the convention in which they are repeatedly uttered, these acts do "not take place in the isolated moment of its utterance, but [are] the 'condensation' of past, present, and even future unforeseen meanings" (Salih, 2002: 102). The meaning of words, Butler (2011) claims, cannot be fully 'saturated' in a particular context and "meanings...exceed [the] purposes for which they are intended" (Butler, 1999: 6).

For example, after a victim of sex trafficking was sentenced and imprisoned in Montenegro, WRC activists subverted the language often used in the very courts that perpetuated this particular injustice. They drew upon signifiers such as 'evidence' and 'legitimacy', cited 'articles' of 'laws', judged evidence used against the victim as 'inadmissible' and 'incomplete'. The aim of such a strategy was to subvert the practice of a trial (see Vijesti, 2015b), while also drawing attention to the formalised injustices experienced within this passive construction of identity in relation to the law. Discourse can, therefore, from a performative perspective, become democratised, with the 'original' or 'traditional' meaning contested between actors and groups (Rothenberg, 2006).

Third, as meanings 'exceed' their intended purposes, it follows that a speaker has limited power over words and their effects (Butler, 2011: 171). There is no all-powerful subject that 'commands' language and is in control of the consequences that spoken language performs, as suggested by Habermas in his account of deliberative democratic practice.

Once we see language as a constant movement of differences in which there is no stable resting point, we can no longer appeal to reality as a refuge independent of language: everything acquires the instability and ambiguity that Derrida (1993 [1970]: 223-224) claims to be inherent in language. There is only "a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability…a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power" (Butler, 2011: 171).

In terms of democratic practice, one might draw on Butler to consider discourses of democracy persisting from past sedimented traditions but also capable of change and subversion, as they are used in unfamiliar contexts and in unfamiliar ways. Such re-iterations of democratic practice hold the possibility of re-shaping democratic discourses/identities.

4.2. Performativity and norms

Besides offering a range of norms for practicing democracy, theorists of agonism and deliberation find social norms crucial for enacting democratic practice, be it as a 'reservoir' of shared meaning relevant for redeeming a validity claim (Habermas, 1984: 38-39), or as a source of conflict between actors (Mouffe, 2013: 7). However, neither offers a definition or detailed insight into the workings of social norms and how they bear on subjects in the depth that Butler does.

Butler offers a dynamic and nuanced account of reiterative norms, an account that approaches norms as both disciplinary and as a source for 'agentic' (Butler, 2011: 83)

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practice. Norms are defined as "compelling social fictions" (Butler, 1999: 191), the sedimentation of which produces "a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural" (ibid). From this basis, acts produce norms, and vice versa. Norms and acts partially govern our subjectivity, yet their co-constitutive entanglement opens up a space for different identifications/practices to emerge (Butler, 2004 and 2011). Through her elaboration of reiterative norms, Butler provides an account of where agency stems from and how we can understand agency from a poststructuralist perspective. While Butler acknowledges that identity can be performed in novel and different ways, she argues that there is no agentic subject behind such performativity (1999: 34): her account of agency is "subjectless" (Boucher, 2006: 115; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016: 264).

For Butler, norms are not only reproduced but are also impregnated with the "potential production of difference emerging from required modes of behaviour – not necessarily to be understood as intentional resistance" (Borgerson, 2005: 68). Saying that resistance to the norm might not be intentional suggests that a subject is not sovereign over its agency. Rather, Butler (2004; 2011) states that the power of social norms is inescapable and that one will always be restricted within the boundaries of pre-established, sedimented social norms, i.e. they bear upon the subject and enact it. Therefore, even when we actively resist, escaping the boundaries of one social norm does not necessarily mean that it is an act of subversion but, rather, an act of "substitution" of one existing norm for another (Butler, 2011: 80).

However, even though such a view implies a totalising power of social norms, they are not perceived as "mono-deterministic forces" (Schaefer and Wickert, 2016: 217), for the

regulatory norm can be "turned against itself to spawn re-articulations that call into question the hegemonic force" of such a norm (Butler, 2011: xi). Butler draws on Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1978) here to underline the generative power of discourses, that even instituted prohibitions can provide suitable conditions for a proliferation of different discourses.

Norms become effective in regulating the self via processes of continuous reiteration (Butler, 2011: 70). The norm is continuously repeated and reaffirmed via both informal and formal social institutions, e.g. via customs and official laws. Through this repetition an "'I' is secured", an 'I' whose boundaries are etched by "citing or miming" the norm (ibid: 71). In turn, the established identity/practice further "(re)invokes and (re)invests the symbolic law" (ibid.) of the norm, rendering it naturalised. This is a process via which subject-positions are assumed and understood as "hegemonic" (e.g. whiteness, femininity, etc.) – as a sedimentation of perceived collective identifications (Jenkins and Finneman, 2018: 158).

Yet each of the repetitions performed may "go awry...and produce new and even subversive effects" (Butler, 2009: iii). The norm itself provides the conditions for resisting that norm and may turn against itself. Citing a norm in everyday speech and acts is an ongoing process and while it "plays the role of producing identities and foreclosing others maintaining the illusion of natural categories of behaviour" (Borgerson, 2005: 68), it also serves as a vehicle through which a subject can be undone (Butler, 2004: 333; see also Kenny and Fotaki, 2014; Nicholson and Carroll, 2013). The rupture within such citing often occurs at the borders of foreclosure (Butler, 1999:

loc287), when "the right way [of life] is decided in advance" (Butler, 2004: 39), but when such a life is perceived as "unliveable" (ibid: 4).

One's own sense of self derives from existing norms (Joy et al, 2015), yet these are norms that are constantly being reworked and rearticulated via discursive/bodily enactments of these norms (Butler, 1999), such as democratic practices. On the one hand, a person is "dependent on this outside" to 'establish' what one is (Butler, 2004: 7) and on the other, the reiteration of norms via 'oneself' alters and re-inscribes these norms in novel ways (Butler, 2011). In this sense the self is always already "other to [oneself]" (Butler, 2004: 15) as the "sociality of norms exceeds [one's] inception and [one's] demise" (ibid).

With regards to this research, I explore what kinds of normative democratic frameworks members of WRC operate within and explore the agency enacted within and beyond these frameworks: whether norms are primarily informal or whether they are driven by formal government procedures and informal traditions, and whether such norms prompt an 'agentic' reinscription. Equally, I consider sources of discourses and identifications external to Montenegro, such as the norms of international donors or even the norms of various accounts of feminism.

4.3. Performativity and recognition

Butler's account of recognition allows us to develop a framework for better understanding how practitioners position themselves as democratic subjects and, in turn, how they are positioned by the normative environment they inhabit and influence.

As noted earlier, we come into this world "on the condition that the social world is already there" (Butler, 2004: 32). This social world, although multiple and fragmented, provides the norms under which we are identified as particular human beings. In other words, "the sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself" (ibid). Norms provide a framework for the "intelligibility" of the self (ibid: 42) and without them we would not be recognisable (Kenny, 2018). Yet, on the other hand, these very norms provide within their language gaps and contradictions the possibility for us to dis-identify.

Butler's account of recognition adds depth to an understanding of how norms make certain democratic subjects/practices (un)intelligible and socially (un)accepted (Tyler, 2018). Subjects are driven by the desire to be socially recognised, and such a process may involve violence (death even) (Butler, 2011: 91), with bodies emerging as the site of "discriminatory exclusionary practices and violence" (Fotaki et al, 2014: 1241), suggesting that struggle may lie at the heart of performed democratic practice. In sum, we are both identified and dis-identified by, and in relation to, reiterative existing norms. But how does the process of recognition occur in the first place?

Butler draws on Althusser's ([1970] 2008) concept of interpellation to demonstrate the process by which a subject becomes socially constructed (Butler, 2011). She provides Althusser's example of a police officer hailing the subject in the street: 'Hey, you there!' as an example of ideology at work, through which a subject is formed (ibid). The moment the subject recognises the call of the law, s/he becomes interpellated, s/he becomes a subject. The subject sees her/himself in relation to the law and a symbolic fabric that positions people in certain ways (criminals, helpful citizens, and so on): the law (the

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norm) calls the subject and the subject, in turn, by virtue of answering the call, complies with the law (Butler, 2011; Harding et al, 2014).

This moment of compliance to the law is the moment where Butler departs from Althusser. Butler provides her own example of being interpellated at birth: when a nurse/ a doctor enacts a process of identification upon a baby e.g. by naming it 'a girl'. It is at this very moment, Butler argues, that the process of "girling" begins (Butler, 2011: xvii). She agrees with Althusser that norms exist prior to our entering the world but, unlike Althusser, Butler argues that norms may not necessarily have a totalising effect upon the subject. Some interpellated girls may happily (or nor so happily) be recognised by existing social norms and may in turn 'answer' to that call by complying with existing norms. Yet, some may find "the terms by which [they are] recognised make life unliveable" (Butler, 2004: 4) and may attempt to dis-identify. Fear of punishment due to a lack of compliance to norms may become overturned by a fear of living a life under the conditions that norms provide (Butler, 2011: 82). One could draw on this account of recognition to enrich understanding of practitioners' relationship with norms of democracy. Practitioners, for example, may recognise existing norms of democracy as 'unliveable', a system that does not recognise them as viable subjects, and may embark on a process of re-inscribing and challenging such norms through counter-practices.

Depending on context, Butler argues, some individuals are deemed more 'viable' than others – in Ranciére's (2012) terms, more 'sensible' than others. To illustrate her argument, Butler (2004) elaborates upon what makes us 'human' and concludes that some of us are, in certain contexts, more or less human depending on socially intelligible/acceptable notions of gender, race, ethnicity, and other socially accepted

categories of 'human'. However, the conditions under which we are recognised as 'viable' are constructed via discursive embodiments and are thus open to change (Butler, 2009).

In this process of re-performing norms, subject formation is still driven by the desire to be recognised as "socially viable being[s]" (Butler, 2004: 2) but also by what Butler refers to as fantasy. Fantasy is not contrasted with reality for Butler, though. Rather, "it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality"; reality is fantasy's "constitutive outside" that enables us to "imagine ourselves and others otherwise" (Butler, 2004: 29). Envisaging the future is a process of striving towards something that cannot be fully predicted and is not therefore presented as a smooth process. Envisaging a future 'self' is a process whose 'realisation' suggests "a certain agonism and contestation" (ibid: 39): an imagined version of the 'self' may (and probably will) clash with existing frameworks of recognition offered in the form of social norms.

It is worth noting here that the initial recognition of the subject can never be fully secured and that it is impossible to "fully inhabit the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilised" (Butler, 2011: 171). This means that the 'citation' of the norm is never repeated in its entirety (each repetition of the norm may not be the same). This imperfect citation "implies the instability and incompleteness" (ibid) of norms and of identity. Such instability further implies that a subject may not feel fully recognised by the social norm and may, in turn, seek out further reinscription and recitation of the norm in order to secure her/his self, which is always self-defeating (Clarke and Knights, 2015).

In sum, an 'I' is first and foremost formed through the act of address, which "mobilises [its] place in speech" (Butler, 2011: 171), which in turn implies that social recognition is prior to subject formation. The recognised subject may reject such recognition later on and attempt to dis-identify. Yet the very process of disidentification will always be performed in relation to that initial recognition (initial social norms) via which the subject was formed.

An emphasis on performativity and recognition for this research raises questions as to which linguistic/embodied acts are regarded as intelligible within the scene of study. For example, certain ways of communicating and enacting democratic practice drawn from feminism may be regarded by broader discursive communities as entirely foreign, or even threatening. Or, this perspective might offer ways of analysing how people strive to make themselves intelligible through democratic practice and the extent to which they are prepared to compromise with their democratic allies and adversaries in order to do so.

4.4. Performativity and body

Butler's account of the body enables a view of democratic practice as performed in embodied ways that are disciplined by, but that also cut across and through, discourses of democracy, foregrounding the bodies of practitioners as sites of democratic practice. This is a valuable perspective because, as Knights and Clarke (2017: 340) argue, notions of self are primarily constituted in disembodied ways in the academic literature, "largely through...dominant discursive, linguistic and often masculine narratives" (see also

Brown and Coupland; Clarke and Knights, 2015; Coupland, 2015; Fotaki et al, 2014; Harding et al, 2014; Kachtan and Wasserman, 2015; Kenny and Fotaki, 2015; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014). Likewise, theories of democratic practice assume that engagement between democratic actors unfolds largely though language, overlooking the corporeal aspects of such interactions. While it is credible to assume that democratic practice does take place through the language of debating (within parliamentary sessions, legislative committees and town hall meetings), even this relatively narrow segment of practice requires speaking or signalling bodies for its effects to become intelligible. Practice and practitioners, therefore, need to be understood as "negotiated, created, threatened, bolstered, reproduced [and] overhauled…through ongoing, embodied interaction" (Alvesson and Robertson, 2015: 11).

Referring to bodies as 'sites' can create an impression of subjects as passive. However, Butler provides an agentic account of bodies that can offer a much-needed supplement to the underdeveloped account within the democratic practice and NGO literatures. She argues that performativity is not solely enacted via speech acts, but also, and simultaneously, via "bodily acts" (Butler, 2004: 198): we 'park' our bodies amongst others, in the street, workplace and social spaces, and in doing so bodies enact a certain meaning (Butler, 2015). The body conveys and enacts meaning through its presence, even when seemingly passive (Coupland, 2015) – it is always performative, in other words.

Contested bodies

Butler theorises the body through the sex/gender binary (1999; 2004; 2011) with the aim of subverting this very binary – to problematise the binary understanding of sex (body) and gender (discursive practices related to sex as understood via the natural sciences) and, given the gendered nature of the organisation I research, it is worth bearing with Butler's elaboration, as it offers conceptual and analytical insight into the practices of a women's organisation within a scene of patriarchy. Butler argues that sex has been traditionally understood through discursive practices of biology and medicine, i.e. the chromosomal and hormonal composition of bodies, reproductive organs and so on (Butler, 2011; de Souza et al, 2016). Repetitive inscription of such discursive practices (via the proliferation of textbooks that offer 'facts' about bodies, medical practices and instruments, etc.) became naturalised over time and are constitutive of the ways in which we understand gender (Bowring and Brewis, 2009).

Butler (1999) sets herself two objectives in relation to embodiment in general and sex and gender in particular. The first is to deconstruct important social constructs, such as sex and gender, as neither purely material nor discursive. Instead, they constitute one another in complex, contested and interdependent ways. This interpretation runs somewhat counter to the "linguistic idealism" (Butler, 2011: 4) of some poststructuralists, who insist that "everything [including the material] is language" (Elliot, 2014: 40). In contrast, Butler argues that "to deconstruct the matter is not to negate or to do away with the usefulness of the term" (2015: 5).

In *Bodies that Matter* (2011), Butler problematises the accounts[19] of Plato, Aristotle, Freud and Lacan in order to deconstruct the historical terrain on and via which sexual difference is inscribed. Understanding of social constructs is reinforced through repetitive bodily practices and through the very construction of a symbolic realm via which we come to know and experience ourselves in everyday life (Cabantous et al, 2016).

To counter the discourse of naturalised sex difference, Butler states that "a good ten per cent of the population has chromosomal variation that does not fit neatly into the XX-female and XY-male set of categories" (1999: 145). This implies that the difference between the sexes could have been constructed otherwise, which would, in turn, bear differently on language and thus the social construction of gender. The 'truth' of sex, she argues, is echoed not only in the academic literature but also in how male and female sex/gender is perceived socially and known through a reproduction of material and symbolic norms. Therefore, for Butler, "to invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures" (2011: 22) and thus any recourse to matter in theory "requires that we return to matter as a sign which in its redoublings and contradictions enacts an inchoate drama of sexual difference" (ibid). Butler claims that the body as we know it is not merely a "mute facticity" (Butler, 1999: 50) but is a discursively regulated inscription, its "materiality arises in a matrix of power relations" (ibid.).

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[19] Specifically, Butler critically assesses the accounts of *cosmology* (Plato), *hyle* (Aristotle), the *Oedipus complex* (Freud) and *the name-of-the-father* (Lacan).

Butler's reading offers insight to this research as it enables a view of the bodies of practitioners as dynamic and continuous entanglements of social/material acts that reproduce and reconfigure one another through democratic practice. Studying bodies separately from their social construction would only entrench further the binaries that Butler seeks to problematise (Thanem and Knights, 2012). Additionally, bodies should be understood not only through their interaction with the observed context but as sedimented enactments of social/material practices through time. Therefore, it becomes possible to interpret the bodies of democratic practitioners as sites of democratic practices, which could challenge certain patriarchal practices through engagement with predominantly male politicians and a patriarchal normative culture.

Language and the body

Butler does not deny the existence of the material body that undermines and informs linguistic practices and is, to borrow her phrase from elsewhere, not completely 'intelligible' via language (Butler, 2011: xv). This infers that language fails to entirely signify what it refers to via the term 'body' (Cabantous et al, 2016; Fotaki et al, 2014). That said, Butler does argue that language has a regulatory power over bodies and that the effects of language on the body are often tangible (Butler, 2004). For example, language privileging male offspring in Montenegro has a tangible effect on the bodies of women who are pressured to abort female foetuses.

The impression gathered from the conception of language as regulatory force is that language somehow imprints on, and writes a history over, 'the body'; that body is

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something experienced viscerally (we hurt, we die, etc.), yet something whose meaning is also externally imposed via language – "site[s] in which relations of power [intersect]" (Brown and Coupland, 2015: 1330). Yet, Butler argues that the body is a "construct which is forcibly materialised through time [via] regulatory norms" (Butler, 2011: xi). 'Sex' (traditionally assumed to be exclusively of the body) is itself a "process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effects of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (ibid: xviii).

Butler has been criticised for making recourse to language whenever she attempts to provide an account of the body (Barad, 2007; Salih, 2002), because "she reduces bodies to effects of discourse" (Knights and Thanem, 2011: 26). Indeed, Butler argues that language not only inscribes onto a surface but also produces the surface itself. Language is constitutive of body. However, she also argues that bodies can resist and subvert discursive practices, such that bodies and discourse are intertwined, entangled and impossible to separate (Butler, 2011: 37-39).

Butler admits that it is difficult to talk about 'the body' in general as "grammar fails us" (Butler, 2011: 13). The body is best understood if we attempt to see language itself as material and explore how its materiality bears upon the materiality of the body and vice versa. Speaking is a bodily act that requires "larynx, the lungs, the lips and the mouth" (Butler, 2004: 172). Sound, digital, written and sign language are also material, relying on the body for communicative effect. When we speak we also perform something, we assert our presence: "[speaking] constitutes a certain presentation of the body" (ibid). We convey meaning via speech and impact upon others not only through words themselves but also through the embodied presentation of that meaning, and that which
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is not intended to be conveyed at all (Cabantous et al., 2016; Jenkins and Finneman, 2018). On the other hand, our interlocutors evoke different responses in us (e.g. make us cry or laugh, intentionally or not). Speaking therefore requires the body and affects the body. Each discursive/bodily act begets more materialities, influencing the basis upon which further acts and bodily presences will be performed and understood. We cannot, for example, enact democratic practice outside our bodies – both in terms of conveying or receiving meaning, and we also enact practice through our bodies (e.g. occupying streets in protests, blocking police cordons, inserting ourselves into parliaments, government buildings, etc.)

Yet, there will always be "a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented" via language (Butler, 2004: 199). While we are aware of that which we term 'body' at all times (e.g. via pleasure or pain), and while we experience the world in the embodied manner, bodies somehow still escape our systems of knowing. There will always be an excess of a signified referent that is "never fully of language" (Butler, 2011: 37) and, thus, falls out of the analysis.

Such an unknowing of the body might present a significant challenge for research, in terms of what it is possible to notice, describe and analyse. What we can study, however, is the signification that "produces an effect of its own procedure" (Butler, 2011: 6), that is, the body that signification "simultaneously claim[s] to discover as that which precedes its own action" (ibid.). We might explore how bodies are positioned in certain ways via language but also how bodies seem to 'respond' to and subvert such positioning. Signification "contours" the body and so "produces it" (ibid); signification and the referents it produces "have history and historicity" (ibid: 36) that can be problematised,

as such a historicity is always a construct of something that we may have come to perceive as 'natural' (Joy et al, 2015).

Some authors suggest that 'embodiment' is a more satisfactory term than 'the body', as the latter can be said to further reinforce a body and mind binary, while embodiment denotes the continuous process of the dynamic enactments of the two, their co-constitutive character (Knights and Thanem, 2011; Riach et al, 2016; Thanem and Knights, 2012). Moreover, these authors suggest that it is not enough to speak and write about embodiment but that researchers need to account for their own bodily presence in the field, and not only in nominal terms such as being 'happy', 'nervous', 'bored', etc. but through providing a reflexive and descriptive account of those feelings: "of your heart pumping, eye-lids closing, armpits sweating, stomach aching, your mouth drying out" (Thanem and Knights, 2012: 22). Incorporating the researcher's embodiments can help not merely to deconstruct the binaries between mind/body, reason/emotions, nature/culture but also to "dissolve" them (Knights and Thanem, 2011: 3).

Plural embodied performativity

Butler (2015) argues that "embodied and plural performativity" (p.12) is crucial for understanding "the people" (ibid.) in democratic practice, especially in an environment where social forms of democracy have been replaced by "entrepreneurial modalities supported by fierce ideologies of individual responsibility and the obligation to maximise one's own market value" (p.15). What Butler means by plural embodied performativity is salient for this research and so its overlapping dimensions will now need to be unpacked.

The first dimension to highlight is Butler's account of participants in public assembly exposing their bodies and making them *vulnerable*. The notion of protestors opening their bodies to harm and abuses of power as a form of democratic practice will seem familiar for people who have been involved in public demonstrations, which always contain within them the potential for a degree of violence (Graeber, 2014). Vulnerability, for Butler, is "understood as a deliberate exposure to power" (2016: 22) and represents the mobilising force behind collective resistance – without people making their bodies vulnerable together in public, assembly loses its performative power.

The second dimension is that of relationality, a concept in co-dependent relation in Butler to vulnerability. Vulnerability holds the potential, according to Butler (2015 and 2016), to bring people together through a form of empathetic relationality. Underlying this relationship in Butler (2006 and 2016) is her embodied concern with what counts as a liveable life. The experiences of the marginalised, oppressed and underprivileged are significant for Butler (2006) because they highlight the precarious conditions experienced under purportedly liberal and democratic frameworks. Yet the precarity of bodies holds a more general salience for Butler (2006), in the sense that precarity makes visible a common ontological condition of the vulnerability of the human in general, a commonality that can serve as the basis for connection, understanding and solidarity (Butler, 2015). However, vulnerability here should not be mistaken for weakness, as for Butler, such shared vulnerability is constitutive of agency: "receptivity and responsiveness become the basis for mobilising vulnerability rather than engaging in its destructive denial" (2016: 25).

The third and final dimension of relevance here is that of a relational infrastructure. Moments where another's vulnerability, or one's own vulnerability, are surfaced, for Butler, underline the inherently relational condition of all subjects: "each 'I' brings the 'we along" (2015: 51). Experiences of loss can bring to light how any subject is dependent upon an "infrastructure" (2016: 21) of others – their physical presence, words and affective support. In moments when such an infrastructure is removed, we see in sharp focus our intra-dependencies on others in constituting what we know as 'I', or 'we'. Understood in this way "the body is less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living" (Butler, 2016: 19). Generative experiences of assembly are capable of building a powerful form of democratic agency precisely because they create instances of people forming infrastructures of dependence between one another on egalitarian terms, as they experience a collective form of vulnerability.

In conclusion, embodied enactments of democratic practice seem particularly relevant bearing in mind that the public-democratic life of Montenegro is predominantly considered a male domain (see CEDAW, 2017). Drawing out the embodied experiences of practitioners opens the possibility of engaging with the ways in which practitioners use their bodies in ways that defy the democratic norms of the setting, as well as the ways in which their bodies may be disciplined by certain masculine norms. Focusing on plural embodiment enables me to draw out the ways in which practitioners make themselves vulnerable and the ways in which they relate to others through such vulnerability. Finally, Butler allows me to perceive how vulnerability may be turned into strength, a force that holds the potential to mobilise large bodies of people.

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IV Summary

This chapter has outlined Judith Butler's theory of performativity as a means of deepening understanding of how democratic practice is enacted by particular subjects, who can be understood as operating within a field of re-iterative norms and who 'respond' and act in embodied ways. It was positioned as particularly salient in a research setting that is as dominated by patriarchal norms as Montenegro. The theory thus supplements the accounts of democratic practice offered by, predominantly, Habermas and Mouffe, understanding them as enacted through a fluid and ongoing web of practices, not necessarily only within formal and discrete spaces for democratic engagement. Adopting Butler's account of performativity enables a reading of Habermas and Mouffe as offering a framework of regulative norms under which democratic practice could be enacted. The theory provides a novel way of understanding the 'agentic' enactment of democratic practice from the perspective of re-iterative norms that may result in different subjects/practices. Moreover, through the concept of recognition, Butler provides a framework for understanding why some practices/subjects may be more intelligible than others and how the process of 'intelligising' new formations unfolds. A performative focus also offers a way of understanding how subjects can resist norms in embodied and unexpected ways – crafting a more nuanced and novel form of democratic practice/subjectivities that escapes neat linguistic capture. From Butler, we can re-interpret democratic practices (of deliberation, agonism or something else) as embodied/discursive, entangled in a continuous relationship of co-production. Finally, her plural account of embodiment makes possible a relational reading of bodies as ontologically entangled, joined together in vulnerability, something that may be utilised as a strength in democratic practice.

V Methodology – Discourse-based ethnography

Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology adopted as a means of addressing the RQ and the performative conceptual focus of the research. Underlying the RQ are some important points of emphasis, namely: how those enacting democratic practice influence and inform practice and how practice bears on practitioners; how practitioners inter-relate with the dominant discursive fabric of the context in which they live and work; and how these enactments of practice relate to larger discourses and norms of democracy within a setting of deeply unequal power relationships.

I pursue the RQ and related objectives by adopting a poststructuralist ontology and epistemology. Poststructuralism is an onto-epistemological position in itself, yet it is often situated within the ontology of social constructionism, so that it assumes multiple, socially constructed and contested realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Such a reading of 'reality' is a consequence of conflating ontology and epistemology. Namely, ontology, or assumptions made about reality, within poststructuralism are inseparable from its epistemological assumptions, i.e. 'reality' is inseparable from theory (Erickson, 2011), so how we come to know 'reality' will influence the 'reality' produced and vice versa. In sum, poststructuralism is concerned with the relationship between the subject (the person subjected to and re-performing knowledge), knowledge itself (what kind of knowledge is being produced) and language (how that knowledge is produced and how it shapes meaning), and aims to analyse the interplay between micro adoption and

subversion of discourse within the broader discursive environment.

Following the poststructuralist and performative nature of the research, practitioners are approached as people with voice, those who generate 'democratic' practices via their day-to-day work – people intertwined with a context of democratic and social practice, a context that also inhibits, marginalises and oppresses women. Practices are adopted as the empirical focus of this research as they hold the potential to illuminate people's sense of self within a larger discursive environment (Clarke and Knights, 2015; Ybema et al, 2009: 300). Remaining faithful to the performative emphasis of the research, I seek to draw out the rich dimensions at play in enactments of democratic practices – the embodied visual and linguistic components.

I combine discourse analysis with ethnography as a suitable means of generating and representing data related to democratic practice, allowing me to explore its discursive (linguistic and visual) tapestry through immersive and reflexive engagement. Discursive forms of ethnography are situated within a constructionist paradigm that assumes truth as being "continually constructed and reconstructed", reality as multiple and meanings attached to any social phenomena as numerous (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 8). Van Maanen (2010: 248) refers to such ethnographies as "poststructural tales", which is an appropriate description of my approach to generating research data in the sense that knowledge is co-produced between researcher and participants.

The research focuses on one setting, the Women's Rights Centre (WRC). Focusing on one research setting enables an exploration of the context-bound social phenomena at play, obtaining 'intimate' knowledge of the research scene (Harding et al, 2014; Lucas et al,

2017), brought to life through the diverse voices, bodies and interpretations that constitute the field. Yet, the primary intention informing the approach adopted is to allow the reader the opportunity to experience what it is like to inhabit the embodied-discursive reality of practitioners in WRC.

The chapter is structured through a general explanation of the methodology and methods adopted, followed by my description of how I adopted and adapted these. First, I justify my ethnographic methodology and, second, continue by exploring and setting out the relevant aspects of a discourse-based ethnography. Third, I outline my data collection methods. Fourth, I describe my abductive, reflexive and discourse-based data analysis of linguistic and visual material. Finally, I offer an account of the research ethics procedure I followed.

5.1. Ethnography and discourse analysis

I adopted a combination of ethnography and discourse analysis (Bardon et al, 2017, Cooren et al, 2008, Hodgson, 2005, Kenny 2010, Nicholson and Carroll, 2013; Symon and Pritchard, 2015) as a suitable means of investigating the rich and multidimensional performative practice of NGO workers. It is an approach that attempts to gain insight from a depth of immersion in a community of language and materiality (Pritchard, 2012). Such an approach is a suitable methodology because it combines a rich account of a scene of study with the textual rigour of discourse analysis (Pritchard, 2012; Watson and Watson, 2012).

Ethnography is particularly valuable for "establish[ing] the context of the discourse one wants to study" (Oberhuber and Krzyzanowski, 2008: 190), and discourse analysis, on the other hand, can help one understand the entanglement of the discursive/embodied practices that constitute any context (Kenny, 2010). Ethnographic research can go hand in hand with discourse analysis because "everything encountered [in the field] has to be treated as potentially meaningful" (Oberhuber and Krzyzanowski, 2008: 188) and discursively 'read' by talking, asking questions, conversing, describing and deciphering. Through engaging with one another in a particular context, research participants and researcher "actively co-construct the texts' meaning" (Koller, 2012: 23) according to their relation to the context, which is filtered through their own background experiences and knowledge.

5.1.1. An ethnographic approach to research: theory and method

Ethnography is perhaps best described as a versatile research strategy that may encompass a number of ontologies and epistemologies, including poststructuralism (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). It is sometimes likened to documentary through virtue of "the fact that somebody actually goes out beyond the ivory towers of employment…to live like those who are studied" (Van Maanen, 2010: 242). The most significant characteristic of ethnography is therefore its prioritisation of an in-depth account of a scene of study and the lived experiences of participants within that scene (Taylor, 2010; Yanow, 2012). Through immersion, ethnography enables the researcher to learn about the subjective experiences of participants first-hand (Watson, 2011: 202), seeking to experience and observe the "real-time practices" (Symon and Pritchard, 2015:

246) of subjects. The aim of ethnographic research is to offer the reader a "room with a view" (Cunliffe, 2010: 226) – a convincing perspective on what it means to inhabit the world of a particular community, to see through their categories of sensemaking (Watson, 2011).

Ethnography requires a rich familiarity with a scene of study. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state that researchers need to identify and study the setting(s) their research is to be based within as well as to select participants for their research project. This can be achieved by "opportunistic observation" (Taylor, 2010: 72), where the researcher uses every opportunity available to observe the potential research settings and participants before deciding where, how or whom to approach.

Becoming part of the WRC community:

The ethnographic tenor of my research started early, through initial scouting for a suitable research setting and subsequent early immersion in that setting. I began actively searching for an organisation to base my research in as early as 2014. After receiving numerous recommendations about WRC's 'good practice' from a number of practitioners and citizens I began profiling the organisation in January 2015. This involved performing an "online ethnography" (Courpasson, 2017: 1282) - tracking the organisation's activities via its website, social media page and third party media outlets in order to familiarise myself with the kind of practice that WRC performs, before establishing first contact in July 2015.

At this point in time I was already convinced that WRC was a suitable organisation for study, as its mission, as well as purported practice, aligned well with the requirements of the RQ. For example, I was particularly struck by the critical assessment of the proposed law on social protection that WRC offered (see Chapter 6), as well as with its campaign to familiarise the general public with the topic. Most importantly, as illustrated by this example, what attracted my attention was WRC's active engagement in influencing and creating democratic practice in the country.

I initially made contact via the head of the organisation, through online messaging. Our conversations focused on sharing and exploring one another's worldviews, particularly in relation to gender-equal politics, and experiences of activism. Having established that we possessed a shared set of interests and values, the head of the organisation agreed to meet me while I was in Montenegro. What was supposed to be a short, introductory coffee turned into a long exchange on the ways in which Montenegro could become a more democratic society were gender equality widely accepted and supported. Leaving our plans open-ended, we agreed to keep avenues of communication open.

After this encounter, I continued with the online ethnography, but now with less of a distance between the organisation and me (Holm and Fairhurst, 2017) – instead of observing the organisation's activities online, I started engaging in conversations either via email, Messenger or through the comments section on its social media page. In retrospect, although I was drawn in by common interests, and the exercise felt more like fun than work, engaging with the pre-fieldwork online ethnography was a sensible strategy, as I managed to familiarise myself with events and causes that were significant

for WRC practitioners, enabling me to more effectively become familiar with the discursive community: its language, norms and relationships with external stakeholders.

As soon as the beginning of March 2016 I met the rest of the WRC team. I thought it important to try to build relationships with research participants gradually in order to make the transition from the virtual to the 'actual' more organic. I called into its premises once more before joining the team in October 2016, while maintaining regular communication with the organisation throughout. After obtaining institutional ethics approval, I officially assumed a participant-observer role in WRC, on October 1, 2016.

I explained my role (what I was attempting to learn and how), after which one of the participants suggested that each member of the organisation should provide me with "a brief walk-through" (Nikola) of their day-to-day work. Others, including myself, agreed to the idea and in the following few days each of the participants provided me with a short induction relating to their role. This strategy was useful, as it gave me a clearer idea of what I could expect to learn but also provided us with the opportunity to get to know one other in more depth. Throughout the fieldwork, but especially in the first few weeks, I noticed how they picked up on my body language (e.g. when they perceived that I was confused, they would stop whatever they were doing and patiently elaborate on the context in order to help me understand). The transition from online ethnography to on-the-ground fieldwork felt seamless; the beginning of my work in the organisation was experienced as one of familiarity, and an invitation to observe and engage in a meeting with one of the organisation's important international stakeholders on my first day in the field suggests that the feeling was mutual.

Ethnographer identity:

A typical characteristic of ethnographic research is an awareness the researcher brings concerning how their own experiences and values relate to the scene being researched and how these identifications and experiences might affect interpretation (Cunliffe, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Taylor and Smith, 2008). The ethnographer not only has to be aware that they are a part of the research process but also how their presence in the research setting might bear on the participants' behaviour and responses. This process of active and critical examination of one's subjective positioning, and the potential impact it may have on the research process, is known as reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Koch et al, 2014).

Not engaging in the process of reflexivity can be harmful towards participants. Taylor and Smith (2008) provide an example of how anthropologists from the global North misrepresented kinship relations and gender roles in the global South, engaging, thus, in a process of 'misrecognition' and misrepresentation of particular cultures (see Taylor, 1994). Projecting a particular, perceived identity onto participants may hold consequences for how readers observe certain groups but also for how participants view themselves. It is worth noting here that this discussion is not reserved only for ethnographic research but is relevant to research in general (Hammersley, 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The danger of perceived misrecognition exists even in poststructuralist ethnographic research, where, despite an orientation to co-construction, the experiences of the researcher are, to a degree, privileged: ultimately, in a single-authored ethnography, the researcher must write up the findings and frame them within a narrative (Bardon et al, 2017).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) outline a range of potential research identities for ethnographers, ranging from detached and 'neutral' to highly immersed in the work of the researched scene. A participant-observer identity can be viewed as a suitable fit with a poststructuralist research paradigm, as it seeks to observe the scene as a researcher, focusing on the body/speech acts of others as a primary source of data, but is also committed to understanding the enacted practices of the community through participation. Being a participant-observer therefore offers first-hand, embodied knowledge of life in the community (Brannan, 2017: 662). It means accepting that the researcher and the researched cannot be separated – acknowledging that my "personal opinions on events" (Courpasson, 2017: 1283), as well as my more general presence in the field, inevitably shape the researched phenomena, resulting in a co-construction of meaning between research participants and I (Nicholson and Carroll, 2013). Being a participant-observer of course also surfaces issues of identity confusion and potential conflicts of interest, as one can become too close to a community and its values, an issue I explore in the sub-section on research ethics.

My research identity:

I agreed with WRC members that I would engage as much as possible in their day-to-day work while simultaneously acting as a researcher. My identity in the field and the impact of my presence on the observed phenomena was a matter for reflexive exchange between participants and I, as well as a matter for ongoing reflection in my ethnographic journal. However, I was always cautious not to impose my views on others, instead

subjecting them to the same forms of democratic exchange as were practiced throughout the organisation. Similarly, I was cautious about being drawn to parts of the organisation I felt a closer affinity with and therefore sought to 'distribute' myself as much as possible across the organisation's programmes and related events, so as to enable a more diverse co-construction of meaning. Moving between initiatives also had the practical effect of not imposing my views too deeply on any one area of the organisation.

Having said that, some days in the organisation were so hectic that it left us with little time for reflexive engagement. Moreover, WRC practitioners encourage confrontations and playing 'devil's advocate' as a strategy in debates, which meant that we often engaged in heated and passionate discussions, usually on the go, discussing one thing whilst performing another. Yet the approach enabled me to identify the prevailing discourses of democratic practice as they emerged, were contested and gained traction; it enabled me to track how WRC members engaged with them and to gain insight into how the discourses of democratic practice present in the field interwove with the practical struggles and projects of the organisation.

Most importantly, adopting a participant-observer role enabled me to develop a rich and embodied sense of what it means to perform democratic practice in an engaged organisation, with real material and emotional pressures and incentives; to gain a present and embodied sense of "people's practices, feelings and experiences" (Thanem and Knights, 2012: 4).

5.1.2. Discourse analysis and its relevance

Discourse analysis is often referred to, broadly, as a research strategy for analysis (Bardon et al, 2017; Dougherty and Hode, 2016; Elraz, 2017); however, discourse analysis must be approached as "a complete package" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:2), with its philosophical assumptions (ontology and epistemology) offering a way of reading one's surroundings in the field and immersing oneself within a discursive community (Pritchard, 2012).

Types of discourse analyses are multiple (Taylor, 2013); however, within a constructionist ontology, which informs this research, there are two broad approaches of relevance, each of them carrying somewhat different assumptions: critical discourse analysis and poststructuralist discourse analysis (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). These approaches are interested in language as evidence of how social life comes into being; however, they tend to approach the structuring nature of language differently (Fougère et al, 2017; Taylor, 2013). I will briefly outline the main assumptions of CDA of relevance to this ethnographic research before unpacking the approach adopted, poststructuralist discourse analysis (PDA), in more depth.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

I drew on methods within CDA that were consistent with my onto-epistemological approach but excluded elements that were not. CDA is closely associated with critical theory (Taylor, 2013: 17), which focuses on identifying and unearthing power relations

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embedded in social phenomena. Such a focus is aimed at making visible power constellations of certain groups, individuals and institutional structures for the purposes of instigating social change (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Fairclough, 2003; Hammersley, 2013). Discourse is "not only seen as constitutive but also as constituted" by other social structures and practices (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 65). However, CDA has been criticised for rarely in practice either analysing or conceptualising the 'real' power that sits behind the production of discourse and for failing to propose how its insights can be drawn upon to enact social change (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

The more prevalent analytical approach of CDA researchers tends to be a micro-focus on talk and text (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Taylor, 2013; Wetherell et al, 2001): for example a textual analysis focusing on grammar units (verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, etc.) and argumentation nuances tracked through text (see Dougherty and Hode, 2016; Harding, 2008; Wodak et al, 2011). As CDA studies focus largely on the linguistic, many of its textual techniques, such as analysis of grammar, are also valid for a poststructuralist study (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) and can therefore be adopted in this study.

Importantly for this study, some researchers within a CDA tradition also seek to analyse the visual communication of discourses, an approach called multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) (Alcadipani and Islam, 2017; Heizmann and Liu, 2018; Machin, 2016; Machin and Mayr, 2012). The aim of this approach is to demonstrate how language and image interweave and are co-constitutive of meaning, with aspects of written grammar also perceptible in the 'visual grammar' of imagery (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Such techniques are adopted to analyse the deployment of imagery from organisations and

institutions, rather than the imagery captured by the field researcher. I adopted such techniques to analyse the deployment of imagery from WRC, although I used some of my own photographs and those taken by news reporters in order to enhance understanding of the enacted practice. In addition, embodiment may be thought of as an intensely visual and performed experience, which is why I employed some techniques from MCDA in the study, where they integrated well with the conceptual and methodological emphasis of the research.

Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (PDA):

Poststructuralist discourse analysts acknowledge the existence of macro-social discourses that may limit the agency of social actors, but interpret these as normalised and contested via continuous micro adherence and resistances (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). One of the most significant distinctions between the PDA approach and CDA is that PDA proponents do not distinguish between the discursive and material. This is not to say that the material is unrecognised but that, ultimately, the material can only be known and analysed through "the discursive condition of emergence" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108). Discourses are made of both material and linguistic practices, yet we can conceive the material only via the discursive (Hardy and Thomas, 2015). Discourse is defined as a "structured totality resulting from articulatory practices" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105), where articulation is understood as "any practice establishing a relation among elements" (ibid.) in which the identity of the 'element' is modified as a result of this articulation.

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This is why in this research I analyse material artefacts using discourse analysis, as, following Butler (1999; 2004, 2011), I interpret the material and linguistic as entangled and inseparable. Through the process of articulating practices in my findings, I weave together the visual and linguistic in order to evoke the embodied aspects of democratic practice. In doing so, I also aim to induce in the reader the sensory experiences that practitioners and I may have experienced: feelings of triumph, defeat, frustration, embarrassment, tiredness, despair, sorrow, happiness, loss, etc.

PDA does not constitute a singular approach to research, with various differences in emphasis existing within the poststructuralism umbrella. Largely used within political studies, but also increasingly present in organisation studies, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory is envisaged as a response to Marxism's seeming over-preoccupation with class as a system of material relations. Acknowledging the increasing tendency of people to relate to and experience power in terms of identities – gender, sexuality and race, but also in terms of social movements – Laclau and Mouffe develop a theory of discourse that establishes contingency as its guiding premise (Cederström and Spicer, 2014). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory has been referred to as a form of 'neo-Gramscianism' (McLaughlin and Bridgman, 2017: 572), as it is interested in the dynamic nature of how hegemonic constellations of power are formed, challenged and defeated.

Discourse theory has largely been adopted as a means of understanding the formation and development of campaign groups, with analysis focusing on the range of discourses, alliances and antagonisms at play. For example, Griggs and Howarth (2004 and 2008) explore how disparate people come together and work in tension within chains of equivalence to oppose airport expansion plans. In more micro organisational terms,

Smolović Jones et al (2016) draw on discourse theory to posit identity in leadership development as a contingent and political process assembled from various discourses and interests, as something that stretches beyond the formal boundaries of organisation, into people's social and cultural identifications. In terms of this study, the proposition of contingent identity and meaning in discourse is of value. Bearing in mind the broader discursive and hegemonic shifts and positioning – and how these may manifest and organise groups in the field - may also be of use in better understanding the larger political moves at play within performative practices.

Within organisation studies, a Foucauldian approach to discourse seeks to explore people's subjection and regulation to organisational and societal discourses, practices and technologies (e.g. Townley, 1993). For example, Knights and Clarke (2014) explore how professional academics experience insecurity of self in relation to contemporary discourses of the entrepreneurial and career-driven academic. More recently, researchers have turned to Foucault's later writings to explore the potential for subjects to resist disciplinary discourse and to work on the self as an ethical project (Clarke and Knights, 2015), an 'art of living' (Munro, 2014: 1143), co-opting and transforming existing discourses and practices in novel and more emancipatory ways.

The work of Judith Butler, adopted as my theoretical framework, builds on Foucault's writings, and has already been discussed, but given her centrality to this study, it is worth briefly revisiting her work, specifically its more applied use in discourse studies. A Butlerian account of discourse is similar to discourse theory in as much as it is interested in discourse within a field of contested hegemony, and it is akin to Foucauldian discourse analysis as it explores the subjectivation of people within a field of discourse.
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Nevertheless, it could be claimed that Butler offers a more sophisticated account of the subject in discourse, through her theory of performativity. The focus is far more on the lived and qualitative experiences of the subject. While Butler is interested in the "power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (2011: xii), she is equally focused on "the persistence of disidentification" (ibid: xiii) with prescribed identities, something she explicitly connects to 'democratic' life and democratic performativities (ibid). In keeping with her embodied and discursive-material preferences, Butler's focus is upon the body and subjectivity within discourse, and so it is important for understanding how practitioners navigate norms and tensions in an embodied way, feeling their constraints and oppressions, yet striving to generate democratic practice through such an environment.

Within organisation studies, a Butlerian approach to discourse analysis has been adopted to better understand people's embodied experiences within a regime of discourse (Ford et al, 2017a). Analytical focus moves between analysis of discourses present in the field and the subject's performance or rejection of these discourses in practice (Kenny, 2010 and 2018). In practical terms, such studies usually combine a reflexive account of self in a scene of study (ibid.) with a focus on the language adopted by participants to perform a certain sense of embodied self. In terms of language, and in common with CDA, Butlerean studies analyse micro uses of language but tend to focus on people's everyday and subjective accounts, rather than drawing out the workings of ideology through language.

In terms of methods, Butlerian accounts usually work more with interview and ethnographic accounts that surface people's identifications. In common with CDA,

Butlerian researchers are interested in verbs and nouns (e.g. Nicholson and Carroll, 2013), but also foreground pronouns, as these are taken to signal the presence of discursive identity work, as participants construct a sense of themselves in relation to organisation through their talk (Ford et al, 2017; Harding et al, 2017; Harding et al, 2014). In addition to language, Riach et al (2014) adopt visual aids and prompts in their interview-based study, in keeping with the sense in Butler that discourse is experienced in embodied, sensory-rich ways.

Discourse approach adopted:

The discourse approach adopted in this study is strongly shaped by Butlerian poststructuralism, due to the research focus on the embodied enactment of practice. Viewing the identity of a subject as an 'incomplete' achievement, in the words of Howarth (2013), enables a certain 'democratisation' of the self through research, of making accessible and analysable the identity and practice of those who perform democratic practice within NGOs (Glendinning, 2011: 40). This is because practice and identity, as incomplete and contingent, are approached as necessarily relational and discursive phenomena (Knights and Clarke, 2017). With its focus on performative discourse, Butler's account allows me to explore the discourses that are involved in shaping the enactments of practitioners; it enables me to understand how a subject of democratic practice is itself enacted through the mixing of these discourses and also how the subject agentically 'configures' a practice through drawing on available discursive resources beyond those of the strictly 'democratic' (Butler, 1999: 89).

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Nevertheless, insights from broader poststructuralism are also incorporated when they align with the Butlerian approach adopted – chiefly, a recognition of the contingency of language and the salience of certain signifiers in assembling political coalitions and identifications. Furthermore, in keeping with the broader constructionist ontology adopted, certain analytical techniques, predominantly from CDA, are adopted, such as the analysis of grammatical units of speech and the overlap between language and visuals. These techniques are employed as they help enrich a sense of how practice and self are constructed relationally and in embodied ways over time.

5.1.3. Data collection

Methods utilised in both ethnographic research and discourse analysis are diverse, a collection of techniques that can be brought together in a way that makes conceptual sense and will help illuminate the research question (Lazaraton, 2002; Taylor, 2013; Willis and Trondman, 2000: 7). My focus for selecting methods was guided by the need to generate data that illuminated the discursively constituted experiences of participants in the field as they enacted democratic practice over time. With these requirements in mind I chose observations and interviews as the primary forms of data generation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lucas et al, 2017; Wodak et al, 2011).

What all ethnographies have in common is that they are "rooted in observation" (Zickar and Carter, 2010: 305), a method often coupled with interviews, be they structured, semi-structured or open (Brannan et al, 2012). Moreover, the researcher's reflections on the positioning of their own "bod[y] on site" (Yanow, 2012: 33) and their own identity

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 14) is also considered data that merits analysis. This latter aspect of ethnography is viewed as crucial in avoiding problems of unconscious bias and the transmission of privileged norms onto the data (Driver, 2016).

I will now briefly outline the principles of each method of data generation before offering an account of how I adopted these in practice.

Observations:

Employing observation as a method provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore a matrix of "roles, rules, norms, unofficial practices, politics, discourses, and cultures to be found in organisations" (Watson, 2011: 209). Specifically, observations provide the opportunity to investigate how practices are enacted within such a matrix (Harding et al, 2014; Paring et al, 2017).

Through immersive, experiential observation, I was able to trace certain norms and practices, such as participation or dialogue, to theories of democracy. However, besides these 'imported' norms, I was able to learn about WRC's own norms, rules, practices and discourses that informed the performance of particular subjects (Butler, 2004). It was of value to observe practitioners in a range of everyday work contexts, paying attention to how they used, and were constrained by, discourses/embodiments. Such contexts in practice involved a mix of formal (meetings and events) and informal (conversations, coffee breaks etc.) settings.

In terms of participation, I engaged in regular organisational activities, from helping to organise events, writing speeches and statements, working with stakeholders and producing research for reports, to more mundane activities, such as printing, cleaning and carrying. Throughout my fieldwork, in common with Paring et al (2017), Cooren et al (2008) and Kenny (2010), I took detailed fieldnotes within an ethnographic journal. These notes contain a record of extra-linguistic impressions, such as body language, overall dynamics and 'materialities' (e.g. room layout, participant use of specific 'props') (Paring et al, 2017; Wodak et al, 2011). I made daily entries in the journal, sometimes throughout the day, in longhand and on paper, and in the evenings, electronically. These sessions allowed me time to reflect on my own identity in the scene, to what extent I had become integrated into the norms of WRC, but also to take a step back and try to view the scene in the capacity of a researcher-observer rather than a participant-observer. The individual entries varied from a few paragraphs to several pages, depending on the relevance of the organisation's activities. However, I often returned to various entries and added material to them retrospectively, whenever I gained fresh insight about the observed event.

In total, the journal contains 343 pages (approximately 70,000 words) of typed-up text and a full notebook of longhand impressions. In terms of observed meetings, workshops and events, besides noting thoughts in the journal, I also audio-recorded many of them, after seeking approval. In total, I have 31 audio-files in this category, which amounts to 4.33GB, or approximately 79 hours, of data. I transcribed those of most relevance to the RQ for further analysis, amounting to 121 pages and 42,000 words. Meetings, events and workshops make much more sense when listened to, due to the ability of the listener to appreciate the dynamics of the unfolding conversations, different kinds of interactions

and exchanges between interlocutors, the sound and pitch of voices, the noise made by people's movements in the room, etc. I found that listening to a recording had the capacity to transport me back to the event so that I could relive it, allowing me sensory insight that a transcript alone would not be able to provide.

I also compiled a folder with material produced by WRC containing various videos, reports, posters, photographs, public announcements, and so on, the content of which I analysed over the course of three years, particularly bearing in mind my emphasis on the embodied (and therefore also the visual). This data provided contextual background for the research setting but also valuable texture for analysing the prominent discourses of democratic practice WRC practitioners engaged with, as well as insight into the particularities of their engagements.

Post-event interviews:

Data obtained via observation is often supplemented with interview data in ethnographic approaches, allowing participants to elaborate or reflect upon action, or to clarify certain events that may have caused a researcher some confusion (Alcadipani and Islam, 2017; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Ybema and Horvers, 2017; Smith et al, 2017; Taylor and Smith, 2008). Interviews can provide additional 'texture' to observations, i.e. participants' "views, thoughts, reflections, and feelings" (Cooren et al, 2008: 1348) can supplement the impressions of an observer. Interviews may be salient in providing a forum for the co-construction of an account of events, helping the

interviewer and interviewee to reflexively make "sense of self and dominant...discourses" within a particular setting (Kenny, 2010: 864).

In this research, post-event interviews were important for understanding how practitioners identified with a particular kind of democratic practice, especially as democratic practices can be said, by definition, to be complex enactments constituted by a range of diverse, often disagreeing, agents within a matrix of diverse discourses. Interviews were designed in a semi-structured manner, with the structure being provided by impressions of events observed. This approach to interviews was adopted due to the inevitability of certain themes emerging during observations, which would require further exploration. Identified themes served to guide further inquiry, but these interviews often transformed into open-ended conversations, allowing research participants to talk at length about a particular topic or current concern (Holm and Fairhurst, 2017; Knights and Clarke, 2014). Overall, the interviews gave participants an opportunity to provide a more thorough account of their relationship to unfolding events, exploring how they formed their "sense of self in the process" (Kenny et al, 2011:27), as well as how they related to certain events, people, artefacts and organisational arrangements (Paring et al, 2017).

Over the course of 11 months, I conducted and transcribed 28 interviews, 25 with women and three with men, all aged between 25 and 45. Each of them lasted approximately 1.5 hours, amounting to around 35 hours of audio data. I interviewed the staff members of WRC (18), associates of the organisation (6), as well as some government employees (2) and international organisation practitioners (2) who regularly collaborate with WRC. Interviewing people who associate themselves with the

organisation (e.g. volunteers) and those with whom WRC practitioners collaborate was important for obtaining a richer understanding of the broader context of democratic practice, as well as for gleaning others' perceptions of WRC and how they negotiate and enact democratic practices together.

5.1.4. Data analysis strategy in practice

Even though data collection and analysis are usually discussed as two separate stages of the research process, the division in discourse-based ethnographic research is not so straightforward, in keeping with ethnography's preference for induction[20] or abduction[21] (Cunliffe, 2010). Taylor and Smith (2008: 36) argue that both data collection and analysis may involve a "dialectical" interconnection between collection and analysis, where the two stages of research inform one another. Analysis of ethnographic data is iterative in nature and usually guided by the aims and purposes of the research, which can shift as the engagement progresses (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In other words, the researcher needs to repeatedly return back and forth between the data and the issues/concepts to be researched, while drawing provisional interpretations and conclusions in the process. Effective interpretation is dependent upon continuous questioning; the researcher needs to approach the data from new angles and to experiment with different viewpoints (Taylor and Smith, 2008).

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[20] Induction refers to a "grounded theory-like" approach to analysis (Alvesson, 2010: 197) where a researcher engages in building "contextual theory" (Arcidiacono et al, 2009: 165), giving priority to insights provided directly from data (Bednarek and Cape, 2014). The approach is often contrasted with deduction, where the priority in data analysis is given to preexisting theoretical knowledge (Alvesson, 2010).

[21] More is provided on abduction in the following section.

In what follows I first reflect on the broad analytical approach adopted, namely, abduction. Second, I offer detail on the discourse analysis strategy employed, poststructural discourse analysis, drawing on some conventions from CDA where appropriate to the RQ and conceptual and methodological approach pursued.

An abductive and reflexive approach

Taylor and Smith (2008:36) argue for a "dialectical" interconnection between data collection and analysis, where the two inform one another in an iterative cycle (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Abduction is an iterative approach to data analysis (Nicholson and Caroll, 2013), which involves "reading and re-reading data, looking for surprises" (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1431). However, such a process does not involve a deliberately 'naive' search for themes but an informed one, rooted in a broad understanding of the theoretical literature (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). This means that the researcher needs to go back and forth between the empirical material and theory in search of emerging themes, which abide by or question existing theory, but also be open to themes that do not fit neatly within existing theoretical frameworks (ibid: 1270). Such instances of not fitting are potential sources of "surprises" (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: 1431) and "mysteries" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007: 1272), or points in the data that indicate areas for further investigation through fieldwork. Such a process is enacted consistently and continuously during the field engagement.

In practice, my approach to data analysis overlapped with data collection. Nightly reflections on the data generated via recordings, fieldnotes and documentation enabled a gradual and iterative process of interpretation. I began by noting down ideas and associations gained in the process of reading and re-reading my data. Sometimes these ideas and associations would be informed by the literature (e.g. 'agonistic conflict', 'rational dialogue', etc.), but sometimes I would simply note 'themes', or rather 'prompts', provoked by certain episodes I participated in, without necessarily having previous theoretical knowledge concerning these. It soon became apparent that the themes identified did not fit neatly within the theoretical boundaries offered by the literature: some overlapped and others defied them. Coming to this realisation led me to being more comfortable with allowing myself to be "challenged, surprised, bewildered" by the data (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007: 1269).

Through continuous iterative engagement I gradually began noticing patterns, which helped me code the data into provisional themes. I tinkered with different associations I gained through reading the data: noting them down, exploring synonyms in an attempt to prompt further associations, as well as looking for clues in the literature that could provide me with new ideas and insights. I would then take a step back, trying to relate these to the data. Often, I would notice synonyms and metonyms scattered throughout the margins of my data and these would act as a kind of assurance that I was circling an emerging theme. On the other hand, I was surprised by how many times my impressions/associations could not be supported by the actual data or would represent a somewhat augmented version of the impressions conveyed by the participants in, say, interviews. These points signalled the necessity for reflexivity and interrogation of my own worldview and identity.

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Indeed, Nicholson and Carroll (2013) and Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) suggest employing reflexivity from the onset of a research project as a useful strategy for interrogating one's own subject-positions while in the field, as well as one's own interpretation of events – and within an abductive approach, this strategy is an important part of the data analysis process. I was born in Montenegro, where I lived for around 20 years, which means that I am culturally attuned to the context. Namely, I am a native speaker; I am familiar with the broader socio-political context, including bearing witness to the introduction of democracy as a form of governance (albeit as a child), as well as the subsequent development of this system. I have experienced being a woman in the newly established democracy and repatriarchalised country of Montenegro, and seen first-hand how far the democratic principles of liberty and equality stretch in reality when it comes to everyday life.

Until the age of 10 I was raised to believe in equality and was encouraged, along with my classmates, siblings and friends, to be a 'productive member of the community' (a phrase commonly used by parents and teachers), which meant that we were expected to be the best students we could be and should find a way of contributing to the community in the future (as doctors, engineers, scientists, builders, etc.), regardless of our genders. However, attitudes towards women soon started to change and by the time I turned 13 it became common to hear teachers (usually male) say that investing in girls' higher education was 'wasteful', as their 'destiny' led them to the proverbial kitchen. Such views coincided with the increasing revival of toxic ethno-nationalist and religious narratives and practices, dictating traditional gender divisions and encompassing all spheres of life.

By the age of 18 I became accustomed to inequality – having to prove my worth as a woman, be it at university, work or at family and friends' gatherings, and to be repeatedly told what I could and could not do as a woman, which shaped me as a feminist. Furthermore, such experiences prompted me to learn more about democracy, as I intuitively felt that the purported narrative about liberty and equality and the opportunity to participate in political decision-making, which democracy was supposed to entail, was dramatically incongruent with what I was experiencing in practice. Having said that, I was aware that the knowledge and experiences I had could have been different to those of others. Such awareness was a first step in engaging in the process of identifying and interrogating the taken-for-granted 'truths' I held about myself and others (Cunliffe, 2002), which was an unsettling task but a necessary one nevertheless.

Returning to my fieldwork, one of my reflexive strategies was to ask research participants to help by treating me as a novice in the organisation and to explain their engagements as they would to someone who had no experience with the civil sector in Montenegro. Luckily, instead of finding this process cumbersome and strange, they found it amusing at first and a few participants even stated, later on, that they learned much about their work simply through trying to articulate it to 'a novice'. On my part, I was glad they agreed to such a strategy because I began to notice certain divergences in my understanding of aspects of practice and others' understanding of it, which was undeniably shaped by our respective worldviews and experiences. These divergences instigated dynamic dialogues and often a battle of identifications, resulting in identity shifts from both parties.

For instance, during our internal debates about the provision of support for protesting mothers (more detail provided in the findings), I realised how much resentment I held towards the elder generation of women and that I was blinded by that to the point of not being able to empathise sufficiently with their hardship to enter into a political alliance with them. I was adamant that they had put themselves, and others, into a difficult position by succumbing to conservative political propaganda and not protesting against the tide of suspicious privatisations that had ended with them being unemployed. It was through numerous debates with practitioners, as well as subsequent conversations with protestors, that I became aware of my entrenched views: they had less to do with my left political stance, as I claimed, and were more related to my view of the perceived injustices visited upon younger generations.

However, there are many aspects of my identity that are not accessible to me and thus cannot easily be reflected upon by me. In this sense, reflexivity assumes that "a researcher can extricate herself and...assume the position of an outsider" (Fotaki et al, 2014: 1252) from which she can dissect and critically evaluate her complexity and contradictions. This does not mean that reflexivity can be rejected entirely but rather acknowledges how the 'real' subject does not exist in poststructuralist research: that I, as a subject, am "equally [as] contrived and constructed as the research 'subject'" (Driver, 2016: 733) I strive to discern, and that the reflexivity strategies we choose to undergo are simply different approaches to a co-construction of meaning. The underlying approach I adopted to challenge my own preconceptions was dialogic, to share with research participants and to make myself as open to democratic questioning as the organisation's workers.

In keeping with an abductive approach, my data coding, un-coding and re-coding, including my own reflexive notes, took place continuously throughout the fieldwork. When I recognised enough repeated discursive resources and enactments, which corresponded broadly to the provisionally marked themes, I would embark on scheduling interviews alongside continued observations, so that I could discuss the provisional themes with participants, amongst other issues that emerged from observations. Such an iterative engagement with the data, assisted by the active engagement of research participants, allowed for a more meaningful formation of themes; namely, these conversations did not serve the purpose of merely confirming the themes I provisionally marked as significant, but also acted as a medium via which reflexivity took place. Sometimes the theme would deepen as a result of these conversations; sometimes it would transform into something else and every time more data would be generated. For example, one of the main themes, now termed 'aesthetics', originally had a rather different provisional tag – 'political engagement'; however, the theme was assigned an alternative label following numerous conversations (via the interviews and informally) between the participants and me.

Post-fieldwork analysis

In line with the assumptions of poststructural discourse analysis, I approached the written/spoken material, as well as the material artefacts, discursively. This does not mean that everything is reduced to language, but that "our access to [the material] is always mediated by systems of meaning in the form of discourses" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 35), with discourses interpreted as an amalgam of language and sensory

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resources. Following Kenny (2010) and Pritchard (2012), data generated via observation, in the form of an ethnographic journal, visual material and transcribed data, were all merged into a single electronic database, which were then treated as texts meriting analysis.

All data was generated in the Montenegrin language and it was important to analyse it in its original form, especially when it came to textual discourse analysis, as the translation to English would alter not only the syntagmatic configuration of text but would also distribute the performativity of the language differently. For example, the Montenegrin language is less amenable to nominalisation, where the noun or the noun-phrase is derived from another grammar unit such as verbs or adjectives (e.g. strange – strangeness), or to converting nouns into adjectives (e.g. mess - messy)[22] (Billig, 2008). Such performativity of the language in practice meant that translation to English prior to analysis would place an action upon the subject or replace the subject action with an ergative form (e.g. the poster is made), displacing the action elsewhere (Dreyfus, 2017). Moreover, some of the terms that have the synonym equivalents in English have evolved in different contexts, and the meanings they incite have sedimented differently (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

Bearing the translation issues in mind, and following Holm and Fairhurst (2017), Jammaers et al (2016), Zanoni et al (2017), I analysed data in the Montenegrin language and subsequently translated selected extracts into English, paying close attention to the

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[22] In cases when such a conversion can take place technically, the word would not sit well with the rest of the sentence and often it would affect the entire structure of the sentence.

word order in sentences and making sure to replace each grammar unit with its equivalent in English. Admittedly, such a strategy sometimes resulted in ungainly constructions that could not be avoided. I provided additional explanations when the word replacements could not be performed faithfully and/or where the term required additional description.

As stated earlier, I performed the first stage of analysis throughout the ethnographic fieldwork and by the end of my engagement in the field I already had three themes/practices identified. After completing the fieldwork, I went once again through my data for the purpose of populating each of the practices with ethnographic episodes, this time within separate documents. This strategy was valuable as it enabled me to focus more on each of the respective practices, but it also provided me with insight into how much overlap there was between them, not only in terms of how they manifested within the same episodes but how the three practices presented in the findings section were entangled and in struggle with one another.

Once I populated the practices I embarked on a second stage of data analysis – a close textual and visual analysis. Here, I first tracked argumentation by tracing the connections participants made in relation to dominant discourses/practices. Second, I explored language and visual performativity. In terms of language, I paid particular attention to grammar units and how they related to one another to build performative practices (Butler, 2011; Harding, 2008; Wodak et al, 2011). In terms of visuals, I analysed the performativity of the visual material, looking at how it supported or inhibited democratic practices in relation to dominant discourses. Next, I describe in detail the textual and visual analysis adopted.

Argumentation:

Analysing argumentation enabled me to understand the meaning and purpose people attributed to democratic practice, as well as how such arguments were contested in practice. Such an analysis allowed insight into the contested nature of people's identities in relation to democratic practices (Smolović Jones et al, 2016), as actors advocated and competed for what it meant to be a 'woman' and 'man' in a democratic society. It was of particular importance here to note the discursive repertoires drawn upon by participants, systems of language deployed to bolster the meaning of salient signifiers (Butler, 2009) and how such systems were also communicated visually. Adopting a Butlerian approach to analysing argumentation, I sought to analyse how meaning was grounded through the repetition of arguments and the ways in which some repetitions (in language and visually) went awry, creating alternative possibilities for constructing democratic practices.

Performativity of the text:

Taking a fine-grained approach to the data, this aspect of analysis deals with an exploration of individual grammatical units of speech and how they relate to one another and the arguments constructed by participants. This is a particularly salient strategy for exploring the enactment of practices and the entanglement of identifications and discourse these practices are embedded within. Unlike CDA analysts, who focus predominantly on transitivity, or how verbs relate to the object(s) in a sentence (see Alvaro, 2013; Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2008; Machin and Mayr, 2012; Wodak et al,

2011), I expanded the analysis to include other units of speech, such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections (Harding, 2008; Harding et al, 2014; Koller, 2012; Lirola and Chovanec, 2012; Wagner and Wodak, 2006). This decision was made because of the performative focus of the research, an acknowledgment of the rich repertoire drawn upon to articulate practices/subjectivity (Butler, 1999: 159). I now elaborate on each unit of analysis employed but it is worth noting that not every unit or visual aspect was analysed for each episode, in recognition that some were more prominent or salient than others at particular times.

Verbs:

Verbs are important for understanding performative doing (Butler, 2004), because they signal action and activity, the very things that perform meaning, practice and self, but they also provide a sense of the broader context (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Verbs tell us how a subject is positioned in relation to an object (Wodak et al, 2011); for instance, whether a speaker is deflecting responsibility, as in, 'I told her to do it, but she did not', where a subject 'I' is placing responsibility onto the object 'her'.

However, the form of verbs is telling as well. For example, the adoption of a progressive form of verb (e.g. devising, building, thinking) may suggest an ongoing process/phenomena, as opposed to a participant constructing phenomena in a more settled way (devised, built, thought). Passive and active forms of verbs can signal felt agency, or a lack of it (Billig, 2008). For example, in active voice sentences the subject performs the action stated by a verb, e.g. 'the police force removed the protestors from

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the plateau in front of the government building'; however, in passive voice sentences the subject is acted upon by a verb, which can conceal the agent at work in the action (Fairclough, 2003), e.g. 'the protestors had been removed from the plateau in front of the government building'.

Tenses denote how the action stated by the verb is performed in relation to time, and this grammar unit is sometimes referred to as 'aspect' (Binnick, 2006). The verb aspect can signal how a subject is positioned towards the phenomenon they are referring to (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). For example, different members of WRC may perceive the same issue in a different way in terms of temporality: as something that is completed and established, as something that is ongoing or as something that is yet to be performed.

The mood of a verb, such as indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional and subjunctive, can signal the attitude of the subject towards the object of their attention (Hewings, 2005). For example, indicative verbs are used to describe a state of affairs, e.g. 'gender equality is established' and can denote the speaker's attitude towards the issue discussed. The imperative mood of a verb, on the other hand, is a demand from an interlocutor, although the interlocutor might be concealed/abstracted: e.g. 'give me evidence!' or 'evidence is needed!' Depending on whether the addressee is concrete or concealed, an imperative may signal a form of antagonism and open up possibilities for further conflict when the interlocutor is identified but encourage a more passive or confused response when the agent of the command is concealed. Interrogative verbs also place a demand on the addressee, however, in a less antagonistic manner. For instance, in the sentence: 'would you pass me the pen?' the speaker places a polite plea, whereas in the sentence, 'will you leave me now?' the speaker expresses a more antagonistic mood.

A conditional mood states a course of action as dependent upon other action; such a mood can range from a simple declaration, e.g. 'if it rains, the ground will become wet', to a more threatening mood, e.g. 'if you submit that report, I will fire you!' Finally, the subjunctive mood denotes a desire on the part of the speaker, e.g. 'I wish we were more equal', and can therefore be a window into observing affective commitment in language.

Aside from the technical performance of verbs, it is also important to pay attention to the choice of verbs adopted to denote action, e.g. the 'mildness' or 'strength' of a verb, but also to analyse verbs in relation to their immediate (syntagmatic) or wider narrative context (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

Pronouns:

The analysis of pronouns in Butlerian research has been developed by Harding (2008) and Harding et al (2014 and 2017b). Harding (2008) claims that different ways of speaking about self signify a moving process where participants develop "theories of the self" (ibid: 48). In more detail, Harding (2008: 47) argues that adopting 'I' denotes the felt agentic power of the subject; the feeling of being able to actively shape one's own subject positions. 'Me', on the other hand, is suggestive of what subjects "believe" of themselves (ibid). This is a more detached position, where subjects reflect back to theorise about themselves. 'You' may stand for other person(s) but it can also suggest a speaker's intention to connect with others (audience, interlocutor or even inanimate objects): to generalise a proposition to include a collective identity, rather than simply a personal one. It can be an indication that our 'self' exists with reference to a community

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of others, in "oneness within a collective" (ibid: 47) or it may reflect the habit of talking on behalf of others (Shuman, 2005). Similarly, 'we' suggests belonging to a collective but can also "diminish the speaker's responsibility for what is said" (ibid), shrinking a personal identity within a collective one. Rather than view the presentation of personal pronouns in isolation, and following the guidance of Harding, I sought to track down the appearances and disappearances of pronouns, as well as their overlaps.

It is also important to consider the context that the articulation of a pronoun is embedded within. Pauses and extra-linguistic manifestations of communication (intonation, gestures, etc.) are useful in understanding the performance of a subject position (Harding et al, 2014). For example, pauses in talk may insinuate that participants are "engaged in an internal dialogue devoted to theorising the self" (Harding, 2008: 47). Furthermore, interrogating choices and usage of nouns and adjectives alongside pronouns is indicative of how subjects build their identities in talk (Harding, 2008; Harding et al, 2014).

Nouns:

Nouns are grammar categories that perform the function of identification, identifying a person, a thing, but also a state, an idea or a quality (Hewings, 2005), providing important insight into how participants name or identify particular practices or people within practices. The choices of nouns speakers use to denote what they identify is telling, as nouns provide texture to the context (Bednarek and Caple, 2014; Harding et al,

2014, Wodak et al, 2011). For instance, referring to a woman as a 'girl' can appear patronising or derogatory in some contexts and endearing in others.

Nouns may seem as though they convey neutral meaning but may connote and signal particular identifications and exercises of power. For instance, common nouns (signifying general things or people, e.g. a bike, a man, etc.), proper nouns (signifying particular things or people, e.g. London, Nela) and concrete nouns (signifying material things, e.g. snow) predominantly serve to denote a general or more particular person or thing, but also have the power to connote an idea or value in relation to the context they are situated within (Machin and Meyr, 2012; Perović, 2012). For example, stating 'she is from the north of Montenegro', in certain contexts may evoke an image of a 'naïve', 'rural' and somewhat 'rough' person, even though 'the north' denotes simply a particular geographical region (see Perović, 2012).

Abstract nouns, those that refer to phenomena that do not have material property, such as qualities (e.g. goodness, soundness, etc.) and ideas (e.g. truth, democracy, leadership, etc.), often have more ambiguous signification to the ones explored above (Dreyfus, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2008). Similarly, abstract nouns may 'accrue' meaning through history (Koveshnikov et al, 2016), and their meaning is likely to be conditioned by other nouns closely linked to them in a particular context (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). It was therefore necessary to take into account historical and contextual properties of abstract nouns in the analysis. For example, notions of 'equality' and 'liberty' could potentially hold dramatically different meanings depending on context and intent.

Adjectives and Adverbs:

Adjectives often act as embellishers of nouns in a sentence; they could give texture to a noun and increase or decrease the value of the nouns they aim to characterise (Brubaker, 2000). When a noun is accompanied by a "string of adjectives" (ibid: 34) in talk about the self, especially if those adjectives stand in contradiction to one another, this could potentially signify a struggle to identify within a matrix of practices. In more general terms, choice of adjectives can be indicative of the nature/intensity of the relationship between subjects and their environment. For example, 'strong', 'weak', 'equal', and so on, may be employed to intensify the performances of democratic practice participants engage in.

Adverbs, on the other hand, could modify the meaning of adjectives, but also verbs, by denoting the place, time, manner and degree of an action and/or quality. Stating, for example, that 'policies are freely accessed here and now, which is very good', provides an extra texture to the context provided by the sentence, in comparison to the adverb-free 'policies are accessed, which is good'.

Prepositions, Conjunctions and Interjections:

Prepositions are perhaps the least ambiguous speech units and denote location (e.g. in, on), direction (to) and relation (with) (Hewings, 2005). However, their omission from a text may be significant, e.g. omitting that a certain policy is drafted with another party, could potentially signal a deliberate concealment but might equally be unintentional.

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Prepositions need to be analysed in relation to contextual knowledge and other forms of data, in other words. Conjunctions, on the other hand are more immediately insightful. The conjunction 'but' may signal a disagreement and if it is used repetitively may indicate a more persistent divergence in opinions, attitudes and views in the field. The conjunction 'if' denotes that something is conditioned by something else, yet frequent use may imply a degree of deflection or a postponement of action. Finally, the conjunction 'and' may imply the struggle of a speaker to fully articulate a phenomenon, when it is repeated numerous times in a sentence, e.g. 'the protest is good, and useful, and it allows people to voice their demands, and it is just, and it's just correct...' (a protestor in the 'protest of mothers' I observed).

Visual performativity

Ethnographic research often combines both linguistic and material data; it requires "attention to...material features" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 134), a description of how people relate to "physical things" (ibid.). This means that artefacts such as photographs, videos and props are important (Taylor, 2010; Zickar and Carter, 2010) in providing a richer account of subjectivity within a scene.

As stated earlier, I treat visual material as a discursive resource, as performativities are inherently sensed, as well as read, and I draw on multimodal discourse analysis as a tool for analysing the deployment of visual imagery in democratic practice. I see a visual element of the methodology as salient in representing the embodied aspects of democratic practice, drawing out the sensory range through which democracy is enacted

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and related to. In relation to WRC more specifically, it is an organisation that offers primacy to the visual and aesthetics. Exploring the visual performativity of WRC's practices opens possibilities for studying and understanding democratic engagement outside the conventional language-dominated methods, aspects that would remain predominantly hidden had the analysis focused only on linguistic aspects of data.

Visual resources are particularly important for exploring "identities, values and activities" (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 15), as they offer a series of associations that could be further interrogated and that are sometimes more potent than words in engaging or conveying a message (Linstead, 2018). Visual material is used "to communicate things that may be more difficult to express through language" (ibid: 31) alone. This is why Ranciére (2009), in relation to political and democratic art, talks of the aesthetic potential of a 'sentence-image'. By this he means that combinations of language and images hold the potential to 'undo' (ibid: 46) dominant representative connections, opening the way for disruption and the creation of fresh associations (new areas of the 'sayable' in Ranciérean terms) (see also Linstead, 2018; Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Munro and Jordan, 2013). Sentences in this configuration offer a certain stability, an anchoring of familiarity, with images generating incongruence – and sentence-images therefore hold a similar function to montage, with its "clash of heterogeneous elements" (ibid: 55).

Considering that the visual does not possess its own grammar in the same way that language does, it is useful to think about the visual in terms of what kind of "affordances" (Alcadipani and Islam, 2017: 866) it constructs in relation to the context explored, as well as its "meaning potential" (Machin, 2016:31), i.e. the symbolic associations a visual

artefact might provoke (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2009). Nevertheless, similarly to language, visual material, e.g. images, can denote (depict certain things/persons), but also connote (provide a meaning beyond the literal) (Krzyzanowski and Forchtner, 2016). For example, an image depicting a large exclamation mark within a triangle can connote danger on the road ahead without providing great detail about the content of the danger.

Some visual imagery has a more historically sedimented meaning and can be more easily 'read' (e.g. a white dove with an olive branch in its beak symbolises peace). Other forms of imagery have dramatically different meanings, discursive context depending (e.g. the colour red could symbolise love but also danger or anger). However, even those images whose meaning is sedimented to a degree could be used subversively, which would make analysis less straightforward (Machin, 2016). This is why an iconographical analysis explores the way that "individual elements in images, such as objects and settings, are able to signify discourses" (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 31), bearing in mind that such individual objects should never be analysed in isolation from their wider discursive context (Machin, 2016). The meaning of imagery can never be precise and finite because, just as in language, the meaning of the visual is contingent (Macgilchrist, 2016).

Visual performativity can be gleaned from the analysis of objects, settings and people presented in visual material (e.g. images, posters, video frames, paintings, banners, etc.) and the relationships they are situated within (Machin, 2016). Settings and objects are analysed predominantly via analytical categories such as: size, colour, tone, focus and foregrounding (ibid). The representation of people can, in addition, be analysed via the analytical categories of: gaze, angle, distance, agency and transitivity (Machin and Mayr,

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2012). However, visual performativity can also be gleaned from attempts to 'ground' certain discourses via "exclusionary moves" made within images, or by analysing what is absent from a visual (Macgilchrist, 2016: 264).

Settings:

Settings can be important points of analysis as they can reveal the intentions – or perceived intentions - of the designers of images (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Settings can range from abstract to concrete and they can act as a means of (de)contextualising the subject/phenomena. For example, leaflets promoting learning could depict a classroom featuring children and teachers and in this case the classroom would be considered as depicting a more concrete setting for the topic it aims to promote. However, in some cases the choice of setting may be misleading. For example, Lirola and Chovanec (2012) demonstrate how cosmetic surgery leaflets often depict settings of medical and health care, encouraging a view that such procedures are "health-oriented" (p.494), disguising the consumerist pressures underlying many people's choices to pursue bodily alterations.

Objects:

Visual artefacts "carry meanings but also affect practice through shaping the types of possible expressions from which actors can choose" (Alcadipani and Islam, 2017: 868). Objects in images can be used to denote objects in the material world, e.g. an image of an

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apple in a market stall is likely to denote apples; however, sometimes objects in an image may serve a different performative character, e.g. an apple may invoke a sense of 'sin' if situated in a religious setting or can symbolise health if it is placed on, say, a health promotion leaflet. In such cases objects draw their connotative power from sedimented symbolic associations (Machin, 2016).

Objects can be used to frame intended impressions of a scene and such framing can be evaluated by analysing uses of colour, size, focus, foregrounding and degree of overlap between objects (Machin and Mayr, 2012, Machin, 2016). For example, colours can connote a different meaning and trigger different associations, similarly to nouns. For example, the colour white may be used to connote innocence, black – mourning (at least in a European and North American context), green – health, and so on. Size may lend prominence to some objects and detract prominence from others (Bednarek and Caple, 2014). Focus can signal which object the author wants the viewer to think about (Doerr, 2017). Foregrounding/backgrounding and the overlapping of objects are useful techniques to guide a viewer's gaze to what the author thinks is important (Lirola and Chovanec, 2012). All these categories could be used in combination to elicit a certain reaction.

People:

In considering the representation of people, a few categories might be useful for the analysis of visual performativity in democratic practice: pose, angle, distance, agency and transitivity (Machin and Mayr, 2012; Machin, 2016). Analysing pose and angle can place

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the viewer and the represented in a particular relationship, e.g. the image author may deliberately place a demand on the viewer by posing the represented in the middle of the composition, directly facing the viewer, demanding the viewer's engagement; or the viewer can be placed merely in a 'voyeur' position, as a witness to a scene in which the represented is engaged (Malherbe et al, 2016). Distance can be used as a tool to suggest "intimacy or remoteness" (Machin, 2016: 110). For example, a close-up of the represented can create a sense of intimacy/familiarity, as the viewer is 'forced' to engage with facial expression and 'feelings' (the recent example of the shell-shocked Syrian boy covered in dust and blood in the news would be a case in point here (see Narayan, 2016)). Alternatively, close-ups can generate feelings of intimidation. Images of people presented at a distance can create a sense of detachment or anonymity (e.g. the depiction of refugee boats filled with 'foreign' people can create a sense of anonymity and dehumanisation in relation to the represented people, while simultaneously generating threat through the presence of a large number of anonymous figures).

The intended illustration of people's agency can also be gauged through an analysis of representation (Van Dijk, 2000). For instance, some of the recent promotional videos of an opposition party in Montenegro, *Demokrate*, depict a leader of the party in the setting of the family homes of his voters, where the leader sits at tables with male heads of households and discusses policies while women are represented as silent servants, quietly washing dishes, cleaning and serving in the background. In this case it is safe to say that the agency of the women is silenced. In relation to agency, transitivity (Wodak, et al, 2011) can be gleaned from visual material. Transitivity is an analysis of who does what to whom, in a sentence or image. Transitivity analysis can thus foreground aspects such as who is held responsible for action, who is granted agency and who is silenced: in

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other words, verbs and those enacting them can be visually as well as linguistically represented.

As stated earlier, WRC produces various artefacts as part of its day-to-day practice, which it uses to illustrate its campaigns and work. I analysed the visual performativity of these artefacts via the analytical tools offered here but also in conversation with participants, where we discussed the 'logic' that guided them in crafting these items, as well as the intention, i.e. what they hoped to accomplish with each of the visual items. In particular, the multimodal techniques were useful in unpacking the emerging and embodied enactments of democratic practice, analysing how the words uttered by subjects connected with visual cues and positioning to create a form of democratic agency.

5.2 Research ethics

Ethical approval for this research was sought and granted by the Open University Ethics Committee prior to commencing the fieldwork. In addition to explaining the nature of my engagement to my research participants before undertaking the field research, I shared a copy of the participant information sheet and consent form with each participant, while also taking the time to explain the content of each verbally. Throughout the research I ensured that information regarding the research topic and our respective roles was sufficiently clear and understood by all the participants. I made sure to highlight ethical concerns they might think about, such as anonymity, confidentiality, as well as potential diverging interpretations that might cause points of tension between us.

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Participants expressed the desire for me to keep the original name of the organisation but we collectively agreed to anonymise their names, as well as to remove from the data their personal details. This was a decision that sat uncomfortably with me and one I revisited with them throughout the fieldwork, with the same result, their insistence on maintaining their organisational identity. The data used in the analysis is stripped of any personal information that could provide insight into the identity of the research participants, their names substituted with pseudonyms and sometimes other techniques employed to further blur identities (e.g. variable gender assignation, a narrative divided between two people, etc.).

My ethnographic journal is kept on a password-protected server and the handwritten journal is stored in a private drawer to which I am the only key holder. As with the journal, and audio recordings of meetings, workshops and events, the interviews, including the transcripts, are also stored on a password-protected server to which I have exclusive access.

V Summary

I introduced the methodology of discourse-based ethnography as suitable for generating and analysing the rich practices of NGO practitioners. I presented the methodology as a means of exploring the discursive (linguistic and visual) tapestry of the enactment of democratic practice through immersive and reflexive engagement. I posited a combination of poststructuralist discourse analysis and ethnography as a way of

foregrounding the dynamics of practitioners and their practices within a broader context of nascent democracy – but also of patriarchy and corruption. I proposed being a participant-observer as a suitable research identity for offering an immersive account of democratic practice, a mode that allows the researcher to embody and enact democratic practice with practitioners. I justified a mix of observations and post-event interviews as suitable for generating data in co-construction with research participants. In terms of data analysis, I described an abductive approach as implying an iterative and gradual approach to analysis. Finally, I stated my intention to draw on the micro-analysis of language and images as a means of unpacking the fine-grained performative enactments of democratic practice in the field, with the visual and linguistic approached as overlapping and co-constitutive of democratic enactment.

VI Findings – Embodying Democratic Practice

Overview of overall findings structure and presentation

My findings are organised into three chapters, each denoting a particular democratic practice enacted, as per my main objective stated at the outset of the thesis. In line with the research question and objectives, I offer first-hand insights into what it felt like to enact democratic practice in embodied ways with practitioners, as we worked to actively shape and challenge norms. I do so through a reflexive engagement with the language and visuals of the scene.

The data is presented in each chapter in the following way: I first offer a brief overview of the practice and sub-practices contained within it; second, I provide a table summarising each sub-practice and its dimensions, connecting these to empirical examples; third, I explore each sub-practice through an in-depth ethnographic episode; finally, I offer a summary of each practice. While other episodes could have been selected, and indeed many were, and subsequently removed due to constraints of space, the ones finally included were selected for their evocative power in the hope they would provoke an embodied response from the reader, similar to those I felt in the field.

Embodying democratic practice: Introduction

During my time in the field I was struck by the embodied character of democratic practice, which was enacted through and upon the bodies of practitioners, as well as my own. Democratic practice took its toll on the bodies of practitioners but their embodied approach also opened the way to meaningful, relational and generative enactments. Analytically, embodiment is an under-developed aspect of the democratic practice and NGO literatures and in this chapter I seek to enrich these bodies of work through drawing out a range of embodied enactments by practitioners in their day-to-day work. I call the chapter *embodying* democratic practice in order to highlight practitioners' bodies as sites of such practice, where the possibilities and tensions of democratic practice are played out with and through bodily acts. Specifically, I explore three sub-practices of this embodiment that emerged from the data: *transversing*, *foregoing* and *shielding*.

The first sub-practice, *transversing,* refers to establishing a basis upon which groups are able to work together, and is explored as an embodied discovery, of making oneself vulnerable and open to change. Transversing conveys a sense of practitioners and their collaborators moving between one another's subject positions over time, as they learn in embodied and experiential ways about one another's claims and where they come from. The second sub-practice, *foregoing*, offers a closer view of bodies as sites of agonistic democratic practice, in which different subjectivities battle for domination in practitioners' day-to-day work. Finally, the sub-practice of *shielding* denotes practitioners' sophisticated movements between agonistic and antagonistic relations with government institutions in their attempts to protect the clients they work with and

for – a process in which they 'supplement' and extend the embodied subjectivity of those they aim to shield.

6.1. Transversing

WRC practitioners do not always share similar views with the individuals or groups they engage with. Such discrepancies bear on the practice produced; yet the practitioners of WRC do not perceive this incongruity as an inhibitor and do not necessarily attempt to erase differences, but perceive these as a regular state of affairs, unavoidable circumstances under which they perform their work. While the worldviews they each hold often clash, the encounters WRC has with clients, and those it works with, rarely escalate into conflicts that cannot be resolved.

Transversing is a sub-practice that refers to establishing the basis upon which groups and organisations cultivate collective democratic agency through difference. The sub-practice highlights the movement between different subjectivities in order to accommodate assembly between diverse people. My experience in the field suggests that the process is relational and a form of everyday embodied deliberation, where actors shift between subjectivities, testing assumptions and resistances. Deliberative dialogue here is piecemeal and spans time, settings and subjectivities. These deliberative dialogic acts can be spontaneous and occur in improvised situations across a range of different settings. The ethnographic episode I use to illustrate transversing and its dimensions concerns 'the protest of mothers'. The protest of mothers proved to be a dominant series of events from my time in the field and therefore necessitates a summary.

In April 2015, in the run-up to the general election, the government proposed amendments to the Law on Social and Child Protection that would guarantee mothers of three or more children a lifetime of financial benefits. Perceiving this proposition as antagonistic towards women, WRC, alongside a few other organisations[23], protested against it in an open letter to the government and the parliament, arguing that the amendments ran counter to the democratic principles of liberty and equality and therefore stood in direct conflict with the country's constitution. Rather than creating opportunities for women to both work and become parents, WRC argued that the government was proposing to fence mothers off from the public sphere, thereby reducing women to their reproductive roles, incentivising them to withdraw from the labour market and remain at home. Moreover, WRC judged the proposition discriminatory due to its favouritism towards one category of women – mothers. The introduction of such benefits, it added, only served to paper over the privatisation and corrupt investments that left women unemployed and/or trapped in the grey economy. WRC appealed to the government to conduct a gender and financial impact analysis prior to the vote on the amendments so that MPs could make a sound decision based upon research rather than unsubstantiated and misguided sentiments[24].

In defiance of the protest against the proposed amendments, parliament voted for their adoption without conducting a gender and financial impact analysis, and the new Law on

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[23] The other two organisations that signed the appeal letter were ANIMA and Safe Women's House.
[24] The campaign for the adoption of the amendments was wrapped in the discourse of care for the women-mothers as marginalised and subaltern (see Pejović, 06/03/2015)

Social and Child Protection was put into force in January 2016. As a consequence, approximately 22,000 women with three or more children abandoned their employment and renounced their pensions in order to become eligible for benefits. However, after securing yet another electoral victory in October 2016, the government admitted to making an incorrect assessment of the number of women who might be eligible for the benefits, which had resulted in a significant budget increase from the initially estimated €15 million to €75 million (WRC, 27/03/2017). To ameliorate this oversight, the government proposed a decrease in benefits of 25% under the pretext of general austerity measures (Komatina, 20/12/2016).

This proposition instigated the protest(s) of mothers, which started as a series of fragmented gatherings across the municipalities and subsequently grew into a wholesale national protest that resumed 20 times between February 2017 and January 2018, and was still ongoing at the time of writing (Dan, 01/01/2018). The short breaks between protests occurred only during the deliberations of the Constitutional Court, Parliament and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, which were supposed to resolve the mothers' grievances. The longest protest took place in March, in front of the parliament building. The March protest lasted 26 days, during which women, including some practitioners, resorted to a hunger strike that lasted for 11 days. All of the efforts were in vain as the government failed to meet the mothers' demands. After the initial decrease of benefits, the amendments to the Law via which these benefits were guaranteed was pronounced unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, leaving around 16,000

women[25] stranded without benefits, but also without the jobs and pensions they previously renounced in favour of becoming eligible for lifetime aid.

The message the mothers conveyed in their public speeches was that the injustice they suffered was financial. They also stated the strong belief that they should be privileged within society on the basis of being mothers. WRC practitioners did not share either of these views. They believed the mothers were economically impoverished, not only because their benefits were revoked, but mainly by the privatisation and corrupt investments from government that left them without any means of supporting themselves.

Before presenting the details of the episode used for analysis, I summarise the sub-practice and dimensions of transversing in the following table:

Sub-practice of embodying democratic practice	Dimensions of the sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Transversing Embodied movement in building collective democratic agency towards a position that enables assembly to be formed and demands made.	**Exposing** Denotes exposing one's body to the precarious and embodied experiences of others, facilitating a relational emergence of democratic agency. Practitioners seek out these opportunities and deliberate upon them, aware of the bounded and particular nature of their own stances.	Ethnographic journal extract: I was aware that I would never be able to explain to any of these women why I was against the benefits, as saying that would mean that I was standing against them putting food on the table for their families… The rationalised political stance I came to the protest with started to wobble and become overpowered by feelings of compassion towards these women.
	Inhabiting Denotes going a step further	Sanja, interview extract: "…If you don't feel the injustice, if it

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25 Some women managed to reclaim their right to pensions and some were issued temporary welfare status, which allowed them to keep their benefits for an additional five years (Dan, 01/01/2018)

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	than exposing, inhabiting the embodied subjectivity of others. This is a relational aspect of the sub-practice, whereby the subjectivities of those represented and the representing practitioner are influenced and changed in the process. It is also a process marked by care for the other's vulnerability.	doesn't torment you, then you won't be able to fight against it…I live with them…carry them home… and as a human being I feel obligated to help… "
	Citing Denotes asserting agency in visual and bodily ways. It always denotes collective agency, an absorption and re-appropriation of others' subjectivity.	Ethnographic journal extract: Early on, the protest was abundant with messages celebrating motherhood (e.g. "Mothers are the Law"). Yet, as a result of numerous conversations with practitioners, mothers started to absorb the signifiers offered by WRC relating to the rule of law (e.g. "We only want what belongs to us by law")

Table 1: Sub-practice of transversing

Ethnographic episode (transversing): The protest of mothers

WRC premises were buzzing with preparations for the International Women's Day March, when Lara, one of the organisation's workers, exclaimed: "People, quickly! Check out the link I sent. The mothers have gathered! Tonnes of them!" The live streaming of the video by one of the participants was poor quality but we could see a large number of women carrying banners and standing peacefully in front of the government building. The phone camera wobbled at one point, making the picture blurry, followed by a cacophony of muffled but raised voices. I was itching to go out and see the protest for myself but I bit my tongue as I remembered that WRC opposed the amendments to the Law that guaranteed benefits to mothers in the first place. Before I finished my thought, Luka, Lara and Marija exclaimed almost simultaneously: 'Pack up, we need to be there!'

Exposing:

We walked to the protest where we met with the rest of the activists: WRC practitioners, associates and volunteers. We dispersed deliberately and spent an entire day talking to protestors, learning about their life stories in an attempt to discern what kind of support they needed and what we could do to contribute. I stepped into the crowd confident of my view that the amendments to the law on social and child protection were outright wrong and that the harmful consequences of their adoption would take years to change. In my mind I was rehearsing a script for conveying my views in a friendly manner in case I was asked about them. However, squeezing between grids of raised arms gripping banners with calloused hands, which perfectly framed their determined but weary faces, my confidence started to erode. Suddenly, being exposed to all the clues indicating the kind of lives many of the women here lived rushed to my attention like a meteor storm: wrinkles on relatively young faces matching those on the more mature in all but the depth of creases, worn out shoes and jackets, no jackets at all, swollen bags underneath eyes, an intricate web of tiny cuts and scars on their knotty hands induced by years of manual labour, solemn and exhausted facial expressions. The rationalised political stance I came to the protest with started to wobble and became overpowered by feelings of compassion towards these women.

My heart raced when I noticed a woman smiling and moving in my direction as I realised that the script I was working through in my head was rapidly dissolving in the face of these new realisations. The women I had visualised in my mind previously did not wear the marks of living in poverty. I was aware that I would never be able to explain to any of

these women why I was against the benefits, as saying that would mean that I was standing against them putting food on the table for their families, providing books for their children or being able to pay their utility bills. I made small-talk with the woman, during which I learned that she was a mother of four children and wife to a partner who suffered permanent spinal damage from performing construction work, and how benefits had been the only source of income for them in the past months. The realisation of the burden of her hardship prompted me to re-evaluate and reframe my political stance. When I answered in the negative to her question about whether I had children, an expression of puzzlement briefly washed over her face before she offered a form of empathetic understanding, saying that: "It's cruel that young women can't afford motherhood." Afraid to say anything that might give me away as an 'outsider', I simply thanked her and continued to move amongst the crowd, further feelings of guilt creeping in. This was agonistic engagement – it was confrontational in identity terms - and yet I kept thinking, while walking between the mothers, that the theory itself could not capture the embodied, visceral and relational ways in which my own commitments were being challenged.

Inhabiting:

Exposing ourselves to the mothers and their stories of deprivation was no simple fact-finding exercise. Their stories changed us and propelled a proactive reworking of our democratic agency, our sense of 'we' (Butler, 2003), forcing us to call into question and adapt our prior political commitments, challenging what we viewed as a breach of law from the government.

When the other practitioners spoke to the protestors about the hardships they had been enduring for years, "the brutal reality hit home" (Andrea). She added that: "All those political stances we have adopted must be reframed as they are empty against the suffering these women endure". Mina said it was no wonder these mothers thought the way they did as they were "simply a product of decades of patriarchalisation", experiencing constant repetition of the same message about the role of mothers in society, such as a woman's place being in the home and "the reward or punishment that comes with upholding or defying such a system". It was Sanja who described the experience of inhabiting in most depth:

Supporting mothers was a terribly risky move because many of them flirted with the right wing, neo-fascist parties. On the other hand…they're women who have the right to fight for their rights. In some ways it was completely natural to support them, but on the other…well, you remember, we didn't feel good being there. But it was heart-breaking seeing them suffering like that…The conversations we had with organisers of the protests also weren't easy. We made a judgement to support them because this government impoverished them, toyed with them and then discarded them. That goes beyond the immediate value systems mothers and we may have. Such an act from the government has breached a system of values that concerns us all – the rule of law. Now, we understood that, but those women just wanted their benefits back. And how do you support those with whom you do not speak the same language? Via the language of compassion, like we did. If you don't feel the injustice, if it doesn't torment you, then you won't be able to fight against it. You can throw all the knowledge you have through the window. People who do what we do can't leave the office at 5pm and lock their activism there. That would be insincere…When things such as this happen, I live with them, I carry them home, I think about it and as a human being I feel obligated to help as much as I possibly can. That kind of empathy is actually something that

separates the truthful people, truly motivated fighters for democracy, from those who are…stage fighters. You simply have to live it 24/7. If we fail to protect the rule of law, what's the point of anything? Nobody's safe in a lawless country. Not mothers, not us, not anybody. So that was my thinking - that and compassion drove my decision. Mothers didn't get that all the time, but we were all in the same pickle. Today it was mothers, tomorrow somebody else…

Sanja begins by stating the difference between WRC practitioners and protestors, flagging what in her view presents the biggest risk of supporting the protestors – mothers "flirting with the…neo-fascist parties". She proceeds by traversing back and forth between the pros and cons of lending support, weighing this risk against the injustices these women are subjected to. What surfaces through this traversing is Sanja's interplay between the emotional and rational: a struggle to justify the support she is emotionally inclined to provide for those who hold a different "value system", without damaging the organisation's reputation. While her inclination to join the mothers in protest is initially driven by compassion for those who "suffer", her argumentation gradually surfaces another, rational subjectivity, via which Sanja frames the protest as a fight for "the rule of law" rather than a fight for "benefits". We learn that neither Sanja nor the mothers she was talking to have changed their views regarding the benefits, but that Sanja has rationalised a way of supporting the protest without damaging anyone involved. She closes her story by returning to an emotional subjectivity, which she posits as an enabler of action, where one has "to feel the injustice" in order to "fight for democracy".

Sanja's use of verbs denotes the embodied way in which she comes to inhabit the subjectivity of mothers. Sanja positions the mothers as "impoverished", "toyed" with and "discarded" by the government, as people who are "suffering" injustice, but also who "didn't get" the political scope of such injustice. The practitioners are posited as people who "feel" the injustice, "fight" against it and are "tormented" by it, who "carry" suffering home and who "live" their democratic practice. Inhabiting is therefore a difficult, conflictual, uncomfortable and irrational experience.

Inhabiting is evident in the way Sanja utilises pronouns in her talk. She begins with the solitary 'I' where she positions herself apart from the protestors. Very quickly she includes me[26] in the story via the pronoun 'you' (and soon the rest of the organisation is denoted by 'we' and 'us'), as someone who might recognise the stated differences between 'us' (the organisation) and 'them' – (the mothers). 'Us' and 'them' are posited as standing on diametrically opposite sides of the spectrum: fighters for democracy versus those others, some of whom "flirted with nationalist, neo-fascist parties". However, Sanja frames another 'they' – the corrupt government that breached the rule of law, those that Sanja paints as a threat to "us all". At this moment, the practice of transversing is complete, temporarily: "us all" (mothers, practitioners, "somebody else") are positioned as united against "them" – the government that breaches the rule of law.

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[26] By this time in the field I was fully integrated as a member of the organisation and referring to it via the pronoun 'we' became a normalised practice for WRC practitioners and I. This is why I believe that Sanja in this case was not adopting a collective pronoun to disperse her responsibility for actions and decisions made (Harding, 2008; 2014) but was rather – and probably quite unconsciously – including me within her building of the subjectivity involved.

Citing:

WRC members and their associates wanted to support the mothers despite their differences, but they also had to create a basis upon which such support could be enacted. With this in mind, they engaged in numerous and long conversations with the protestors about the ways in which they could be supported and while the mothers were polite, they were reluctant to accept assistance. For some time, the protestors and WRC remained locked in some sort of political stasis: WRC wanted to offer support but no one was certain how such support could be enacted in practice. Practitioners continued to bring food, water and ideas about various ways in which they thought the mothers could be assisted, such as incorporating mothers' issues into the International Women's Day March, writing numerous appeals to representatives of relevant institutions and reaching out to EU representatives. However, for a number of weeks dialogue between representatives of the two groups jarred. For a large portion of time during the protests the mothers simply wanted their benefits restored, while WRC wanted to protect the rule of law by drawing attention to the point that the government could not guarantee rights and then take them away on a "whim".

Eventually, the 'inter-subjective' space in which resolution was reached about the legitimacy of the protest took place between various subjectivities, where the compassion of practitioners aligned with their political commitments to more radical forms of equality. The mothers' subjectivity moved towards the larger anti-authoritarian position of WRC and its opposition allies. As a result of numerous conversations between the two groups, the mothers began to incorporate some of the rule-of-law argumentation

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of WRC into their speeches, which brought them and the practitioners closer together, albeit differences were not collapsed.

Divergences between WRC and the mothers were not constituted through words alone. Some of the tensions inherent in the transversing of the mothers can be seen in the following picture of a mother during the action.

Photo 1 credit: Savo Prelević, Vijesti newspaper

In the picture, taken in the early stages of the protest, a woman holds a sign saying: "Mothers are the Law", a pun which roughly translates as "mothers rule" and denotes the citing of a powerful social norm – the importance attributed to the status and authority of 'mother', a *particular* concern in Laclau's (2007) terms, rather than a *universalised* one incorporated and adapted into a broader chain of equivalence. The norm of motherhood as privileged becomes even more pronounced through the underlined red lettering, as if the words could have been written and sanctified in blood. The staging of the photograph

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re-enforces the message of the 'sanctity of motherhood' discourse. The gaze of the mother is directed at the viewer – an engaging look that seems to demand a kind of confirmation. When connected with the 'sanctity of motherhood' discourse, which is so prevalent and powerful in Montenegro, we can plausibly assume that the anticipated response is an act of validation on the part of the viewer and this interpretation would be congruent with the published location of the photograph, in a national newspaper, where such norms are abundant and continuously recited.

Indeed, in the first weeks of the protest most of the protestors framed their narratives around the privileged status of mothers, as if they were attempting to remind the government of their sanctity and to instigate a sense of shame. The banners and speeches featured messages such as: "Prime minister, don't you have a mother?"; "Remember, you all came from mothers"; "Hurting a mother is the greatest sin", etc. However, after failing to provoke the desired response from the government, and engaging in prolonged dialogue with WRC, some of them began shifting their narrative. The photograph below is interesting as it uses the same staging techniques but delivers a subtly different message.

Photo 2 credit: ИН4С Portal, online media outlet

In this photograph the sign says: 'We only ask for what belongs to us according to law'. Here the message of the mother to the viewer is universalised through a request for empathy: the feeling that one has been deprived of one's rights in law by an antagonist government is common across numerous causes and people in the country, so the appeal is to view the mother as suffering injustices 'like you'. In terms of the political shift of the mothers, we can note that the photograph demonstrates a transversal, at least for this mother, from the particular subjectivity 'maligned mother' to a more universalised one of 'maligned mother who has been wronged just like you'. Her positioning is conveyed neither through word or image alone, but through an accumulation: the mother's body is brought to bear on the visual of the sign and the words communicated. The mother cites the words of WRC but also, through her bodily presence (she looks tired, even run down), she enhances and reconfigures the words into a new political stance.

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The extent of the transversing experienced and undertaken by the mothers can be seen in the following picture:

Photo 3 credit: Savo Prelević, Slobodna Evropa, online news agency

Here, we see a mother in one of the later protests holding a flag designed by a progressive and feminist NGO (Anima), denoting love and solidarity. The citing that occurs here is obviously far more general and broadly progressive than the original language of the mothers and one might also note that the effect of a mother holding the flag carries a more encompassing and perhaps impactful message than had a practitioner been holding it. Furthermore, the picture itself denotes equivalence between diverse people and groups – there are many people in frame and the angle of the picture is downwards to emphasise the number of people present: people's individual features are less important than the mass of people and the prominence of the flag they congregate beneath.

Transversing summary

I positioned the sub-practice of transversing as establishing a basis upon which diverse groups were able to work together. I explored the sub-practice as one of embodied and relational discovery, of making oneself vulnerable and open to change by exposing oneself to the hardship of others. I elaborated upon how practitioners and their collaborators moved between one another's subject positions over time, as they learned in embodied and experiential ways about alternative political stances. I introduced the notion of inhabiting one another's subjectivity as relational, enacted through the feeling and appreciation of others' vulnerability. Finally, I demonstrated that the movement between subjectivities was enacted in visual and bodily ways, through the dimension of citing, which fostered the construction of collective agency.

6.2. Foregoing

Foregoing is a sub-practice that highlights the experience of offering one's body for someone else's cause but also of supressing aspects of self for others. This is experienced as an antagonistic struggle, as bodies appear as sites of democratic practice. The unremitting capitulation of practitioners to the perceived needs of others is enacted through a matrix of repetitive norms, of masculine rationalisation but also of care for others, which bears vigorously onto practitioners' bodies. Underlining repetitive norms in this sub-practice is important as it draws attention to the enactment of democratic struggle within the self of practitioners in daily routines, not in big, theatrical and public sacrificial acts.

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Sub-practice of embodying democratic practice	Dimensions of sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Foregoing The notion of the self of practitioners as the site of democratic struggle, where competing subjectivities vie for recognition. The struggle is experienced in embodied ways through the vulnerable bodies of practitioners.	**Self-conflict** Denotes the emerging agency of practitioners. Such agency emerges out of conflict between subjectivities and always favours the posited needs and subjectivity of the 'other' – the client or ally in WRC's case.	Marija, interview extract: "There's nothing rational about it…I am sorry that…how come everything and everyone else was more important to me than me?…How come I didn't think of my wellbeing first? Believe me, I…I feel so guilty, I feel…but…I just had this feeling that somebody's counting on me…"
	Normalising Highlights that foregoing does not take place in formalised and official spaces designated for democratic engagement (e.g. roundtable discussions, workshops, conferences, etc.), but in the routinised work of practitioners (such as running chores and managing time). Normalising is a pull back to the rational and masculine norms of order and routine.	Ethnographic journal extract: Marija's miscarriage happened as she was busy with the everyday routinised work of the organisation (running errands for people in need, driving between commitments, lifting a heavy printing press).

Table 2: Sub-practice of foregoing

Organisation members performed foregoing as a taken-for-granted, normalised practice, which they rarely questioned and often dismissed as something that was 'not a big deal' whenever I would bring it up. Purely in terms of stamina, I experienced what it was like to rise early every day, return late from the office each evening or later at night, have a rushed dinner and then join online discussions between colleagues – it was often exhilarating, but also physically and emotionally draining work, performed for little financial reward. I now explore how we can understand such foregoing of certain aspects of self through a democratic lens. Instances of foregoing are abundant in the practice of WRC and I will outline their main features through a single, in-depth ethnographic episode – the story of Marija.

Ethnographic episode (foregoing): "There are worse things in life" – Marija's story

This episode illustrates an act of bodily foregoing, that of a practitioner foregoing her own wellbeing for others, which materialised in the form of her miscarrying a pregnancy. In this extract, the practitioner, Marija, struggles to understand her actions and feels torn between guilt relating to losing a pregnancy and a felt necessity to help others who are in need.

Marija worked across the main organisational programmes, which involved: meeting clients, performing administrative tasks for the programme of psychological and legal help, conducting research for the advocacy programme, running errands within the cultural programme, and so on, hoping that by experiencing different aspects of the organisation's work she might learn where she could contribute the most. In between these tasks she would strive to learn more about issues preoccupying feminists, reading various articles and often translating them for one of the organisation's web pages. On several occasions, Marija expressed concern that she might be 'underperforming' despite the fact that her 'performance' was not assessed, and she was always spoken of in positive terms by her colleagues.

Often, the sub-practice of foregoing would bear so vigorously onto her body that she would be on the verge of crying every time she believed that her performance was not up to standard. The practice of foregoing, coupled with the stress that comes with the regular practices of WRC, through encounters with people who suffer injustice, inequality, poverty and violence, often brought Marija to a state of "hopelessness and despair", as she stated several times. It also imbued her with a sense of "heightened

responsibility" towards those perceived to be in need. The series of actions that eventually led to Marija miscarrying were not entirely deliberate, but performed through enacted and repetitive impulses of the body: focused on helping others and performing 'well' against the demands posited by her maternal and emotional selves.

During our exchange, her body language was incongruent and conflicted, as though her various selves were in a state of disagreement and adversarial dialogue: she appeared to be struggling to present a brave face, but her body presented a different self. She clutched her hands nervously, braced herself as if cold, bent her torso forwards while sitting, as if in pain, and yet kept smiling as if in defiance of this aspect of herself. I asked her if she was all right and she assured me she was fine, maintaining her smile. I backed off because I believed she wanted me to, and we continued to talk. The expression on her face relaxed a little, seeming only slightly relieved, and I realised she had secured one victory – I was one less person she needed to convince that she was 'fine' and 'resilient'. I briefly reflected on the fact that saying she was 'fine' was a kind of signature and rationalised statement from Marija and her colleagues. Marija recounted her story:

> *I was under so much stress…I don't know if [a colleague] told you but we drove to those two women…No one should be brought to…such an inhumane condition…They are starving, all of them, so malnourished! We brought the food supplies for perhaps a week, tops…Anyway…I was…I'm under stress. It is…I can't…I didn't quite know how to process it. I'm learning, you know…It's not that…I just…I'm still learning. Anyway, that day […] we were supposed to pick up the printing press. We needed my car for that, so [a colleague] and I went to get it…I wasn't really thinking about it, I was just focused on getting things done, to make some contribution. So I bent, lifted it and realised how heavy…I really don't blame anybody, I completely erased it from my mind, it's all my fault. It was an early pregnancy, I just worked as normal, I didn't feel unwell…it was really too heavy, like a washing machine filled with water…but we managed somehow to lift it and load it into the car and then when*

we sat down, it dawned on me. I thought: 'Oh my god, I'm pregnant and I did this! [clutching her stomach] Oh, I felt awful…I still don't know…I can't believe myself! Then, suddenly I started to feel an excruciating pain…terrible pain and I felt…I ran to the toilet and I realised…I saw…and I just said to [a colleague] 'I need to pop out quickly'. I did not explain anything to anybody…The doctor took me in, did the necessary checks and said – 'Yes, it seems like this pregnancy will go, unfortunately.' And then I started to sob uncontrollably…I don't know why I think the way I do and why I act the way I do and trust me I did try to provide an answer to that but it was simply something stronger. There's nothing rational about it…I am sorry that…how come everything and everyone else was more important to me than me? How's that possible? How come I didn't think of my wellbeing first? Believe me, I…I feel so guilty, I feel…but…I have no answer. I just had this feeling that somebody's counting on me, like those women who have nobody else there to help them and it never occurred to me that a person counting on me was, in fact - me. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? I let myself down and I let others down…Now I can't be of help…[bursting into tears]…I have no one to blame but myself. Uh…sorry…I should pull myself together! […] there are worse things in life. [straightens her back and adjusts her top]

Analysing the language used by Marija to make sense of her experience helps surface some of the ways in which foregoing is normalised, patterns replicated throughout my time in the field by other WRC practitioners. The body becomes the site of contestation between demands, with the posited 'other' and the 'rational' professional self of Marija prevailing. The first thing to note about Marija's story is that it takes place in a mundane environment of office routines, rather than being experienced in a space specifically designated for democratic practice. Her routines are never explicitly reflected upon but seem to act like a constant pull back to the masculine, to order, combined with a sense of push and pull of the various 'others' who need her attention. Marija's story is fragmented, indicative of the other dimension of this sub-practice – that of an antagonistic struggle of self, immediately obvious in this episode in the numerous pauses, breaks and fragmented sentences she enacts in her attempt to explicate the series of actions that take place the day she loses her pregnancy. To see the broader

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contours of this struggle of self, we can analyse the argumentation and related positioning of subjectivity in the text.

Marija is struggling to understand the events that lead to her foregoing and lifting of the heavy printing press. She jumps between several competing subjectivities: her emotional, maternal, professional and routinised selves, the women whose circumstances shook her and the organisation, finding it hard to achieve coherence, with all of these manifesting in a form of conflictual dialogue, vying for prominence and legitimacy. She starts the argumentation by stating that she had been under a lot of stress in the weeks running up to her miscarriage, suggesting that stress might be the culprit for the lack of concentration she exhibited in deciding to lift the device. She first concentrates on her emotional self, pointing to the stress she experiences, yet her thoughts suddenly shift to the hardship that the women she visits have to endure and then, returning to her professional self as if to reassure me that she is not sensitive but that she is rather still learning about dealing with the stress that the job entails, a pull back to the masculine norms of order and 'professionalism'.

She expands her argument with details relating to the clients she visited that day, and how their living conditions shook her. Such a shift to other women's experience amidst reflection on her own acts suggests that Marija might feel guilty for trying to justify her behaviour through the explanation of stress. However, she quickly shakes the thought off and returns to listing the things she was supposed to do, falling back upon the mundane norms of work. The organisation forms a sense of agency and self here, as she yet again makes recourse to a professional self, as if trying to rationally explain her actions, before blaming her maternal self for not intervening, in the most intense passage of the story,

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which is heightened by her tears. But even here she chastises herself for such behaviour, reminding us that 'there are worse things in life', suggesting that whatever she feels should be regarded as insignificant in the larger scheme of things where people suffer 'inhumane conditions'. The episode is therefore 'resolved' as her professional self and the selves of her clients endure and are privileged.

Looking more closely at the utilisation of speech units and the ways in which they are tied together into a syntagmatic configuration surfaces even more starkly the struggle Marija feels in relation to herself. In terms of how this struggle is built through language, the subject she is the most preoccupied with 'theorising' (Harding, 2008: 48) is clearly herself, as she makes reference to herself 52 times within this particular excerpt via the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'myself'.[27]

Yet, even though Marija makes frequent recourse to self, she is struggling to surface her thinking and feelings about self, evident not solely in the fragmented and unfinished clauses, but also in traversing from past to present tense. Namely, she begins by saying that she *was* under stress but soon afterwards she changes her mind, stating that she *is* under stress, suggesting that the stress she is referring to is not necessarily linked to a particular day/event but to a more persistent state of being for her. She continues shifting between present and past tenses in fragmented clauses, in an attempt to explain herself and her actions before, again, seemingly settling on the past tense. This suggests

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[27] Although the pronoun 'I' appears 52 times in the selected excerpt, this pronoun appears only 14 times in the Montenegrin version due to a specific character of language where the pronoun 'I' is often omitted from constructions, as the speaker's reference to a particular person(s) is denoted through the auxiliary verb 'to be'. For example, instead of saying 'Ja sam uradila to'/'I did that', it is sufficient to say 'uradila *sam* to' omitting the prounoun 'Ja'/'I', as the form of the auxiliary verb 'to be' – *sam* – denotes reference to the first person, or self.

that she 'did not know' how to deal with stress on that particular day, immediately followed by a statement featuring a progressive verb form, which indicates that even though she would like to be more resilient, she is still 'learning' how to process the struggle, as if the solution might be to become more adept at rationalising her demands.

Focusing on the transitivity of the extract, we can see more clearly the commands issued by the professional, masculinised subject position and those of her clients. These are materialised in the clauses 'getting things done' and 'making some contribution', suggesting that the command to contribute and to finish the task she is 'supposed to do' challenges her maternal and emotional selves. It is worth noting here that she uses the verb phrase 'supposed to' without actually naming the agent of 'supposition', which could indicate that she performs an act of self-responsibilisation, where she regulates her behaviour according to what she believes is 'supposed to be done'. Such self-responsibilisation is fortified by the subjectivity of the women she visited, whom she represents in speech as 'counting' on her. The progressive form of the verb 'to count' suggests that she feels that she is adjusting herself to be in a constant state of alertness should someone require 'help'. At one brief moment, Marija engages in a moment of reflexivity, which brings her to the realisation that she managed to forget about one person who was counting on her – her maternal self – which leaves her perplexed. Yet, rather than attempting to discern the reasons for this, and potentially resolving the perplexity, she denies herself an opportunity to empathise with her own maternal self and reaches for the self-directed (masculine) imperative instead – 'pull myself together!'

It is worth noting the choice of nouns and adjectives, as well as the omission of these from parts of the excerpt, because they surface some of the embodied struggles of

subjectivity experienced by Marija. The most prominently used nouns in the text are 'stress' and 'pain', each denoting a corporeal experience, yet each of which are not fully articulated, as if Marija struggles to translate her bodily experience into words. She makes an attempt to underline the pain she feels by painting the noun with adjectives such as 'excruciating' and 'terrible' but her experience still remains incomplete in the text, which is indicated by unfinished sentences and fragmented clauses. Yet, on the other hand, Marija appears reluctant to put certain bodily experiences into words. For example, she describes how she ran to the toilet after she felt pain and abruptly cuts the sentence mid-way through, unable to say that she saw blood, as if the more rational and masculine aspects of self want to erase this embodied experience.

She opts for the third-person-neutral pronoun 'it' to denote something that is 'stronger' than her 'rational' side – empathy – that guides her actions and eventually instigates the feeling of 'guilt'. The under-developed and neutral nature of 'it' contrarily signals its weight and authority, as the dominant aspect of her agency. The equating of rationality with empathy in a speech act is seemingly an oxymoron but within the agency of Marija underlines the dominance of her empathetic and professional selves.

The choice of nouns and adjectives all point to the bodily experiences of Marija, yet her characterisation of these experiences as something 'irrational', coupled with her conflicting body language, points to Marija's desire to perform rationally and composedly as a means of avoiding feelings of 'guilt', 'blame', 'stress', 'pain' and 'it' – the heightened sense of empathy that guided her actions in the first place. Such a desire is almost immediately translated into her bodily performativity at the end of our conversation

when she 'pulls [herself] together', wipes her tears away, straightens her back and readjusts her top, as if putting everything back into a 'rational' order.

Foregoing summary

The sub-practice of foregoing highlighted how democratic practice was played out upon the bodies of practitioners. Foregoing denoted putting one's body into the service of others and, in the process, supressing aspects of self that were perceived as not being 'adequate' for the task. In the ethnographic episode above, I explored how a masculine subjectivity emerged through a process of conflict between different subjectivities vying for dominance. The agency that surfaced from such conflict enacted a subjectivity that favoured the other who was posited as being in need. Finally, I highlighted how such agentic enactment represented a rational pull to the masculine norms of order and discipline, which was normalised through the routine work of practitioners rather than taking place in more formally designated spaces for democratic engagement.

6.3. Shielding

In generating democratic practice WRC practitioners often find themselves in the role of defender, trying to shield people from various forms of antagonism. In doing so, they seek to navigate antagonism, often suffering by putting themselves – and their bodies - at risk, experiencing threats and slander, in order to agonistically support those they shield. Conceptually, the practice of shielding refers to the substituting and extending of the subjectivity, and bodily presence, of the people WRC supports, in order to protect and

advocate for them with antagonistic state institutions and other hostile actors. I explore

two dimensions of shielding. Each is defined and summarised in the following table.

Sub-practice of embodying democratic practice	Dimensions of the sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Shielding Practitioners' enactments of a series of shields, each offering a different form of protection in a given situation. Shielding helps an emerging agency develop through allying embodied experience with knowledge of democratic practice and activism established over time.	**Supplementing** Offering an authority of experience, in activism and professional expertise, when such knowledge is not possessed by the people practitioners seek to support. This dimension is embodied, as it denotes a movement between knowing when a corporeal presence is necessary and when a more disembodied form of expertise might be needed.	Ethnographic journal extract: Protesting shoulder-to-shoulder with mothers, practitioners acted as witnesses against potential abuses of power, occupying the space between special forces and protestors (forming a live shield). In addition, they engaged in writing appeals to relevant national institutions and informing supranational institutions about the government's breach of the rule of law, as a means of applying pressure to the government to address the problem. They strove to "defend the mothers in those fields where they are not present" (Andrea), as practitioners were convinced "that the government won't consider them at all" (Jana).
	Absorption Instances where practitioners absorb the deprivations experienced by the people they support, rather than helping from a distance, making themselves vulnerable in order to fortify the 'shield' protecting them from antagonists. New subjectivities arise through absorption, which insist upon democratic acknowledgement.	Mina, interview extract: "I put my body out there as a political tool... First, I wanted to prove to mothers...that our support is sincere, that we're in it together. Second, I wanted to soften the blows they were suffering from everywhere...to erect another wall of support."

Table 3: Sub-practice of shielding

To illustrate the sub-practice of shielding I now unpack its dimensions through an

ethnographic episode from the protest of mothers.

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Ethnographic episode (shielding): advocacy, protests and hunger strikes

Experiencing national media attention, the ire of establishment politicians, their financial interests and coercive apparatus, posed a real antagonistic threat to the mothers, most of whom had not previously expressed their political agency to this degree. WRC practitioners knew early on that the mothers' discursive strategy of seeking to shame political leaders into reinstating their benefits would fall upon the deaf ears of corrupt government actors and that the mothers would need some kind of protection and support, fortification that would also respect their agency. Below I expand upon the two dimensions of shielding, supplementing and absorption.

Supplementing:

We sat in the office watching a live stream video of the mothers congregating in front of the government building. On the video someone's voice shouted 'special forces!' and we caught a glimpse of the police unit's shields though a shaky camera shot. We looked at one another, all thinking what Lara said next: "I hope the police will refrain from 'protecting'[28] the mothers!"

We dashed out of the door and straight to the protest. Passing through the crowd, I spotted a group of activists standing in front of the row of special forces officers, as if

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[28] In October 2015 a controversial anti-government peaceful protest organised by opposition parties and groups turned into a violent clash between police and protestors in which 40 people sustained injuries (see Vijesti 25/10/2015).

shielding protestors from potential conflict with the police. I made my way through to them to ask if that was what they were doing and Mina, a seasoned activist, explained that she did not think that conflict would occur, as the police were there just as "a tool of intimidation". But should it come to a clash, Mina further explained, we were there as "witnesses" who could provide testimony to the media and courts, as the mothers had no experience of working in these kinds of situations. Jovana added that she was familiar with the ruling party's tactics of sabotaging and dismantling protests, and stressed that it was "our duty to protect the protestors, by being their eyes and ears". I asked what would happen if they, the practitioners, got injured, and Mina promptly answered with a question: "Would that be any worse than what these women are going through?" I understood that feelings of responsibility and compassion were driving their practice, and that in their eyes protecting protestors was more important than their own safety.

This was an example of practitioners supplementing the position of protestors with knowledge generated throughout numerous antagonistic government engagements. The immediate reaction of practitioners was to shield the protestors from potential (but familiar) forms of abuse. In doing so, they placed themselves at risk, and shielding the protestors took priority over their own safety. I squeezed in between the practitioners and special forces, taking this photograph:

Photo 4: Special Forces in front of the government building

My motivation in taking the photograph was to document the police presence, which seemed excessive for a peaceful protest by ailing mothers. I wanted to capture the mass of police, with an angle to the side to emphasise the point. The act of documentation, in retrospect, was a modest and perhaps obvious form of shielding, perhaps an ironic labelling given the prominence of 'official' police shields in the picture.

As I continued to move through the mass of people, I met Nina, who greeted me with a myriad of semi-devised action plans regarding how to assist the mothers, even then, as we stood amidst the action. Always ready on her feet, she rapidly listed things that should be done: letters to be written, food and water to be procured, tracking the narrative in the media about the event, and so on. When she noticed that I was barely following, she stopped and asked if something was wrong. I expressed my conflicted feelings regarding the protest in relation to my opposition to the law, and my empathy towards mothers, after which she urged me to take a good look around, as what she saw

was "the average woman in Montenegro…impoverished, tortured, disempowered and disfranchised". She admitted to feeling the same way but that it was "our duty to side with these women and to support them" and routinely continued to list the things that "ought to be done".

We spent the following weeks stretched between our preparations for the International Women's Day March and formulating a narrative and action plan to support protestors, as we thought that one important way of shielding the mothers was to connect their cause in an organised way with other women's issues and groups. We combined this work with protesting on the street until late at night. Practitioners were accustomed to the stamina required in such 'shielding' work.

After weeks of this work tempo, Sanja, a WRC practitioner, suggested that standing in the street, albeit an important way to provide support, should be secondary to doing what WRC does best: writing appeals to relevant national institutions and informing supranational institutions about the government's breach of the rule of law, as a means of applying pressure to the government to address the problem. She believed, after having numerous conversations with the mothers, that WRC could aid women more by "stretching the mothers' presence". This involved making sure that their message reached both the public and relevant political actors, "defending the mothers in those fields where they are not present" (Andrea), as practitioners were convinced "that the government won't consider them at all" (Jana). The supplementing work here meant concentrating all efforts on supporting mothers through advocacy with relevant stakeholders, surveying media reports and reacting to misinformation, but also continuously conversing with people who had joined the protest in solidarity, in order to

make sure that they did not overstep or suppress the voices of mothers. It was a strategic and partial withdrawal of bodies in order to better protect and supplement the mothers in other ways. The shield became extended: practitioners did not only support the protestors with their bodies, in the streets, but such support was supplemented by making their grievances known in areas they did not have access to previously (e.g. CEDAW committee, GREVIO, the EU delegation, etc.).

Absorption:

Another practitioner, Mina, held the view that the way to offer support was to continue to "put our bodies to good use". Therefore, after the protestors announced a hunger strike, Mina expressed her wish to help the women endure the protest by providing them with professional psychological assistance. This was envisaged as a way of shielding the mothers through alleviating some of their psychological pain.

She soon realised, however, that providing advice felt like too distanced a response. She decided to take a further step and join the hunger strike, absorbing the pain of the mothers. Mina is a seasoned activist with a high profile and long history of participation in various protests and street actions, possessing a long memory of the gradual "degradation of women's political power", which she referred to succinctly as "the war on women". When I asked her if she could explain what drove her decision to join the hunger strike, she responded:

We were against these benefits…but these women were used and deceived… it just became clear to me that they are all alone… sustaining blows from everywhere…I wanted our civil society to stand in solidarity with these mothers, and not only us. What I hoped to achieve by my participation in the hunger strike didn't happen at all, but I hoped that others would recognise another political dimension of the protest, that the mothers were not alone, that the civil sector supported them. This effort to fortify the protest, to add an additional buffer to mothers…I wanted to be there as an activist from the civil sector but I also hoped this engagement would motivate other civil society members to support the mothers. I wanted them to understand that what these women were doing was relevant to the entire society, and I wanted us to sustain their engagement. I put my body out there as a political tool, if you like…First, I wanted to prove to mothers that we meant it, that our support was sincere, that we were in it together. Second, I wanted to soften the blows they were suffering from everywhere, you know, to erect another wall of support so to speak…So I placed my body on the crossroads of political streams: civil sector activists who were against the hunger strike…because they knew that the corrupt politicians wouldn't give a damn about it, but this was the mothers' decision, so if we were to support their cause we had to respect their means of protesting. Then there were institutions with their rotten politicians and media who tried to diminish the efforts of women where we wanted to amplify them and, finally, I wanted to prove to these women that I was on their side, our side, to break that wall of suspicion. These women represented everything worth fighting for…they were a manifestation of our society's hardships and they had to endure these because of our corrupt government, suffering the biggest brunt of it all their lives…I didn't want them to suffer alone and fight alone. Their problem was my problem, our problem.

Mina suggests that her decision to support the mothers is grounded in a sense of solidarity for those who have been abandoned, rather than a political decision to either support or oppose the benefits. In the face of the present political reality, she judges that mothers have been "used and deceived" and exposing and correcting the injustice becomes a priority for Mina, the basis upon which she frames her actions. She assumes 'adversarial' relations with the mothers, albeit rooted in solidarity, and, by default, an 'enemy' position towards the state. We learn that mothers are not merely alone but that they are also "sustaining blows from everywhere" and in a myriad of ways (disregard,

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deceit, manipulation, slander, etc.), which partly explains Mina's desire to protect them. Throughout the rest of the excerpt she details what she hoped to gain by participating in the hunger strike: to navigate between the three political 'streams' (mothers, the broader civil sector and institutions) in an attempt to secure trust, increase participation, and 'fortify' the power of the protest.

The ways in which Mina uses pronouns is insightful for understanding her shielding practice. She shifts between the single person 'I'/'me'/'my' and collective pronouns 'we'/'us'/'our' when she speaks about the protestors, as well as when she speaks about the civil sector activists. This movement may denote a confused sense of belonging. Yet, in light of the argumentation offered, this crossing back and forth between different subjectivities indicates a gradual absorption into the subjectivity of others. She expresses her wish that other members of the civil sector could feel the same sense of solidarity, because their joint and wholesale support would provide that much needed 'buffer' to the 'lone', 'used' and 'deceived' mothers. Mina uses her body to blur the lines between the mothers and the civil sector activists in order to demonstrate the strength inherent in the two absorbed subjectivities. Therefore, her moving between pronouns may not indicate confused belonging. Her bodily performativity enacts a new subjectivity in which the 'I' and the 'we' are entangled, which in Mina's view provides strength to the protest.

The perceived strength of this new absorbed subjectivity, and the agency arising from it, is further reinforced by the choice of verbs Mina employs. There is a visible contrast between the verbs relating to the activity of the 'enemies' (Mouffe, 2013) who 'use', 'deceive', 'slander', 'erase', 'overlook', 'diminish' and induce suffering and those of the

'adversaries' (ibid.) who are described in relational terms: 'support', fortify', 'motivate', soften' (the blow), 'erect' (a wall of defence), 'amplify' (strength), 'fight' (injustice) and 'prove' (worth). The potency of the envisaged unity between the civil sector activists and protestors is indicated by the gradation of the verbs Mina utilises, painting a picture of a 'political subject', with each new image constructed appearing stronger than the previous one. Namely, the unity would 'soften' the blows sustained (a passive object), but it would also 'erect' a defensive wall and 'amplify' strength (empowered subject) and, so strengthened, they would 'fight' jointly against the injustice (active subject).

Shielding summary

The sub-practice of shielding denoted an embodied enactment of a series of shields, each of which offered a different form of protection in a given situation. Shielding fostered the formation of agency through allying embodied experience with knowledge of democratic practice and activism. Through the ethnographic episode of the mothers' protest, I highlighted the ways in which practitioners supplemented the strength of those they sought to protect by applying knowledge gained through long-standing experience in engaging with, often, antagonistic stakeholders (the government in this instance). Yet, paradoxically, the biggest strength of the shield lay in vulnerability: by exposing themselves to the hardship of others, and absorbing deprivations experienced by people, they supported and enabled new subjectivities to arise, which insisted upon democratic acknowledgement.

VII Findings – Navigating corruption

Introduction

The NGO and democracy literatures seem to assume a benign environment, or at least do not consider that democratic practices may be pursued through and around contexts of intense and widespread corruption that are impossible to avoid. Indeed, throughout my time in the field, the issue of corruption in influencing democratic practice was inescapable. This chapter therefore explores how WRC practitioners seek to confront and work around corruption in their everyday practice. I refer to this as *navigating corruption* to denote the subtle and sophisticated ways in which practitioners live with corruption and its ubiquity, yet still manage to pursue democratic practices. In this chapter, I first provide insight into the corrupt practices NGO members work against, through and with, before exploring practitioners' counter-practices in relation to them. These practices are paired in order to draw out the responsive quality of democratic practices *in relation* to corrupt practices: the practices are co-constitutive.

I organise these practices into three sections. In the first, I explore *gaslighting*, a practice adopted by institutional representatives to divert and confuse, and practitioners' means of navigating it in their day-to-day work, which I call *dispelling*. The second section also provides insight into the corruption of institutional representatives through enactments of norms informed by patriarchy, which I refer to as *privatising*, the seep of private relations of oppression into the public sphere, and practitioners' responses to these – *publicising*. In the third section, I explore the corruption of GONGOs. I label these

practices *colonising* to denote GONGOs' tendencies to infiltrate NGO spaces and sabotage their work and, in contrast, I term the counter-practices of WRC *unsettling*, to denote its efforts in disrupting the colonising.

7.1. Dispelling vs. Gaslighting

The verb gaslighting is derived from its original etymon 'gaslight', which entered the English language after the screening of George Cukor's 1944 film *Gaslight* in which a husband "manipulates his wife into believing she is going insane" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2002). This attempt to convince his wife that she is losing her sanity (Thomas, 2018) takes place through a series of manipulative acts, including the adjustment of a literal gaslight to flicker and dim. The term is now used by feminists to denote a predominantly masculine practice of control:

> a form of emotional manipulation in which the gaslighter tries…to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds — paradigmatically, so unfounded as to qualify as crazy…gaslighting is aimed at getting another not to take herself seriously as an interlocutor (Abramson, 2014: 2).

I selected this term to denote the difficulty of generating democratic practice amidst the often abstract, obscure and surreal performances of institutional representatives. I theorise four dimensions of gaslighting from my ethnographic data, which are defined and summarised in the following table.

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Corrupt sub-practice	Dimensions of sub-practice	Illustrative example
Gaslighting Corrupt enactments of institutional representatives, which are deployed to make practitioners question their own sanity and competence.	**Weaponising victimhood** Denotes institutional representatives' attempts to assume the status of victim. This aspect of gaslighting distracts and confuses, re-aligning customary categories and identity boundaries in relation to situations of violence against women and advocacy.	Ethnographic journal extract: During a meeting to address family violence with the police, officers refocused attention to their purported grievances about a practitioner's 'abusive' behaviour, deflecting from the accusation that a child suffered violence due to police negligence. They labelled a practitioner as "aggressive", "assertive and inconsiderate", each time she attempted to discuss the case.
	Ruling Denotes the introduction of arbitrary and unspoken rules into procedures and spaces, which are employed to confuse and inhibit meaningful participation in deliberation.	Ethnographic journal extract: During a roundtable discussion, institutional representatives introduced a number of unspoken rules for discussion, which made participation in dialogue almost impossible. They: pretended not to see a raised hand; decided arbitrarily who could speak; limited speaking time; and, made resisters doubt the appropriateness of their questioning.
	Disparaging Acts of rendering practitioners inept in front of an audience when they raise queries and questions regarding corrupt practices.	Ethnographic journal extract: Institutional representatives persistently strove to deflect from the issue in question (the suffering of a child due to police negligence), by 'disparaging' a practitioner as unhinged and volatile and trying to 'calm down' a completely composed person.
	Collective affirmation Shifting the practice of gaslighting to a collective level through drawing in the wisdom of a crowd to affirm the logic and sense of an otherwise seemingly corrupt practice.	Ethnographic journal extract: She shot me a lingering and perplexed look, exposing me… as somehow foolish for asking questions, before scanning the rest of the audience for support, which she received in the form of a number of eyes rolled and several sighs exhaled in my direction, gaining collective affirmation for my 'foolishness'.

Table 4: Sub-practice of gaslighting

In response, dispelling involves the perseverance and stamina of practitioners in finding a way through. Dispelling is a transitive verb, which means "to drive away in different directions or in scattered order; to disperse by force, dissipate" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2002). I chose this verb predominantly for its evocative power, to denote the sub-practice of undoing a 'spell', a gaslighting mirage created by institutional representatives for the purpose of preventing civil sector members from meaningfully participating. This sub-practice features four dimensions, which are defined and summarised in the following table.

Sub-practice of navigating corruption	Dimensions of the sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Dispelling Aimed at dissipating the abstract, obscure and surreal weave of corrupt gaslighting enactments of institutional representatives.	**Reiteration** Repetition of the same message, almost word for word, for the purposes of refocussing the discussion on the needs of people being represented.	Ethnographic journal extract: While the police officers attempted to force the discussion onto the 'deviant' behaviour of the practitioner, she kept repeating in a monotone that they were gathered together to "talk about the case of a minor who suffered more violence due to police negligence".
	Presenting evidence The introduction of reports, analyses, witness statements, and so on, in an attempt to dispel the effects of gaslighting and refocus the discussion.	Ethnographic journal extract: When a police officer claimed that she acted according to the law and insisted on talking about her grievances instead of police practice, the practitioner started methodically citing statements made by the victim and her mother, legal rules and procedures, firmly trying to shift the discussion back to the case of the minor.
	Tactical withdrawal Those instances where practitioners consciously concede to an unfair and/or inaccurate criticism in order to redirect a conversation back to their area of concern.	Ethnographic journal extract: [The practitioner] nodded, reluctantly accepting part of the blame for the 'abuse' she had not committed, as it was "the only way to move past the stupid thing and focus on the real abuse".
	Instigating compassion Seeks to dispel corrupt	Ethnographic journal extract: The practitioner painted a detailed

	practice by provoking empathetic feelings from institutional representatives.	picture of the history of violence the minor and her mother had sustained over the years, the consequences such a life had borne on the victims, while continuously urging the police officer to imagine such violence happening to her daughter.

Table 5: Sub-practice of dispelling

In this subsection I explore the practices of gaslighting and dispelling through two episodes. The first offers a first-person experience of gaslighting, my own encounter with representatives of institutions during a roundtable discussion of a document no one had read and that was not circulated in advance. This particular episode draws out the dimensions of gaslighting but also the absence of a sub-practice of dispelling, as I was an inexperienced practitioner caught up in the befuddling weave. The second episode provides an example of both gaslighting and dispelling, as Nina (a WRC practitioner) deals with police officers employing gaslighting practices as a strategy to close down meaningful dialogue, distracting and shifting the narrative axis from the victim of family violence to a synthetic conflict.

Ethnographic episode (gaslighting): Am I going mad?

It was not until I experienced the practice of gaslighting first-hand that I truly understood what practitioners went through routinely in interaction with institutional representatives and how difficult it is to dispel such practices. My experience occurred during a roundtable discussion about the application of a law on gender equality with government representatives. I was surprised to learn that the authors of the law were the same people who posed as the sole commentators on the law's application in

practice. Moreover, the roundtable discussion was organised for the purpose of evaluating the 'Commentary to the Application of the Law on Gender Equality' - a document that no one present, apart from its authors, had laid eyes upon before. I kept re-reading the discussion agenda, as I could not believe that a group of people could stage a discussion about something no one was familiar with. The authors-commentators provided an elaborate introduction about the importance of having such a law within the legal framework, underlining the status of the law as a "cherished milestone in the history of the country", before opening the floor for questions and comments.

Doubting my own sanity, I sent a panicky text to Lana (WRC practitioner) asking if she was absolutely sure the organisation had never received and read the Commentary, to which she texted back that WRC asked the authors about the document several times and each time received the same answer: "The document is not ready for distribution". I listened to the audience comments, which were variants of the same type of praise and admiration, wrapped in the discourse of victory and historical significance, of collective affirmation. Not one person posed the obvious questions about whether the law worked in practice and what the experiences of NGO practitioners were with its application.

I raised my hand only to realise that I was invisible, lost in whatever rules the facilitator had determined for selecting speakers. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to make eye contact with the facilitator, I stood up and walked to her, asking for an opportunity to comment. She politely acknowledged my request and continued to ignore me, exposing me as 'irrelevant', or a 'nuisance' (how I noted my feelings at the time). From the vantage point of more experience, I later learned that this was a common practice of gaslighting, where institutional representatives render certain participants invisible and irrelevant

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through the subtle tactics of ruling the deliberation spaces with their own unspoken rules, such as pretending not to see raised hands, deciding who can speak and when, delaying and setting arbitrary limits on speaking time, as well as making people question the appropriateness of their acts (e.g. Was my hand raised enough? Did I formulate my request clearly? Was I allowed to ask questions?). After drawing her attention once again, she approached me and asked if I could allow a ministry representative to comment first. I agreed but wanted to know why she was insisting on it. "She is from the ministry", she enunciated, expecting me to understand, which I did not at the time. Visibly irritated with my reaction, she passed the microphone over my shoulder.

It was reverence for a 'higher' authority that informed the practice of the facilitator. Even though the topic was equality, the entire event was abundant with unequal practice where the floor was offered to institutional representatives before anyone else. Speakers used the masculine gender in speech as a form of neutral gender (a practice which is legally sanctioned by the same law that was being discussed, ironically) and addressed one another in the plural – a kind of formal address that places the addressed at a distance from the addressee and can sometimes constitute a power imbalance between interlocutors. For instance, one of the authors-commentators addressed some of the participants using the singular personal pronoun 'you' (ti), while they in turn kept addressing the authors in the plural 'you' (Vi)– as a kind of demonstrative respect, simultaneously affirming their own position as inferior, which was another instance of ruling the deliberation space with subtle tactics of power (ti as inferior, Vi as superior).

When I finally had the opportunity to speak, I asked the convenors to elaborate on their rationale for providing the commentary for the law they had also drafted, as well as to

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explain why we did not receive the document prior to the discussion. The main speaker amongst the convenors shot me a lingering and perplexed look, exposing me as somehow foolish for asking questions, before she scanned the rest of the audience for support, which she received in the form of a number of eyes rolled and sighs exhaled in my direction, gaining collective affirmation of my 'foolishness'. My palms were sweating because the body language of the speaker and others impressed upon me that I had asked something entirely stupid. Finally, she cleared her throat, smiled innocently and said: "Sorry, I don't understand", another way of exposing me as confused, or incapable of keeping up. When I repeated my questions, she shrugged and apologised for "simply not understanding", appearing confused herself now, as if I was speaking a foreign language, and tried to move the discussion on. But as I saw the microphone being carried away, I shouted across the room: "You are the people who wrote the law and now you have written a commentary on it without the input of those people who actually have experience with the application of such laws in practice. Moreover, no one knows what aspects of the law you commented on because no one has read it. Would you care to comment?"

She was visibly startled by this form of confrontation and provided a clumsy response that the document was not printed until late the previous evening, making offended and hurt facial expressions, and then she glanced around the room for support once again, looking for collective affirmation. I realised after reflection that she was assuming the identity of a victim, even weaponising victimhood, which would in turn render me a bully. However, before I could say anything, people started praising the Commentary as "one of the best documents", as "a document we will be returning to over and over again". By this point I was bathing in adrenaline and had lost all sense of propriety, so I
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shouted back like a feisty drunkard: "How the hell do you know it's the best when you haven't read it?" Yet, instead of the kind of cinematic resolution I was hoping for, where the audience cracks under the burden of a pointed question and admits the fallacy of the staged event, my voice, alongside my sense of pride, drowned in a cacophony of the ode to the Commentary. I was made to feel crazy and then I acted crazily, confirming the identity subtly assigned to me.

After the event, a few participants approached me to express their support. They "completely agreed" with me, they said, yet, none of them said anything during the discussion. "You're Nina's sister right? You girls are feisty!" one of them said with a smile. I remembered that a few other people thought that Nina, a WRC practitioner, and I might be related and only then did I panic, fearing that I may have compromised WRC's relationship with these institutional representatives. I walked back to the office, feeling altogether stupid, ashamed and angry. Upon arrival a couple of people asked me how the discussion went. I came clean about everything, expecting the worst. However, they cheered, laughed and congratulated me on my "baptism by fire". Luka and Andrea shared their "firsts" of similar situations that hauntingly resembled my recent experience. Andrea explained:

> They want you to feel ignorant, as if you're losing your mind...It's their tactic for defeating you. My first encounter with [one of the institutional representatives] was so surreal, I had to check and re-check myself to make sure I was saying what I thought I was saying because her reaction was completely incongruent to what was coming out of my mouth...She wanted to confuse me and shut me up...It's a well rehearsed network of practices: destroying the evidence that we've seen with our own eyes and claiming it never existed, retracting and denying something they said, pinning something on us that we didn't do, slandering us in the media as 'enemies of

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state', inventing meetings and agreement that never happened...you name it! Tactic upon tactic. But in time we learned how to counteract: by making sure there was a physical, written trail of conversations, agreements, never agree stuff over the phone...Be prepared that they will try to turn the political into a personal issue and try to blame you for everything, that they will try to discredit you and so on...Always, always stay on mission and don't get caught up in their game. Be guided by justice, know your laws, and beat them through evidence...It's tiresome and often I think this energy could be better spent elsewhere, but I don't think we have a choice in this society eyeballs deep in corruption.

In the excerpt offered by Andrea above, it is evident that collaboration with institutional representatives can often be demanding and 'tiresome', exerting 'energy' that could have been spent in more constructive ways. By hijacking the time and spaces designated for generating democratic practice (deliberation groups, meetings, conferences, round-table discussions, etc.) with gaslighting practices, the institutional representatives actively restrict opportunities for practitioners to engage meaningfully in democratisation processes. Practitioners are forced to be vigilant, to stay ahead of corrupt practices and to dispel those already enacted. Next, I illustrate the interplay between dispelling and gaslighting with an account of Nina's experiences.

Ethnographic episode (dispelling): 'Brutalising' the police

Throughout my fieldwork I often heard practitioners complaining about being made to "feel crazy", as if they were "losing it", or as if they "participated in a completely different event" to that of institutional representatives. For example, Nina once challenged a police officer for neglecting a victim of domestic violence and exposing her to further abuses.

The victim was a minor so the officer could not take a statement in the absence of a representative from the Centre for Social Protection. However, instead of advising the victim to contact the Centre first, the officer simply stated in the report that there were "no legal grounds for undertaking further action" and sent the victim home. When Nina reacted to this negligence by phoning the police officer in question, and followed up the call with a visit to the police station, accompanied by the victim, the police officer deflected by accusing Nina of verbal abuse.

This was an instance of weaponising victimhood. Instead of focusing on the case in question, the officer refocused attention to *her* grievances and Nina's 'abusive' behaviour, distracting from the fact that a minor had suffered violence due to police negligence. I was present during the phone call made, alongside other members of WRC, and we heard Nina asking for an explanation, reiterating the legal obligations of police officers in such cases; voices were raised on both sides, but to us there was no abuse. Yet the police officer complained about Nina's behaviour to the civic police monitor[29], as well as to the police inspector, which took a long time to dispel. The issue was raised in meetings with the civic police monitor, as well as in 'conferences on complex cases'[30], and it was suggested that Nina was "aggressive", "too emotional", "assertive and inconsiderate", "out of control", that she should "curb her emotions", each time she attempted to discuss the predicament of the minor.

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[29] The civic police monitor is a person who performs external oversight of police practice on behalf of a body called the Council for Civil Control.

[30] The conference on complex cases is a long established forum for the police and WRC to discuss the most complex cases and jointly seek resolution. It is a learning space where practitioners familiarise themselves with police practice and where members of the police learn about the ways in which they could improve their practice.

Each time, Nina had to deny her stated abuse, patiently comparing the police report with the victim's statement and explaining the legal obligations of the police in dealing with minors, as a form of repeated reiteration. I was struck by her calm demeanour and patience at the time, but later on Nina explained it was important to stay composed, as "it is their tactics to provoke you into losing your temper so they can dismiss you as crazy". She continued to present the evidence: reports, victim statements and legal obligations, as if a proper 'dialogue' was unfolding. Yet the officers acted as if they had not heard a word; they would simply continue steering a different 'dialogue', placing guilt upon Nina, like a song caught in a loop. This was an example of gaslighting, where police officers persistently strove to deflect from the issue in question by 'exposing' Nina as somewhat unhinged and volatile. The entire interaction resembled a dream sequence in which you try to scream but no one can hear you, and you can make no impact on the unfolding event.

Below is a short excerpt of a verbal exchange between participants of a 'conference on complex cases'. This conference, organised to discuss the case of the minor, was almost entirely taken up with the conflict between the police officer and Nina. It was clear that the officer had not acted according to the law, yet both the police and the civic monitor employed gaslighting tactics to avoid talking about it:

> Nina: *I think we're at risk of losing track of the real issue here, which is the illegal practice in relation to the minor and how we can prevent it from happening in the future...*
> Civic monitor: *Nina, there's no need for raised voices, we're all friends here...*
> Nina: *Who's raising a voice? I'm just...*

> Police inspector: *Nina cares about her clients and sometimes that leads her to react in an explosive manner, as a woman she can be sometimes too emotional and can act irrationally, but she has to understand that we're on the same side here…*
>
> Police officer who broke the law: *I'm not a child she can yell at…I have feelings…I did my job conscientiously…she is too assertive and bossy…*

In this extract different dimensions of gaslighting intersect with one another. They first expose Nina as unstable, as soon as she raises the issue regarding the minor, and then collectively affirm this description through coordinated remarks. Importantly, it is through the practice of ruling that Nina becomes the main topic of the conference – through the unspoken decision to use the time and space reserved for a dialogue about a complex case for an analysis of the apparently deviant behaviour of Nina.

She is exposed as a bully – someone who "raises [her] voice", acts in an "explosive manner", is "too emotional", "irrational", who "yells" at "friends", disregards their "feelings" and is "too assertive" and "bossy". Simultaneously, the police officers, as well as the civic monitor, are portrayed as victims who suffer from Nina's "irrational" outbursts. It is interesting to note the repetition of the noun 'friends', which is employed as a pacifying (and patronising) tactic by the police inspector and civic monitor – a way to position Nina as someone who needs calming and to convey that she should not 'attack' them, as they are "on the same side". Such positioning serves to transform Nina's objection to the illegal practice into a personal conflict. The exposition stages a stark polarity between 'the good guys' and a 'villain', and the case of the minor is pushed aside through the concerted action of police officers and civic monitor, a form of collective affirmation.

One of the inspectors suggests a "resolution", where "[Nina] has to understand that police officers are made of flesh and blood; they make mistakes, have feelings and dignity", suggesting that Nina should be gentler in communication with the police. At this point Nina nods, reluctantly accepting part of the blame, as it was "the only way to move past the stupid thing and focus on the real abuse", as she later told me. This is an example of a tactical withdrawal, where Nina can see no point in resistance to gaslighting, as that would mean more time wasted.

As the conversation continued past this extract, it was finally redirected to the case of the minor, and Nina used the opportunity to draw attention to the repercussions of the negligent practice, instigating an emotional response from the challenged police officer. Nina painted a detailed picture of the history of violence the minor and her mother had sustained over the years, presenting evidence and describing the consequences of such a life for the victims, while continuously urging the police officer to imagine such violence happening to her daughter – a form of seeking to instigate compassion. People's body language visibly changed around the room as a consequence, and the officer responsible for the negligent practice dropped her eyes, blood rushing to her cheeks. In the end, Nina offered help in a carefully worded question: "How can we assist you in improving practice, drawing on our experience?" This was tactical withdrawal, framing the question around 'improvement of practice' in order to avoid placing blame on the individual officer. The participants agreed on a series of educational sessions and workshops provided by WRC for the police, a practice that is still ongoing.

Gaslighting and dispelling summary

I explored the corrupt practice of 'gaslighting'. First, I highlighted the ways in which institutional representatives *ruled* the spaces designated for deliberation with unspoken, yet well-rehearsed acts (delaying, ignoring, asserting power through styles of addressing others, etc.), in order to confuse and sabotage practitioners. Second, I explored how representatives engaged in *weaponising victimhood*, assuming the identity of victim when faced with difficult questions – a strategy that redirected focus. Third, I underlined the ways in which representatives *exposed* practitioners in front of others as somehow inept or unstable in order to weaken their credibility. Finally, I highlighted how gaslighting gained traction through collective affirmation, where perpetrators teamed up against the 'target'.

In contrast, I explored the sub-practice of practitioners – 'dispelling'. First, I analysed how practitioners combated corruption through *reiteration* – relentless repetition of the issues they wished to convey. This dimension of dispelling was closely related to the second – *presenting evidence*, where practitioners engaged in counterbalancing gaslighting by repetitive listing of evidence (reports, victim statements, protocols, etc.). The third dimension was *tactical withdrawal*, where practitioners tactically conceded to gaslighting, accepting the 'blame' in order to shift the discussion back on track. Finally, I explored how practitioners *instigated compassion* from their interlocutors, a tactic devised to dispel corruption in an embodied way.

I now move on to the next subsection, where I explore the creep of 'private' patriarchal norms into public spaces, and 'publicising' responses.

7.2. Publicising vs. Privatising

I refer to the enactment of patriarchal norms by institutional representatives as *privatising*, denoting the corrupt creep of purportedly 'private' and 'domestic' norms into the public sphere. Such patriarchal social norms shape gender relations, and are communicated through nationalist politics, religion, a gendered interpretation of past events and everyday humour based on traditional stereotypes concerning women and men. Such norms dictate the preservation of a male-dominated family unit and condemn divorce, regardless of circumstances such as violence. Through these norms, males are posited as the rightful heirs to property; male children have preferential status in a household, where they are pampered and often exempted from domestic duties (CEDAW, 2017). Meanwhile, women's bodies are violated due to an informal pressure to produce male offspring, with female pregnancies often aborted (GREVIO, 2017). The problems such patriarchal norms or gender relations instigate (e.g. family violence) are often perceived as 'private' matters, something that should be confined to people's homes, outside the domain of institutions and hidden from public view.

Yet, Montenegro is a formal liberal democracy where liberty and equality are guaranteed by the constitution, various international conventions and local legislation. Patriarchal norms, however, often seep into the institutional fabric and hold greater power in guiding the practice of institutional representatives than legal prescriptions do.

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In contrast, I call the sub-practice of NGO practitioners seeking to reform 'privatising' tendencies as *publicising* (public-ising), a performative practice that seeks to close the gap between professed public standards of liberty and equality and the 'privatised' practice of public officials. Here, the bodies of practitioners come to mark the physical distinction between private and public, challenging identity through bodily acts. This is also a practice that gains power through repetition, instigating and normalising a series of alternative performativities to the 'private'.

I illustrate the corrupt practice of *privatising* through an ethnographic episode featuring Lara's experience with the Centre for Social Protection (CSP). Lara's experience with CSP offers insight into how the seepage of patriarchal norms into institutional practice exposes women to violence. This episode, in particular, depicts the precarious living conditions of women in corrupt settings. I then explore *publicising* through an episode concerning Andrea and the police in order to surface the ways in which practitioners combat such corrupt practice. In situations such as this one, practitioners often put themselves in harm's way in order to exemplify and demonstrate the professed public standards of tending to issues of family violence.

Ethnographic episode (privatising): The Centre for Social Protection (CSP)

In this episode I explore a recurring issue concerning CSP - the tendency of social workers to protect abusers instead of victims of family violence. WRC practitioners often complained how social workers tended to confuse mediation with reconciliation, or more precisely, "forcing women to stay with their abusers no matter what" (Lara) – an

attitude that often leaves women trapped in violent homes without means of escape. Moreover, CSP often disregards legal protocol and by doing so enables more violence. The corrupt sub-practice of privatising features three dimensions, which are defined and summarised in the following table:

Corrupt sub-practice	Dimensions of sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Privatising Institutional representatives' tendency to allow patriarchal norms to guide their practice instead of legal regulations.	**Dismissing** The process of inhibiting women's agency through cynicism, doubt and ignorance. Such dismissal always privileges men (often an abuser) over women.	A victim of family violence talking about CSP representatives: "I have a feeling that if he killed me in front of them they would claim he didn't…"
	Arbitrariness Applying legal procedures and protocols in an arbitrary and selective way so that they fit patriarchal norms.	Ethnographic journal extract: When the victim continued to report violence, CSP representatives informed the police without conducting a prior risk assessment or providing a protection plan (recording a history of violence), exposing the victim to more abuse at home when her husband found out she had reported him.
	Perpetuating violence Institutional representatives actively contributing to the culture of gender-based and domestic violence by siding with male abusers rather than the victims of violence.	Ethnographic journal extract: Having no recorded history of abuse, the woman could not provide evidence of violence to the court and instead was found guilty of 'verbal abuse' after her husband filed charges against her.

Table 6: Sub-practice of privatising

A woman came to the WRC premises to seek assistance in relation to her abusive partner. She wanted a divorce and to assume custody over her children, which meant that WRC was supposed to help her navigate the institutional system, assisting her to

part ways with her partner and ensuring further protection. Cases such as this are standard in WRC's work and assisting the woman in question was not perceived as a particularly unusual task. However, the woman revealed that she had already tried to leave her partner before seeking WRC's help but that CSP had hindered her by encouraging a reconciliation with her partner. In the words of the woman:

> *They want us to get back together, allegedly for our children's sake, but our children suffer because of him, as well as my parents, my friends...CSP treats him like some deity and dismisses everything I say. I have a feeling that if he killed me in front of them they would claim he didn't...*

In this brief extract we see the creep of the private into the public, as CSP assumes its role is to repair a 'private' matter. Furthermore, the woman posits CSP as siding with her abusive husband to the extent that it would not believe her even if "he killed" her, which denotes a complete erasure of her agency. WRC soon discovered that CSP had informed the police of the abuse, standard practice in such situations. However, it did so without conducting a risk assessment or producing a protection plan – important documents, which record the type of violence a woman/family suffers, the profile of the abuser (e.g. whether he has a history of violence) and further assessment (e.g. whether a woman and children need to be taken to a shelter). These are crucial steps in cases of family violence because they ensure a sort of public accountability and record of abuse, chronicling that the violence has occurred but also guiding the decisions of the police and judiciary (e.g. how to protect the victim before tipping off the abuser that she has reported him, etc.). Disregarding elements of legal protocol denotes the tendency of CSP representatives to favour abusive men rather than victims of violence.

Upon being informed by CSP about the case, the police phoned the abuser to invite him to an "informative conversation", which in turn sparked further family violence – the abuser physically assaulted the victim as punishment for reporting the violence. Suspecting that the woman would report the assault, the husband filed charges against her (for verbal abuse) and due to a lack of faithfully recorded history of abuse from CSP, the court ruled against the woman. What this example reveals is that the woman in question is condemned to victimhood by both her partner and the institutions that protect him. CSP actively participated in perpetuating violence through its dismissal of the woman's testimony, as well as its arbitrary application of rules and procedures. CSP not only rendered her suffering invisible, it also disregarded legal protocol in favour of 'private' patriarchal norms, and therefore subjected her to even more violence and injustice.

Immediately after hearing about the violence the woman had to endure from both her partner and the institutions that were supposed to protect her, Lara cleared her schedule and urgently initiated a series of processes, where she: briefed a lawyer about the case, allowing her to immediately appeal the ruling; drafted the necessary paperwork; compiled a risk assessment and contacted the police, CSP and the prosecutor; and made enquiries about potential employment for the woman. In addition, Lara discovered that the partner was an influential figure in Montenegrin society, a fact she suspected played a role in influencing the practice of CSP, the police and judiciary. Lara said:

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We're talking about a particularly cruel person employing all forms of violence recognised by law, but that obviously didn't matter. She needed assistance to break away from the violence but she didn't get it because CSP was bullying her, pressuring her to go back to him, trapping her like a prisoner. She revealed her husband is actually [a prominent member of the community]. And then we understood...CSP found out who he was and started pressuring the poor woman to go back to him. And the ruling against her – I can't even explain how furious that makes me feel. Better not run afoul of the Big Man, you know – he must be protected and preserved, you know. Horror! So we acted quickly, no time to lose...working days, nights, weekends...

Here we see an example of a public institution distorting its role to accommodate the interests of the patriarchal 'Big Man'. A social norm has seeped into the institutional fabric. The status of the woman is evocatively constructed through employing the noun "prisoner", a woman trapped in a society where the male authority of the Big Man rules both public and private spheres. Under pressure from a society that favours men, as manifested through the irresponsible and ultimately illegal practice of CSP, the woman whom the practitioners want to protect has given up fighting the abuser and 'surrendered' herself to patriarchal forces. Andrea said:

in the end she gave up, surrendered...too much violence and injustice for her to handle...We can only help if she wants to be helped, but that doesn't mean I'm ok with it. I'm gutted and angry and scared for her wellbeing...we came too late in the process, I think. If it wasn't for the ignorant CSP she could have been helped, we would have had more time to help her empower herself through our psychological programme and employment and we'd make the institutions do their jobs and detain the abuser, however 'important' he might be.

Both the spouse and CSP are positioned as malefactors against the woman (posited as "trapping", "pressuring", "bullying" the woman), who is rendered a victim twice over. With noticeable lament in her voice, Andrea's story reflects the problem – that of the

privatising practice of institutional representatives, which act similarly to abusive partners. By dismissing women's suffering and testimonies as irrelevant, and through arbitrary application of existing rules and procedures, institutional representatives merely perpetuate violence, imprisoning victims in a vicious cycle of abuse.

Ethnographic episode (publicising): challenging police practice

While in the previous episode I highlighted the corrupt practice of institutional representatives, in this episode I focus predominantly on the practice of practitioners in response – publicising, the ways in which WRC members enact the publicly professed standards of legal practice. In particular, I explore Andrea's experience with police officers, who can be guided in their practice by patriarchal norms rather than legal ones. The definition of this sub-practice, as well as its dimensions, are summarised in the following table:

Sub-practice of navigating corruption	Dimensions of sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Publicising The ways in which practitioners enact standards of legal practice in response to the corrupt sub-practice of privatising.	**Renegotiating borders between 'private' and 'public'** Practitioners' deployment of their own bodies for the purpose of marking the border between private and public spheres.	Ethnographic journal extract: When police officers attempted to ignore the law, a practitioner physically wedged herself between the victim on the one side, and the abuser and the police on the other, in order to demonstrate that violence is a matter for the police and that it should not be hidden behind the closed doors of a private home.
	Repetition Denotes the repetitive citing of rules and procedures, as defined in law, in front of the	Andrea, interview extract: "I spelled out to them [the police] special measures which state that the abuser has to be removed from the

	institutional representatives in an attempt to break through the patriarchal mindset and normalise legally prescribed practice.	house immediately without a court order…I reminded them about the protection of victims and about family safety over and over again…"
	Embodying the discourse of law Practitioners' enactment of laws, established rules and procedures, through their body/speech acts, for the purpose of exemplifying the law in practice.	Ethnographic journal extract: By positioning herself between the victim and abuser the practitioner enacted the law through her own bodily placement - the procedure that police officers should follow – providing a demonstrative example for them to follow. Simultaneously, she cited the legal rules and procedures.

Table 7: Sub-practice of publicising

I had an opportunity to observe and listen to police officers during one of the numerous educational seminars provided by WRC, held for the purpose of improving police practice. I noticed that while the police officers appeared attentive and engaged during the seminars, some of them would often exhibit resistance towards the teaching material during breaks. During one of these, I joined a group of officers. One complained about how practices they were taught "would never be applicable to Montenegro", as they were "too human-rightsy and rigid". I asked him to clarify what he meant and he proceeded to list some stereotypical opinions about a man being the "head of the family" who "decides on everything", and concluded that "whether and how a husband is going to argue with his wife is no one's business", suggesting that violence is a private matter. He received support in the form of a nod from another male colleague, which encouraged him to tell us about a case from his work:

> *Yeah…this bloke came in to complain about his wife. His wife! A hero, eh? So I started jotting down things he was saying, my superior was there and all…so I write and listen to this chicken whimpering about his wife assaulting him [mocking laughter] and I can't believe the crap I'm hearing…but I do my duty – the boss is there. After we finished, I took him aside*

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and told him in the friendliest possible manner: 'Listen, mate, don't embarrass yourself like this – next time [incomprehensible mutter]! Show her her place!' [collective laughter, excluding the woman police officer present].

What is evident in this excerpt is that the police officer is guided in his practice by the patriarchal norms of masculinity, where men 'cannot' be recognised as victims of family violence, as it is somehow shameful and 'anti-heroic', "whimpering" and "embarrass[ing]". Women, on the other hand, are posited as the 'natural' receivers of violence – a medium through which male authority is assumed and women are "shown [their] place". Not only does the police officer dismiss the testimony of the victim of violence and disregard rules and procedures, applying them arbitrarily (only when the "superior" is present), but he also encourages more violence. Furthermore, it is evident from the 'advice' the police officer gives to the victim that he wishes to 'correct' the direction of violence so that it fits the patriarchal framework of violent relations. Below, Andrea recounts her experience with the police in a case of domestic violence:

After receiving a call I rushed to the victim's address. I found the police at the front door chatting casually with the abuser, while the woman pleaded for help, distressed, bruised and in tears. They were trying to force reconciliation! Upon my insisting, one of them admitted that the abuser promised he wouldn't do it again. I kept listing the rules on a loop so they could hear well…It was a guy with a history of violent behaviour on his record! To their surprise, I stood between the woman on the one side and the abuser and the police on the other side. I entered the house and so breached the law, could have been arrested, but I didn't care and I guess the fact that the police aren't familiar with the laws played in my favour this time, ironically. Anyway, I spelled out to them special measures which state that the abuser has to be removed from the house immediately without a court order…I shouted at them, reminded them about the protection of victims and about family safety over and over again…They must have thought I had lost my mind but luckily for all of us they arrested him, so my intervention worked. It was risky, I'm aware, but it worked, and

sometimes we need to get out on the line and face the violence, use whatever means possible to prevent it from happening in the future.

The episode illustrates that publicising practice includes placing oneself in a vulnerable position, exposed to violence, and even, paradoxically, breaching the law in order to enforce it.

The interplay between privatising and publicising is particularly visible in the selection of verbs in Andrea's story. Upon Andrea's repeated enquiring as to why the abuser has not been detained, as per law, one of the police officers states that the abuser "promised" he "wouldn't" do it again. Such an answer denotes an enactment of the patriarchal norms through which violence is normalised and tolerated and where a 'promise' given by the abuser (man-to-man) has greater influence over police practice than the law. Andrea's rejection of such an answer as unacceptable (unsound), leaves them "surprise[d]", which further denotes the degree to which patriarchal norms are entrenched in police practice – they cannot perceive the flaw in their logic. However, it also prompts Andrea to cite the "rules", repeating them "on a loop" as if trying to drill the words of the law through the patriarchal mindset of police officers.

Andrea's further response is to physically wedge herself between the police and the abuser on the one side and the victim of family violence on the other. She "stands" between them, renegotiating the border between public and private: by positioning the abuser and the police on the one side, Andrea signals that abuse is a matter for public institutions and that the police need to address it. Simultaneously, by shielding the victim with her body in the family home, Andrea denotes that the woman should remain in the

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home and be protected, while the abuser should be "removed" from it and detained. Positioning herself in this way, she enacts the legal procedure that police officers should follow through her own bodily placement, a demonstrative example for them to follow. Moreover, Andrea transforms into an embodiment of the 'letter of the law' by simultaneously "spell[ing] out" the legal prescriptions that should be applied in situations such as this one. She repeatedly "reminds" the officers of their legal obligations while placing herself in jeopardy ("get out on the line"), as she risks "arrest" and "violence".

It is interesting to note here Andrea's stated fear of being arrested. She admits a "breach" of the law by interfering in police practice and in this respect her fear is justifiable. However, her fear also denotes the perceived likeliness that the police will be more disposed to arrest a woman for breaching the law than a man who commits a violent crime. The fear of arrest on Andrea's part further signals an expectation that the rule of law is more likely to be enacted when it aligns with the rule of patriarchal norms that shape gender relations.

In terms of the nouns Andrea employs, it is worth noting the abundance of legal terms such as: "law", "special measures", "court order", "family safety", "intervention", "protection". Such vocabulary, mingled with her embodied acts, seems to compensate for the lack of legal foundation for police practice, as if she is trying to trigger the memory of officers about the legal obligations they suppress in favour of patriarchal norms. This is where we learn that she enacts the law not solely by placing her body at the scene of the crime, but also through particular speech acts, hoping to prevent further "violence". Employing the adverbial phrase "over and over again" denotes that the speech acts are

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repeated, which signals Andrea's desire to make sure that the message will be received, but also that she will be persistent and undeterred in this matter.

Privatising and publicising summary

I provided insight into the corrupt sub-practices of institutional representatives, termed *privatising*, as well as the counter-practice of *publicising*. I explored how institutional representatives mimicked 'private' patriarchal norms of gender relations, making violence performed by men invisible, and therefore protecting and further entrenching the male authority of the abuser. I then provided a glimpse into the consequences of such 'privatising' for those who suffered violence. Namely, in 'privatising' the institutional environment, access to legal norms became increasingly closed off, which rendered women and children prisoners of a patriarchal and violent normative framework.

I explored the sub-practice of WRC practitioners as *publicising* - their attempts to close the gap between the professed public standards of liberty and equality and the practice of public officials. I explored three dimensions to the sub-practice of publicising. First, I explored how practitioners renegotiated the border between private and public spheres. This was an embodied practice where the bodies of practitioners symbolically marked the distinction between public and private (as stated in law), challenging the identities of institutional representatives in the process. Second, I demonstrated that this was a practice that gained power through repetition, instigating and normalising a series of alternative performativities to the 'private'. Finally, I explored practitioners' efforts to exert authority through embodying the discourse of law.

7.3. Unsettling vs. Colonising

While carrying out my fieldwork I often encountered practitioners using the term 'GONGO' to describe corrupt NGOs that uncritically promote government policies and practices, regardless of how controversial, and which are amply compensated for their efforts. Such organisations are formally no different to any other NGO, in the sense that that they are registered as NGOs in Ministry of Interior records, have a mission and vision, run programmes and projects and can be partially funded by foreign donors. It is therefore difficult to prove that an organisation is indeed a GONGO, but "for an experienced observer there are clues that could indicate whether an organisation is a bot or not", in the words of Luka, a practitioner. GONGOs do not necessarily try to hide their loyalty to the government, although they do not claim it explicitly either, as such revelations might instigate open challenge.

In this subsection I explore the interplay between corrupt GONGO practices I term *colonising* and those of WRC practitioners, which I refer to as *unsettling*. I chose the term 'colonising' in order to denote GONGOs' practice of infiltrating NGO spaces and sabotaging their work. Colonising manifests across three dimensions that I define and illustrate in the following table.

Corrupt sub-practice	Dimensions of corrupt sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Colonising Denotes the ways in which GONGOs sabotage the work of NGOs by infiltrating spaces	**Erosion** Manoeuvres employed for the purpose of discrediting NGO members, but also hijacking	Ethnographic journal extract: The GONGO representative obstructed our work by ignoring and avoiding us when we were required to draft

designed for the generation of democratic practice.	their time, energy and space, eroding their capacity to generate democratic practice.	documents together, eroding time. When she involved herself in the work she kept producing large documents for us to read and proof-check, eroding our energy.
	Foreclosure The deployment of strategies aimed at closing down meaningful dialogue and disabling challenge and opposition.	Ethnographic journal extract: When challenged to support her claims and stances in face-to-face encounters, a GONGO representative deflected, became evasive and then completely halted the discussion by refusing to provide justifications.
	Self-exclusion Abandoning conversations when challenged and obstructing meaningful resolution of an issue or project.	Ethnographic journal extract: When practitioners were required to draft a joint statement for the UN committee, the GONGO practitioner delayed, stalled and avoided meeting us.

Table 8: Sub-practice of colonising

I term the sub-practice of WRC 'unsettling' in order to highlight the arduousness of such endeavours, where practitioners have to be constantly vigilant of GONGOs' manoeuvring and be prepared to respond. Such engagement is time-consuming and tiresome, as practitioners have to actively prevent colonising from settling and becoming a norm. I explore unsettling through three dimensions, which are defined and illustrated in the following table.

Sub-practice of navigating corruption	Dimensions of sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Unsettling Proactive exposing and undermining of the corrupt practice of colonising.	**Sleuthing** Practitioners' engagement in investigative work to intercept harmful practices.	Nikola, interview extract: "...she spelled out the name [of the NGO]. I investigated and couldn't find anything about it... I'm from the same small town where this NGO is apparently based...it was impossible for me not to know of such an organisation...I asked her in what capacity she would attend the conference – as an NGO member or as a public official, and she refused to

		say…"
	Confrontation This dimension is enacted when sleuthing fails, as a strategy for provoking and instigating dialogue.	Ethnographic journal extract: After many unsuccessful attempts to engage Kristina (a GONGO representative) in dialogue about the legalisation of prostitution...she avoided and ignored us. In our first face-to-face meeting, we openly confronted her with questions aimed at teasing out her arguments, hoping to provoke a discussion.
	Marginalisation Employed when confronting fails, and refers to practitioners' efforts to shrink the space available to GONGOs – a distinctly undemocratic means of protecting democratic norms.	Ethnographic journal extract: Unlike Kristina, we knew that the microphone was linked to the clock. So we spoke until only five minutes remained and Kristina could not go on any longer.

Table 9: Sub-practice of unsettling

In the following episode I explore the interplay between the different dimensions of *colonising* and *unsettling* in order to highlight difficulties in combating corruption in instances involving GONGOs.

Ethnographic episode (colonising and unsettling): "Because I say so!"

Fairly often, GONGOs and their representatives do manage to slip through the net and colonise the same spaces as NGOs, according to the experience of practitioners. I encountered an example of this during the process of reporting on the government's fulfilment of its obligations relating to gender equality, stated in one of the UN conventions. The reporting was made to one of the UN bodies overseeing the advancement of the liberty and equality of women. Each member state is required to

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report to the committee and, customarily, civil sector organisations draft a supplementary Shadow Report, which is presented to a committee and compared with the official government account. WRC initiated the process of shadow reporting as early as 2011 and I was fortunate to be doing my fieldwork at a time when I was able to participate in preparations, as well as the presentation process itself, in Switzerland, alongside Nina, a WRC practitioner.

Nina spent weeks compiling the document, researching, integrating the inputs received from other NGOs and editing. She was also in charge of communicating with relevant stakeholders based in Switzerland and Montenegro and was feverishly fighting for time in the run-up to the deadline, working long days at first, then long days and nights, eventually abandoning sleep entirely for some days. Shortly before the submission deadline, an email arrived announcing that another NGO had registered as a presenter of the report. Instead of contributing to the joint shadow report Nina was working on, however, the head of this organisation, Kristina, revealed that she would submit a separate report. Alarm bells sounded.

Once in Switzerland, Nina and I met Kristina in the preparatory workshop organised for the shadow reporters. Very soon we realised that she had little knowledge of this UN body or the reporting process in general. A hint at how little she knew was visible in her incorrect pronunciation of the very UN body we were to report to, and in her demonstrated unfamiliarity with the Convention in relation to which practitioners had to evaluate the practice of their home government. The organisers of the workshops also revealed that the committee had not received the shadow report from the organisation Kristina represented, which made us more curious about her reasons for being there.

After the workshops were over, the organisers advised us to draft a joint statement, which meant that Kristina, Nina and I had to work together. This is when problems started to arise: from obstructing work to introducing non-discussed 'surprises' into the joint statement.

Despite the fact that we were situated in the same small hotel, Kristina always managed to be late for briefings and meetings, stalled the running of errands we had to undertake before the presentation or simply went missing at some crucial moments, for example when Nina asked her to provide input for the final statement the night before the presentation. She knew that we were required to work together but employed the tactic of self-exclusion, actively eroding our time, which meant that we would have to write the document in haste. She was also secretive about the report she claimed she was still editing the day before the actual presentation. Ordinarily, even though Nina was in charge of compiling the document, the shadow report is circulated for comment amongst various women's groups prior to submission in order to ensure that the most important issues of each respective group of women are represented. However, no one knew the content of Kristina's report, not even the committee the report was written for, until after the presenting period was over. While Kristina appeared laid back and unconcerned about the importance of producing joint work (a practice common to other GONGO representatives), Nina and I tried to interest her in collaboration and to stress the importance of keeping up with deadlines in the short span of time assigned to us. However, she continued eroding our time and energy through delaying and us having to dote over her, instead of working on our document. Finally, we agreed upon a time and place for writing a joint statement and Nina and I made sure not to lose Kristina from our sights, as time was quickly running out.

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Once we sat down to write, Kristina announced that she would let us do our part of the statement and that she would add hers at the end, relating to vulnerable groups of "Roma, rural, disabled, imprisoned and HIV/AIDS suffering women". Issues relating to these vulnerable groups were already covered in our shadow report by the women representing them, but we welcomed her contribution as we hoped it might enrich the existing account. Nina and I drafted the statement relatively quickly but then spent time waiting for Kristina's contribution, which again eroded our time and energy. After we had waited some hours, Kristina finally forwarded her part to me so that I could "brush up her language". To the surprise of Nina and I, her statement comprised of only a single sentence, which lumped many vulnerable groups together and did not convey much substance:

> The special focus of the committee should be on the position of women from other disadvantaged groups, such as: Roma women, rural women, women with disabilities, women in prison and women living with HIV/AIDS.

The rest of the statement, comprising several paragraphs, covered "sex workers" and their rights, far from the stated concerns of the 'NGO' at the outset of the process. After conducting some quick sleuthing, I discovered that the organisation was frequently funded through the government, an unusual occurrence in the context of Montenegro, where government has a long history of restricting funds to NGOs (Đonović, et al, 2016). The question of legalising prostitution and introducing 'sex work' as a legal category is a highly contentious issue in Montenegro, tied to the interests of organised crime and the private interests of government officials. Recently, for example, prominent social figures,

including some politicians[31], publicly proposed the idea of legalising prostitution as a means of revitalising the economy (see Perović-Korać, 2014). The collective attitude of women's NGOs was that since prostitution tends to enrich organised crime, legalising it would only protect the criminals, not the women.

Nevertheless, we were curious about Kristina's position, so we tried for over an hour, while in the same room, to instigate a conversation. Eventually we 'succeeded' and below is an extract of the confrontation from my journal:

> N: *So you are saying you support legalising prostitution? Why?*
>
> K: *Because I do.*
>
> Me*: But what are your reasons for supporting it?*
>
> K: *I have my own reasons.*
>
> N: *Which are?*
>
> K: *They are bullied as sex workers and I want them protected.*
>
> N: *So you think that legalising prostitution would protect them from being bullied?*
>
> K: *Yes.*
>
> Me: *How? What do you base your stance on? I'm curious that's all.*
>
> K: *I spoke to some women who were arrested and police officers asked them for free sex. Imagine if somebody came to you and asked for a report free of charge!*
>
> N: *I don't think that compares and besides this is supposed to be a joint statement. You should have raised this when we were drafting the report with other women's groups, people this issue concerns directly…Listen, there's no doubt these women suffer violence and we could draw attention to it without…*
>
> K: *I did some research and that's what sex workers want.*
>
> Me: *Can you show us?*
>
> K: *We talk to these women all the time.*

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[31] Legalising prostitution was proposed for the first time by the Liberal Party in 2012, which was a partner in the ruling coalition at the time with the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS - the long-standing governing party), and supported by some DPS politicians, including the former deputy prosecutor Zoran Piperović, accused of involvement in the controversial trafficking case of Svetlana Čabotarenko (see Jovanović, 17/08/2014)

Me: *Ok. Can we read it?*

K: *Listen, I don't care how we appear or not but this is my part of the statement and I will use terms that I wish to use…I didn't question yours so…*

N: *But that's exactly the point, we included all the groups who wished to provide a contribution in the drafting process so it's not 'ours', and you appear to be on some solo mission…*

Me: *Just please tell us your reasons for including legalising prostitution in the statement…*

K: *Because I say so. And it stays in.*

Kristina makes recourse to self 12 times through employing the first-person pronoun 'I' and the possessive pronoun 'my'. Such a preoccupation with 'self' signals that Kristina's judgement on the topic of 'sex workers' and 'legalising prostitution' is derived from her own person, rather than evidence. She positions herself as the main authority who decides on the issue and so employs the tactic of self-exclusion from the larger collective of people supposed to participate in drafting the report. On the other hand, Nina employs the pronouns 'we' and 'ours' to underline the collective character of reporting and to convey the obligation reporters have towards the groups they represent, a form of confronting Kristina's 'self' with a collective stance from informed NGOs.

The authority of 'self' in conversation is further fortified by the selection of verbs Kristina employs. She "doesn't care" about the misleading nature of using 'sex worker' as a phrase in the statement and about how we "appear", because pushing for legalisation is something she "want[s]", "wish[es]", "know[s]" and she "say[s]" so. By virtue of not "question[ing]" the part of the statement Nina and I produced, she expects us not to question hers and this rule is posited as the precondition under which Kristina is willing to 'converse'. Yet, such a condition only serves to foreclose dialogue and disable challenge towards the political stance assumed.

Whereas Kristina aims to foreclose the dialogue, Nina and I persistently try to open it up, to confront her, denoted by the abundant employment of interrogative pronouns ("what", "which") and interrogative adverbs ("when", "why" and "how") in the text. In the process, Nina draws attention to the importance of collaboration and fair representation, as if trying to provoke a sense of responsibility in Kristina. This is indicated by the adjective "joint" and adverb "together", signalling to Kristina that the strength of good reporting lies in collective work, while simultaneously reminding her that she rejected the offer to be included.

After failing to deepen the conversation on the topic of legalising prostitution, we switched attention to the technical issues relating to the joint statement. The previous discussion was, in a way, confirmation that Kristina represented a GONGO, as she did not bother to even feign participation in dialogue, employing self-exclusion and actively foreclosing dialogue throughout the attempt at discussion – something that was common to other GONGO representatives encountered in the field. Nina and I locked eyes and gave each other a well-rehearsed silent sign, signalling a change of tactics. Time was running out and so many women back at home were counting on us to fight for their causes. What we did from that moment on resembled a game of tug-of-war, in which we were grabbing more rope each time we tugged, until Kristina held onto only threads.

Dropping the politeness, attempts at inclusion and dialogue, the first thing we insisted upon was the allocation of more space for women from the other vulnerable groups Kristina initially claimed to represent. I used my editing role, alongside Nina, to discretely shape the parts relating to vulnerable groups according to the information
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provided in the shadow report and to subdue and shorten the part relating to 'sex work'. The next step included discussing speaking time. As previously agreed, Nina was to speak first, which gave us an advantage in negotiating time allocations. We suggested Nina took two thirds of the allocated time because her part of the statement covered most of the issues raised by various groups of women, whereas Kristina's covered only a few. They both agreed.

However, Kristina insisted on redrafting her section, every time producing a slightly longer version relating to sex work, trying to secure more space and time, most likely an attempted filibustering tactic, as there were many instances of repeated sentences and abundant synonyms in her text. We suspected that Kristina had not been attentive when the workshop organisers had explained the setup for the presentations to us. We knew that the microphone was linked to the clock so that it would immediately shut off when the time allocated for the presentation expired, a detail we thought Kristina had probably missed. Meanwhile, Nina and I worked out that Kristina's preoccupation with growing her section on sex work was at least keeping her busy and away from sabotaging us, so we kept quiet. Not reminding Kristina of the presentation rules was our way of squeezing her out to the margins, of employing undemocratic means to generate democratic practice.

Before the presentation, we were to meet with members of the committee to provide additional information regarding the shadow report. I was supposed to be a facilitator and Kristina and Nina were meant to provide answers within their selected areas. During the meeting, however, Kristina quickly demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding the groups she claimed to represent, eroding the credibility of NGOs from Montenegro in

general, we thought, in front of the UN committee, and questions had to be deferred to Nina. Yet, even though Kristina did not know the answers to the questions, she tried to colonise the short time assigned for the meeting with filibustering. I used my role as facilitator to squeeze her out as much as possible. I directed most questions towards Nina and provided her with significantly more time to speak, actively ignoring the signals sent to me by Kristina, who tapped me repeatedly on the leg under the table. When the time came for the actual presentation, Nina spoke first and used more than two thirds of the time, as she represented all women from Montenegro who wanted to be included. When it was time for Kristina to speak, she was only able to address the committee for about five minutes before the microphone cut out. 'You don't bring a knife to a gunfight', I thought smugly for a second, before my conscience kicked in.

Colonising and unsettling summary

I explored the GONGO practice of 'colonising' and how it affected the regular work of NGOs. I described how GONGO representatives actively sabotaged NGOs by colonising their work under the pretext of collaboration and, then, pushed the government's agenda. Through colonising, GONGO representatives engaged in a process of eroding the time, energy and credibility of NGOs, foreclosed meaningful dialogue and excluded themselves when joint work was necessary or when they were challenged.

In contrast, I described the engagement of WRC practitioners with corrupt GONGO practices as 'unsettling'. They were forced to stay vigilant about the potential scheming of GONGOs, a dimension I referred to as sleuthing. I argued that WRC practitioners engaged with GONGO practitioners through challenge, conflictual dialogue that

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contrasted and exposed the 'personal' voices of GONGO representatives with the collective body of evidence and causes represented by NGOs. As a final resort, practitioners engaged in shrinking the available space for GONGOs – marginalising, a distinctly undemocratic means adopted to protect democratic norms.

VIII Findings – The aesthetics of assembling

During my time in the field it was clear that democratic practice involved a considerable amount of artful practice, appeals to the senses that escaped the bounds of pure language. I term this practice the aesthetics of assembling in order to denote the artful aspects of the acts of public assembly, and how practitioners engage in facilitating, shaping and influencing assembly. People gathering in streets to voice their political demands, carrying placards and various other artefacts, chanting and delivering speeches, linking with one another, are aesthetic acts, which hold a performative power to enact certain practices and subjectivities. I explore two sub-practices of the aesthetics of assembling: aestheticising equivalence and embodied reordering.

Outlining the sub-practice of *aestheticising equivalence*, I analyse the ways in which practitioners assemble a chain of equivalence (Laclau, 2007) between people voicing different demands, using aesthetics as a medium for achieving this (Ranciére, 2009). At play in the sub-practice is the artful connection of particular experiences with general causes and meaning. I term the second sub-practice *embodied reordering*, drawing on Ranciére's concept of 'the distribution of the sensible' (2012: 12), which broadly refers to the aesthetic regime that renders the world intelligible (forms of art, language, bodies and the material). Whereas Ranciére discusses the order of the sensible and the act of disrupting such an order in somewhat homogenous terms, of a person or group seeking to be recognised within a particular order (e.g. women demanding to be recognised as full human beings, equal to men), I offer a performative analysis to unpack the

heterogeneous, diverse and dynamic nature of the struggle amongst insurgent actors seeking recognition.

To illustrate these sub-practices and their dimensions I draw on the preparations made by WRC for the International Women's Day (IWD) campaign and march. Three years ago, WRC practitioners had the idea of revitalising IWD – to reclaim it from the grip of capitalist-patriarchal [32] interests and posit IWD as a celebration of women's achievements and a platform for voicing new demands, instead of as a lucrative celebration of mothers, which is what IWD had become over previous decades, in the view of practitioners. My mother's generation, and those before, remember IWD as being closely tied with the socialist struggle for women's liberation, Clara Zetkin[33], the fight for the rights of working-class women and the efforts of the Anti-Fascist Front (AFŽ). The link between IWD and working-class struggle was symbolised through the adoption of the red carnation, a flower that was initially used to mark International Workers' Day (see Korrf and Drost, 1993).

My generation, however, born during the fall of Yugoslavia, the rise of ethno-nationalism and revival of religious narratives, remembers IWD as a celebration of mothers and the red carnation as a symbol of motherhood. An image of my neighbour holding, in a superior way, an enormous bunch of red carnations every 8th of March – something she perceived as a particular kind of reward for birthing five sons - is still seared in my

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[32] Redefining IWD as a celebration of mothers throughout the 1980s and 1990s prompted the creation of an IWD gift market. Typical gifts tend towards the domestic, such as make-up, flower arrangements and household items. This gifts market predominantly profits men, as only 9.6% of businesses in Montenegro are owned by women (Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, 2016: 96).
[33] Clara Zetkin helped establish International Women's Day alongside Luise Zietze and Käte Duncker at the International Socialist Women's Conference, Copenhagen, in 1910.

memory. "The more sons, the lusher the bouquet", she used to say, beaming with pride. Perversely, the red carnation became a symbol of corporeal strength in producing male offspring, a reward for upholding a patriarchal system of values.

To mark IWD in schools, we would be tasked with writing poems, songs and essays dedicated to mothers, which we would then recite, sing and read. There are only so many words that rhyme with the Serbo-Croatian word for 'mother' (majka), so the challenge of writing something 'original' every 8th of March was a real struggle for primary school children keen to impress. I will never forget the expression on my parents' faces when my younger sister (aged six at the time) publicly compared our mother to Lake Baikal in the poem she wrote (majka-Bajkal), which was at the time reported in the media in relation to mercury pollution that had rendered some people blind. From a vantage point, I can better appreciate the subversive, although unintentionally so, element of her poetry, as we were truly rendered blind and made to forget the historical importance of marking IWD.

This erasure of the other aspects and experiences of women in favour of motherhood also featured in the naming of the day. The second part of the day's title that read: "8th of March - International Women's Day" was dropped and the day was simply called "8th of March". While it is important to WRC practitioners that mothers are celebrated and motherhood appreciated (some of them are mothers), "it was unfair to do it at the expense of all the other aspects of being a woman" (Andrea).

> As women we're robbed of our experiences, of our humanity…celebrated only for our reproductive ability…Being reduced to machines for reproduction by nationalist

politics...also robbed us of a sense of solidarity drawn from our history of fighting for equality, fighting to become full human beings. (Marija)

Striving to problematise this "mothering of IWD" (Luka) and to revive some of the narratives of the women's struggle to attain freedom and equality, WRC members decided to organise an IWD march in the capital of Montenegro in cooperation with other NGOs and citizens. The IWD campaign and march is a week-long event. Each year, in communication with residents, WRC practitioners task themselves with mapping out the particular problems that women face, which are subsequently articulated into broader demands and voiced through IWD activities. This practice, it was explained to me, is a way for practitioners to "make a big, loud push" (Luka) about all those issues women raise during a particular year. In 2017, demands were made for economic equality, dignity and peace.

8. 1. Aestheticising equivalence

Aestheticising equivalence refers to a sub-practice of the aesthetics of assembling, where a chain of equivalence is articulated through diverse aesthetic mediums, with people and symbols expressing different demands. I identify two dimensions to this sub-practice. The first is that of *grounding-airing*. The particular experiences of women are brought to life through individual performative acts on film but these are offered a general aesthetic force through their connection in the 'air' of the internet. The second is that of *sensory imbrication*, which denotes the aesthetic enactments of equivalence, with the equivalence performed through a diverse range of mediums, which, crucially, gain their

force by being blended together. Melody, text, image and rhythm merge in a compelling performance of equivalential democratic practice, a tapestry of sensory enactment that generates new alliances and fresh associations. The sub-practice of aestheticising equivalence and its two dimensions are defined and illustrated in the following table:

Sub-practice of the aesthetics of assembly	Dimensions of the sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Aestheticising equivalence Articulating a chain of equivalence through aesthetic mediums, with people and symbols expressing different demands.	**Grounding-airing** The generation of familiarity with certain women's experiences and circumstances, combined with the generalisation of such experiences into democratic principles. This allows for alliances to be made across time and in the air of the online space.	Clip from an online video submitted to WRC: "If my grandmother could say 'No' to fascists, then I have to say 'No' to all those who are trying to oppress women. I have to, because of my grandmother, because of myself, because of my daughter…" Here the video combines personal intimacy with more general associations, enabling broader identification.
	Sensory imbrication The generation of equivalence through the performative power of a diverse range of mediums (image, text, movement, melody), which gain their force through their blending and coming together in a common, immediate and face-to-face space.	Picture collage from the IWD march: Andrea, interview extract: "It's inscribed somewhere in our psyche that red is the IWD colour, with red carnations, our socialist past, working class, all red in school recitals…It's a mechanical reaction. Our school recitals were like straight from the inside of the uterus! Remember?" Sedimented associations with the colour red provide a performative force to the chain of equivalence.

Table 10: Sub-practice of aestheticising equivalence

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**Ethnographic episode (grounding-airing): IWD campaign videos**

In the run up to IWD and as a way of including more diverse voices in the campaign, WRC invited people to send videos of themselves in which they were to talk about IWD and why they thought it was important to mark it. The videos that arrived in the WRC inbox, combined with the grievances and demands made by protesting mothers, pointed predominantly to the problem of economic inequality, albeit from different perspectives (that of young people, working mothers, unemployed women, etc.). In some videos and comments posted on the WRC Facebook page, people called for respect for women outside IWD, recognition of women's worth as human beings beyond their reproductive abilities, as well as the necessity for women to enjoy the same liberty and equality as men. The third major problem identified, which also surfaced in practitioners' contact with their clients throughout the year, was the "endemic violence that pervades women's lives" (Lara).

Luka was in charge of posting the videos on the WRC page, in the order in which they arrived, and viewers shared them further on their own profiles. Moreover, WRC hired a public relations company that transcribed the messages and spread them alongside the videos and other campaign material to different social networks and media outlets. The videos initiative was a way for WRC to open up virtual spaces for people to express themselves and voice their concerns and demands, spaces that were subsequently merged with other spaces, such as online media outlets, allowing for the messages to be spread further. It is important to note that all videos were indiscriminately streamed in their original form without any editing or censorship. It was a way for WRC to demonstrate that "IWD belongs to all of us, it's not a property of WRC or any other

NGOs…this was an opportunity for people to claim ownership of it" (Nina). The balance to be struck was therefore of 'airing' a general sense of solidarity and consensus around issues facing women but also 'grounding' these issues in the particular lived contexts of specific women.

As we were preparing the IWD campaign material, videos from various people were steadily streaming in: women and men, young and mature, employed and unemployed. Some of the messages were generic – framed as invitations to remember achievements related to women's rights and as a reminder that the 8th of March is not mothers' day but a celebration of all women. The rest spoke about the particular inequalities they faced in Montenegrin society as women-writers, -parents, -migrant workers, -teachers, -students, -unemployed etc. The diversity of women, who had never met but were brought together in an online space, provided the air, but the specific experiences of women, recounted on film, grounded the connections in daily struggle. To illustrate this dimension of aestheticising equivalence, I now analyse three examples.

Below is a video frame of one of the women, who reminds viewers about the importance of IWD, which she perceives as a celebration of working-class women and peace advocates.
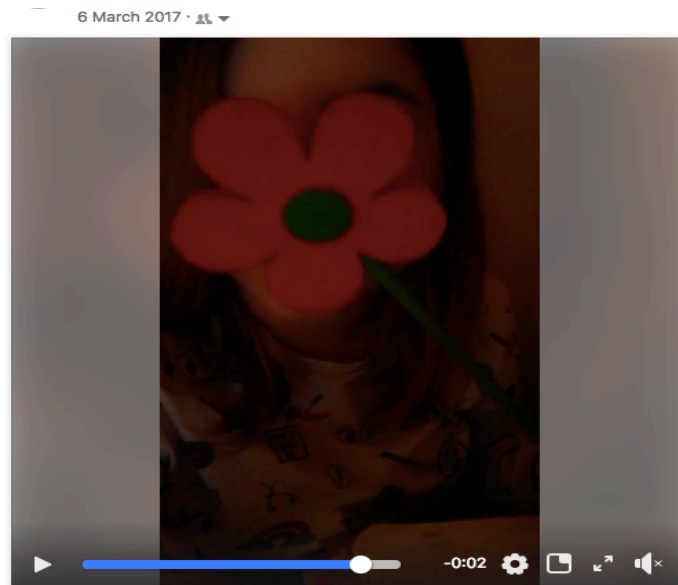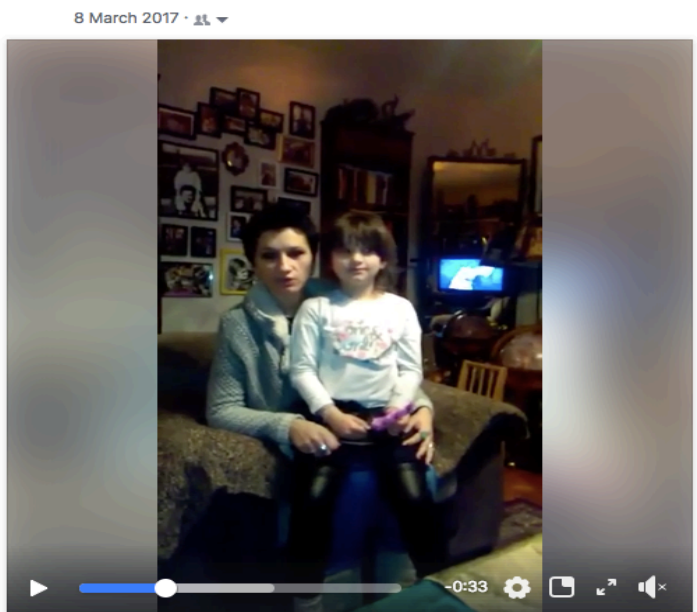
Video frame: Jovana

Jovana's message:

> *Because of the textile factory workers, the history of struggle behind us, we invite you to join the IWD march in the name of the present, the battle against wars, poverty and all forms of social injustice. See you there!*

Jovana reminds viewers about former factory workers, waving a cardboard-made red carnation in front of her face, as if attempting to restore the link between IWD and working-class women. The textile factory Jovana mentions consisted of a predominantly female workforce. However, this factory, and many others in which women worked, has disappeared in the process of transition and with them a formidable and significant collective female voice, leaving the majority of women trapped in either the low-paid service industry, the black-market economy or the trap of unemployment (see CEDAW, 2017; GREVIO, 2017).

Jovana also reminds viewers about the peace activism of women, many of whom were workers, during the wars of the 1990s (see Anima, 2018). Moreover, she draws attention

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to "poverty" and "social injustice", which increased dramatically as a consequence of the wars. It is interesting to note that Jovana opts for the collective pronoun 'we' in her invitation to viewers to join the IWD march, which signals her sense of belonging to a larger group of women from diverse backgrounds, in an equivalential chain. All of these women suffer "social injustice" and "poverty" in solidarity, but also stand for peace and the betterment of working conditions.

In the moment when she extends her invitation, she places a red carnation in front of her face, as if to fortify this collective sense of belonging: her voice is not only her own – the "struggle" is common. Her particular identity dissipates into the general. Such merging with the collective is even more pronounced by the setting she is situated within. Jovana is seated in front of a book, in pyjamas and in the privacy of her home, which prompts a sense of familiarity. Yet, the lights are dimmed and the viewer can barely recognise the speaker – she is both familiar (grounded), but she could be any one of a collective "we" (in the air).

Video frame: Jelena

Jelena's message:

If my grandmother could say 'No' to fascists, then I have to say 'No' to all those who are trying to oppress women. I have to, because of my grandmother, because of myself, because of my daughter…We have to enlighten ourselves, spread the ideas; we have to push for women's rights, starting in our homes and amongst our friends who could, then, spread it further. Only then will we be unstoppable…Persevere!

What captures one's immediate attention in Jelena's message is the continuity of the women's struggle against oppression that she depicts by drawing a link between her grandmother and her daughter. This is both a matter of grounding solidarity in a particular familial experience and also of airing such a connection to the extent that most viewers would recognise similar connections and feel a sense of intimacy to them. Jelena suggests that she is indebted to her grandmother for resisting fascism, which is expressed through the conditional sentence (if she…then I…). By doing so, she further strengthens the link between her grandmother and subsequent generations of women in the family – they are not linked simply through blood ties but through their fight against oppression. Intimacy is accentuated here as the stature of grandparents is particularly celebrated in Montenegrin culture. Within the collage of family photos on the wall behind them, a central place is occupied by an old black and white photo of a woman holding a girl upon her shoulders (mother holding a daughter? Grandmother holding a granddaughter?), which visually fortifies the idea of continuity and bonds between women past and present.

Jelena states that the "push for women's rights" begins at home, where the struggle is grounded in the domestic sphere, strongly suggesting that it is the obligation of every

woman to take part in it, which is evident in the repetition of the modal verb "have to". However, she also exemplifies how such a 'push' might manifest by sending a message from her own home to her "friends...who could spread it further". Jelena also embodies her speech acts. She holds her daughter in her lap as she enacts her words, and so includes her in the proposed "unstoppable" continuum of women who fight for their rights. She enacts grounding-airing in an embodied way, manifesting the general through a corporeal, cross-generational presence.

Finally, looking straight at the viewer, Jelena commands: "Persevere!" suggesting that this perseverance in fighting for women's rights is not optional but mandatory. However, there is something soothing in such a command, as the word used evokes a sense of solidarity and support. Namely, "držite se!" – the Montenegrin equivalent of "persevere", prompts a comforting evocation of people physically holding one another (as in an embrace), while simultaneously boosting one another's confidence to endure. This is a highly embodied image of intimacy and connection, the meeting of the general with the particular.

Video frame: Sanja

Sanja's message:

> *People often say 'poverty doesn't discriminate'. However, my own experience and the experiences of my girlfriends, shows otherwise. We had to leave our country in pursuit of employment and career, unlike our male peers who managed to get work far easier. I support the IWD march because I wish for women to have equal opportunities for employment and career in our country. Therefore, dear women, drop your suitcases and let's get marching!*

Sanja voices her main concern – poverty and the related issue of employment, something echoed in a majority of videos received. Sanja explicitly identifies poverty as a problem that affects predominantly younger generations, a conclusion she draws by observing her own and her female friends' experiences. She grounds experiences of poverty in characters many will recognise. Her sense of solidarity clearly rests with women migrant workers, whom she denotes by using the collective pronoun "we", who "had to leave" the country in order to find jobs. The employment of the past tense modal verb "had to"

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signals a lack of choice – while the privilege of staying is enjoyed predominantly by "male peers".

Interestingly, Sanja speaks whilst walking towards the central bus station, an all too familiar place for her and her migrant worker peers. As she speaks, we hear numerous suitcases rolling on the pavement past her, hauled by passers-by on their way to the station, as well as a cacophony of traffic noise. These particular noises evoke a familiar connection for viewers, of similar experiences and feelings while trudging to work. She carries a rucksack on her back as if to further evoke the experience of travelling to work.

She concludes her message with an invitation for women to join the march. She commands them to "drop their suitcases", which once more confirms her sense of belonging to those women who travel in pursuit of employment. Yet, she immediately follows the command with the self-inclusive exclamatory clause: "let's get marching", implicating herself with those commanded. Such a construction suggests that, although pronounced by Sanja, the command originates elsewhere – it is an imperative that arises from the fact that women suffer inequality in the Montenegrin labour market.

Apparent in this analysis is the way in which online video can open up and extend virtual spaces and offer the basis for solidarity to be formed between diverse people. Namely, in the videos each woman voices her own particular concerns but these experiences are also familiar and hold the potential to echo the experiences and identifications of a diverse group of people, offering the basis for the formation of a chain of equivalence between them. The performances are enacted through a range of immediate effects (lighting, colour, familiar signifiers in text, objects) but also the aesthetic of the unique

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online space, where the collection of diverse experiences and aesthetics forms a kind of collective and more general effect, of inviting others to recognise themselves and their own experiences within them. Below, I analyse another dimension of aestheticising equivalence – sensory imbrication – where a range of mediums in an immediate, embodied and face-to-face setting blend together to enact a chain of equivalence between diverse people.

Ethnographic episode (sensory imbrication): IWD march

On the morning of IWD people started flocking into the premises of WRC. Practitioners cleared one of the office rooms and filled it with artefacts (flags, banners, vuvuzelas, whistles, posters, t-shirts and poles) for people to choose from, and set aside blank canvases, markers and paints for people to add new messages or drawings. This was the practitioners' way of encouraging people to express themselves creatively and "to take part in something that already belongs to them, although people are made to forget" (Irena, a practitioner). This comment references the purpose of the event for WRC, re-enmeshing women in what it sees as the original set of discursive norms of IWD.

Many people brought their own artefacts to the march and those who came empty-handed looked for inspiration in the collection of banners and placards available and crafted their own. Very quickly the offices transformed into a bustling workshop: people busied themselves with flicking through the mountains of banners, adding their own, exchanging them and organising different artefacts in piles. Introductions were made and people grouped themselves into little sub-groups, as far as was possible in a small

office space, casually chatting about the position of women in Montenegrin society, exchanging personal experiences, as well as talking about supporting the protesting mothers.

Photo 5: The 'creative' room in the WRC offices in the run-up to IWD.

Below I illustrate the nuances of sensory imbrication through the story of the march, focusing on different mediums and their moments of blending. Although there was a significant overlap in the performance itself, I separate the story into four sub-sections, according to the sensory aspects in use, in order to underline the diversity of aesthetic and sensory expression.

Photo 6: Images of the IWD 2017 march

Most of the banners, flags and artefacts used in IWD featured red as the dominant colour. Artefacts that did not have red as a base featured it elsewhere: as a way of accentuating a written message, drawn symbol or both. A cursory glance at the collage of photos depicting people joining the march brings the colour red immediately to attention and not only on banners and flags, but also on people's clothes and accessories (bags, scarves, glasses, etc.), and even on the pavement of the square people congregated on.

In the run up to the march, practitioners bought big rolls of red paper on which they, and other volunteers, inscribed their messages and turned them into placards and banners. People commented on different red items of clothing they saw on others as "suitable/fantastic/ideal/spot on" for IWD, without any further explanation, which

signalled that a certain taken-for-granted assumption was in operation. The colour red served a visually unifying purpose, of creating a sentence-image (Ranciére, 2009) assembled by people, their clothes, accessories, inscribed placards and banners.

When I asked Andrea, who was in charge of securing the material, why she chose red as the colour of the march, she responded:

> *…Apart from it being a shock colour, one that draws attention, it just felt suitable…I instinctively reached for red, and I suppose others did as well, as you could see people appeared with their own red banners, flags, clothes. It's inscribed somewhere in our psyche that red is the IWD colour, with red carnations, our socialist past, working class, all red in school recitals…It's a mechanical reaction. Our school recitals were like straight from the inside of the uterus! Remember? [laughter] Everything was red! So some part of me acted upon that…the power of socialist tradition, power of the female body, something recognisable for all.*

The colours that symbolise IWD around the globe differ. For instance, the colours chosen in the UK are purple, white and green, as envisaged by the suffragette movement to denote loyalty, purity and hope (see Blackman, 2015). However, as Andrea hinted, the colour red came to symbolise IWD in the former Yugoslavia through its link to socialism and class struggle. Considering that one of the main problems raised during IWD in Montenegro was poverty and economic inequality, the dominance of the colour red in placards and flags could have been interpreted as a deliberate emphasis on the working class struggle.

However, since the selection of a suitable colour for IWD was not discussed amongst the participants and organisers of the march, and yet the majority selected it as their colour

of choice, it is more plausible that choosing to employ red represents an involuntary, yet agentic act. Namely, it was an act that derived from the impetus of meaning sedimented through ongoing repetitive practices (IWD celebrations, school recitals, female bodily function, etc.). As Andrea explained – it was "a mechanical reaction" prompted by "something recognisable for all", uniting the experiences of women with the struggles of labour. Bearing such sedimented practice in mind, the colour red is more than a means of visually unifying diverse groups of people. It serves as an enabler of a more meaningful, performative chain of equivalence – one built through a myriad of contextually embedded, repeatedly performed practices.

The line "recognisable for all" is key for understanding the power of the colour red to link many different people and groups. It is the colour that prompts memory of a broad spectrum of practices (and symbols) familiar to people in different kinds of ways (worker, woman, student, socialist, etc.) – something that everyone in the context of Yugoslavia can relate to. Such easy relatability to familiar practices fostered through the deployment of the colour red, in turn, provides aesthetic impetus to the chain of equivalence. Namely, not only does the colour link people together visually and meaningfully (by reminding them of a range of practices they could relate to), but it also activates the chain, prompting its performative power.

Mina, another practitioner, said:

> *In a way, we could say that there is no more appropriate colour to denote the women's movement globally, but the colour of blood...we didn't choose it, really, it came to us through acts of struggle, sacrifice and the flow of our cycles. It symbolises life and death at once...*

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For Mina, the colour red symbolises simultaneously "life and death" – the ability of women's bodies to create life and the sacrifices women's bodies endure in the struggle for liberty and equality. For her, the colour red also provides a sense of shared experiences and solidarity, between women globally, not solely women from Yugoslav territory. She evokes the image of a united female population, coloured in red, from all over the world, significantly broadening the chain of equivalence. Yet, by broadening the chain, she 'targets' the attention of a much narrower group – the marching women of Montenegro – inciting an additional sense of belonging to a collective of women bonded by their bodily experiences.

Sensory imbrication – Language and colour:

Photo 7: IWD 2017 marching column

The flag at the head of the marching column reads: "And bread and peace and roses", the main slogan of IWD 2017, bringing the colour red, the inscription of the slogan and the marching column together in a sentence-image. The slogan was derived predominantly from the video messages received, as well as the demands voiced in the protests of mothers and those of WRC clients, which:

> *happened to correspond to numerous IWD slogans around the globe throughout history…messages repeat, we share issues with the textile workers of Massachusetts in 1912, the peace protest in Russia in 1917… it was a way to say that yes, yet again we're fighting for economic equality and prosperity, yet again fighting to maintain peace, but we also need roses, some beauty and dignity in our lives…life should be more than a constant scraping for survival. (Andrea)*

It is interesting to note here the raised demand for "roses", or as Andrea clarifies "some beauty and dignity in our lives". Creating the slogan, Andrea deliberately uses the word "roses" to provoke a memory of the superficial practice of gifting flowers to women on IWD, while simultaneously drawing reference to the textile workers' strike led by women in Massachusetts[34] in 1912, demanding better working conditions but also respect and dignity (Eistenstein, 1983). Andrea's intention is to stress that there is nothing wrong with gifting flowers to women on IWD but that women should be respected and should enjoy dignity on other days as well. The slogan's reference to dignity builds a chain of equivalence not only between women in Montenegro demanding dignity and respect, but also women in Russia and the USA, who raised similar demands, and so the issue of dignity surpasses national borders and instigates a sense of international solidarity.

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[34] The slogan of textile workers from Massachusetts was 'Bread and Roses' (see Eisenstein, 1983)

It is worth noting that the textile workers' strike is infamous for the excessive use of force used against the peaceful protestors by militias (Milkman, 2013). The numerous pictures of US militia holding extended bayonets towards protestors in Massachusetts in 1912 bears a haunting similarity with the image of special forces in full combat gear, surrounding the frail, protesting mothers in Montenegro (see photo No4). Bearing this in mind, the slogan's call for peace can be interpreted as a caution against unnecessary use of force in the case of protesting mothers, as well as a generic demand for peace against the prevailing domestic and gender-based violence in the country. Yet again, the chain of equivalence is extended from national to international level through the medium of linguistic imagery (Massachusetts strike – mothers' strike), while still allowing for a more contextual association to be made (those not familiar with the Massachusetts strike would be familiar with the prevailing problem of domestic and gender-based violence in general).

Each noun in the slogan links to another by the conjunction "and", which gives the impression of assembling a list of things to be accomplished by marching on the streets. Yet even though the list's inventory comprises only three items (bread, peace, roses), the cyclical format employed (accomplished by the repetition of the conjunction "and") has the textual effect of a loop, making it seem never-ending. In this way, the slogan mimics the infinity of struggle to attain economic stability, peace and "beauty and dignity in our lives".

Using the cyclical arrangement of the sentence, which curiously does not contain any punctuation marks, Andrea opens up an opportunity for spectators to join the symbolic

merry-go-round-ride of women's struggle, wherever: at either "bread", or "peace" or "roses". She also signals that the three issues are inextricably linked: there is no economic equality without peace, no peace without dignity, no dignity without economic equality. The slogan, formatted in this way, also symbolically serves to bring different groups of people into a performative assembly (voicing issues of either economic inequality, violence or dignity as priority) through a chain of equivalence.

Moreover, the denoted historical repetition of the voiced demands draws a link between time and space, creating a sense of assembly of protestors from around the globe in different timelines – an assembly that surpasses the streets we marched along, on the 8th of March 2017. Such an assembly is demonstrated on the main poster for IWD 2017, in which the artist created a sense of solidarity that spans different epochs and places, merging streets, people and slogans from cities around the globe and blending them into one image, one protest.

Sensory imbrication – Image, language and colour:

Photo 8: The main poster for IWD 2017

The poster's finish is grey-scale and the only splash of colour (red) is present in the form of the slogan "and bread and peace and roses", as well as in the announcement of the event, stating the date, venue and time. The grey-scaling serves the purpose of blending and making uniform different moments in history from various parts of the globe. The highlighted slogan serves a similar purpose: it summarises the messages from the placards people in the picture hold (that also resonate with the issues voiced by people in Montenegro), which are inscribed in different languages, and so unify the struggle of women globally.

Yet the blending strategies employed are not so extreme as to completely erase the particularities: closer observation offers a window into different eras, noticeable in people's attire (hippie clothing hinting at the 1960s, the tweed costume of office workers from perhaps the 1950s, simple coats of factory workers from the 1970s and 1980s, etc.), as well as the glimpse of older vehicles and different architecture (British Victorian, Yugoslav minimalism, American Art Deco, etc.). As such, the poster allows for simultaneous identification and dis-identification with certain elements, people, events, etc. from previous actions, eras and places, without breaking the chain of equivalence and, therefore, the basis for united action.

Moreover, there is a sense of ordering, as the fragments of older IWD marches are pushed towards the background to provide space for the newer generations (elements of the picture's foreground are taken from recent IWD marches in Montenegro). Such positioning provokes the feeling of continuity between past and present generations, older ones passing the symbolic torch (a placard, an issue) to younger ones, regardless of their respective countries. Such assembling of continuity erases national borders and rearranges the boundaries of the battle for liberty and equality. It further strengthens the sense of solidarity of women globally.

One curious aspect is the appearance of the male arm (detached from the rest of the body) that reoccurs in different places in the poster. We can see that the arm is suited in a shirt and jacket sleeve, which evokes a corporate man or a politician. The arm has no body with a face attached to it, so it is easy to assume any particular corrupt politician or predator capitalist guiding it – it may symbolise a common enemy, an antagonist who the aesthetic chain of equivalence is posited against. The hand serves a performative

function in the chain, extending from the suit sleeve in a grabbing or scooping gesture and wherever it is placed, it leaves an erased smudge. The largest image of a hand appears on the placard, which reads 'I don't want benefits, I want a job', half-erasing the second part of the message, especially tearing through the word 'job'.

This playful depiction problematises, in particular, the adoption of legislation that incentivised a large number of mothers to leave their jobs in exchange for benefits, and the subsequent act of the unlawful withdrawal of benefits, which instigated the protests of mothers. Observed in this way, the depiction addresses a very particular problem of a very specific group. However, the author of the poster also places the same grabbing hand above the IWD slogan, rendering the threat (from the capitalist or politician) common to all – not only to protesting mothers. This common enemy serves here as a unifying force for different groups of women – it places the protesting mothers, unemployed women, employed but underpaid women and working mothers within a chain of equivalence against the corporate men and politicians who marginalise them. The presence of a disembodied arm also serves a comic function, inviting ridicule and perhaps removing some of the sense of dread women feel in relation to such figures of masculinity.

Sensory imbrication – Melody, movement, language:

The assembling of a chain of equivalence also took place through a concoction of music, lyrics and the rhythm of marching people, waving banners. As we started marching, I noticed people taking photos and recording videos from the pavement. One person was

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scribbling something about equal pay on the back of a large yellow envelope, using a post office window as support and joined the marching column, lifting the envelope above her head. Somewhere in the back a group of women was singing an old Yugoslav rock song:

Look what I did to your daughter, mum...
I twisted and turned and changed her
and all of a sudden she's not so dull any more...

The song was originally sung by a man but it adopts a very different connotation when sung by women. In the context of the IWD march it may denote that a woman has decided to break away from a patriarchal upbringing, one that undermines her political agency. It also denotes the struggle involved in breaking away from patriarchal norms, yet this is also a struggle that brings about a "change": "I twisted and turned". The final verse is somewhat mischievous – she hints at a change ("not so dull any more"), but does not clearly state what others might expect to experience, building a sense of hope (uneasy anticipation, even) in the air.

The song is rather cryptic, and as such allows for a variety of interpretations and ways of relating to it: we know that the daughter (an identity common to all marching women) is changing in an unspecified way (allowing for people to attribute their own experiences to such a change). We know that the change is turbulent (a common experience that most can relate to) and that she emerges a different person (again, something many can relate to). The commonalities conveyed in this song serve as a binding force for the chain of equivalence and provide an impetus to the chain - they make it performative. Unified, people are marching along to the same song, singing lyrics that can be interpreted in a number of potentially dis-unifying ways, and yet due to its aesthetic assemblage (the

song is well-known, conveys a broad enough meaning for people to relate to, is performed in the street by marching people rather than discussed as an intellectual exercise), the song performatively brings diverse people together.

By the time the song was over, we had the protesting mothers in our line of sight and a seasoned practitioner played another tune, this time via a portable speaker. The music was quickly drowned out by a chorus of several hundred voices singing in unison, placards dancing to the rhythm of the song, amplified by marching drummers:

> *…Within us, the time/weather is changing*
> *And everyone is yet again*
> *Ready to fight for a dream*
>
> *Within us, the time/weather is changing*
> *From the barricades we'll shout:*
> *No passarán! [They shall not pass]*
>
> *Now is the time…*
>
> *Sejmeni are coming*
> *Bringing chains…*

This song evokes revolutionary feelings; it speaks of the fight for freedom, and can be applied to numerous contexts, allowing many to relate to it. It depicts idealistic people ("ready to fight for a dream") rebelling against 'sejmeni', which could be anyone who holds a weapon (guards, police, military, etc.) or threatening someone's freedom (sejmeni are portrayed as "bringing chains" to the people). 'No passarán' is the famous line uttered by Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, a communist revolutionary from Spain, in her

speech directed again the fascist forces of Francisco Franco in 1936 (Ayrton, 2016). The line is repeated several times as a kind of chant, in crescendo, inciting an emotional build-up and sense of solidarity.

It is worth noting here the word "vrijeme", which can be translated as both "time" and "weather". The verse "within us the time/weather is changing" is repeated several times in the song, denoting two things. First, the word 'weather' suggests that people's mindsets/feelings are changing, as they are no longer willing to tolerate the curbing of freedom. The staccato rhythm of the song suggests that such a change of 'weather'/feeling could be tempestuous – a drum-roll announcing a release. Second, the word 'time' suggests a change in era, a shift on the horizon that could potentially bring forth a new social order. It did feel slightly eerie to sing this song, as we were surrounded by police (wardens and special forces). The police presence provided a visual reference for the lyrics, allowing supplementary identification with the scenario depicted in song, further strengthening the established chain of equivalence.

Aestheticising equivalence summary

I explored aestheticising equivalence as a kind of democratic practice in which aesthetics acted as a medium for assembling a chain of equivalence between diverse groups of people. Practitioners used aesthetics to generate a basis for solidarity by transforming particular issues that people voiced into a common platform for action, in artful ways. This meaning creation only made sense through a particular and gendered performative assembly. The equivalence gained its force through a performative connection to the

women's struggle, through its situating in contemporary socio-political life by a group of practitioners and activists. *Grounding-airing* referred to the dimension that encapsulated simultaneous acts of generalisation and particularisation of issues women face, allowing for alliances to be made across time and space. Such alliances gained their force through a contextualised and therefore familiar and repetitive performative setting, the everyday experiences of women in Montenegro. The coming together of image, text and music - generated a provocative, confrontational but also unifying meaning, a particular chain of equivalence, one that connected contemporary struggle with that of past Yugoslav struggle and the women's struggle globally. The overlapping sensory mediums engaged participants in a way that created new meaning and identifications – a vehicle which enabled a collective agency through democratic assembly.

I now move onto the next sub-practice of the aesthetics of assembling, which I term embodied reordering, where I describe the performative enactments present as people vie for recognition in an order of the sensible.

8.2. Embodied reordering

In this section I explore the ways in which the ordering of the sensible (Ranciére, 2012) is reconfigured performatively through the interplay between WRC practitioners and protesting mothers, each side attempting to enact an assembly (Butler, 2015) that could foster recognition of a specific political subject (i.e. to make a particular political subject intelligible) in the context of IWD. The literature on democratic practice recognises the importance of forming 'hegemonies' for practicing democracy – through voicing

demands, protesting against injustices, forging alliances, etc. However, it offers little insight into the dynamic *within* hegemonies, how a conflict of interests between various groups unfolds or how groups strive to make their identifications commonsensical and dominant, which I present as an aesthetic process. The order of the sensible here is interpreted as something temporary and dynamic, which shifts through a range of embodied acts. The sub-practice and its dimensions are defined and illustrated in the following table:

Sub-practice of the aesthetics of assembly	Dimensions of the sub-practice	Illustrative examples
Embodied reordering A realignment of the sensible order through aesthetic and bodily acts.	**Embodied improvisation** Decision-making, which triggers a reordering of prominence and recognition, is performed through embodied and instinctive acts rather than informed debate.	Ethnographic journal extract: "What are we going to do?" Nina asked somewhat anxiously. "No, idea…Proceed? I replied. "But listen to them…We can't see or hear anything behind! Can you see anything? But they can. Something happened, someone saw something, otherwise they wouldn't…I don't want to turn back, but listen…we have to trust them…." Nina and I improvised and made a decision based upon the instincts and bodily prompts of others.
	Persistence Remaining physically and stubbornly present in assembly, which places pressure and strain on the order in that moment through preventing the grounding of a certain political agency.	Ethnographic journal extract: We continued to walk through the protesting crowd and formed a line in front of the stage, stretching our flag wide. It was important to occupy a space visible to all so that we could act as a reminder that IWD belonged to all women, not only mothers.
	Subversion Employing subversive tactics in order to trigger a reordering of the sensible.	Ethnographic journal extract: One of the mothers complained about the administrators of a Facebook group for not pushing their cause more vehemently, to which the crowd started to chant in mock-lament: "Admin, do you have a mother?" subverting the

		well-rehearsed line from most of the speeches (e.g. Prime Minister, do you have a mother? President, do you have a mother? etc.). A group of people began to undermine the repetitive speeches of mothers through humour, in an attempt to shift the assembly from exclusionary (mothers only) to inclusive (all women).
	Resolution The settling upon an order by contesting parties.	Extract from a speech delivered by Nina at the IWD march: "Mothers' suffering is my suffering, and their burden is the burden of all of us, one for which we are ready to plant our backs in support. Women, we make up half of this country! Let's not forget that…Let's be as united as much as they are trying to divide us! I wish us all a happy Women's Day!" The speech linked broader women's issues with the demands of mothers in a chain of equivalence.

Table 11: Sub-practice of embodied reordering

Ethnographic episode (embodied reordering): International Women's Day or Mothers' Day?

On IWD morning, we collectively descended down the narrow office staircase and spilled onto the square (a large basin, framed by steps), designated as the official meeting place, where we met with the rest of the marchers. I repeatedly span around on my own axis trying to see and memorise it all, never before witnessing so many women in one space. I climbed a few steps to try to locate the WRC practitioners and from there was able to see people carrying placards and flags emerging from side streets, like rivulets joining a river. Finally, I identified Nina, motioning me to join her. I squeezed through the crowd

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and picked up the corner of the flag she held, extended towards me. "Ready?", she asked, smiling. I nodded, smiling back. "It's exhilarating, isn't it? Look at this power! There are more and more people each year!" she exclaimed, looking around one last time before we led the column forwards, towards the protesting mothers, and to the rhythm of drums.

Embodied improvisation:

Mothers were cheering the approaching river of people, many with tears in their eyes. It was an emotional encounter. A group immediately behind me started to shout: "Support! Support!!" and Nina and I joined them in the heat of the moment, prolonging the chant, my eardrums vibrating from the power of released decibels. I looked around, trying to absorb all the motions, facial expressions and encounters, thinking how empowering it was to witness such a diverse pool of people in one place, united. I had never experienced such wholesale solidarity amongst women in Montenegro before and I felt as if I was part of an important historical event. "Look at us", Nina said, pointing to the women around us, "we could run this country together!" I smiled and hoped that everyone was feeling the same.

WRC practitioners spoke on numerous occasions with organisers of the protests of mothers about the IWD march and an agreement was made that people would march past the protestors (as a way of signalling support and allowing mothers to join in the march), proceed to collect others along the designated route and then loop back to support the protestors. It was also agreed that upon joining the protestors, several of the practitioners and participants in the march would be given an opportunity to address the

assembled people from the stage in front of Parliament, where mothers had been protesting for weeks.

As we began merging with protestors, mothers approached the marchers, hugging them and thanking them for their support. The column slowed down to a crawling pace but we continued to walk straight ahead, passing the mothers and heading for the bridge linking two main parts of the city. I was daydreaming about how powerful it would be when we joined the mothers later with a significantly larger crowd and I smiled to myself, imagining the encounter. At that moment a few of the marchers towards the back of the column started to direct us to turn around. "Turn around! You have to turn around! The mothers will think we're abandoning them! TURN AROUND!" A chant of "support for mothers" drifted through from the mothers' stage, in between the shouts.

The shouts persisted and everything became so confusing. Nina, a couple of other participants and I, who were at the beginning of the column, continued to walk forwards somewhat insecurely, as the urging to turn around and join the mothers increased. Turning around felt wrong. My instincts urged me to stick to the initial plan, but the external pressure was escalating. Thoughts about all the work that we had put into shaping and designing the IWD campaign and march so that we could make it inclusive and foster solidarity between diverse groups of women, many of whom were waiting to join us along the agreed route, were racing through my mind. I could not fathom why mothers, or anyone else, thought we were abandoning them, as the initial and well-advertised plan was to join them at the end and to mark IWD, as women, together. "We have to go back, don't cross the bridge! Turn around!" - the shouting broke my train of thought. Nina and I looked at one another and it was clear that neither of us wanted to

halt the marching, but we had to decide. If we had continued, it would have been wrong, if we had stayed, it would have been wrong.

"What are we going to do?", Nina asked somewhat anxiously. "No idea…Proceed? We advertised the route", I replied coyly. "I know but listen to them…We can't see or hear anything behind! Can you see anything? [I shook my head] We can't see. But they can. Something happened, someone saw something…otherwise they wouldn't…I don't want to turn back, but listen…" Nina said. A further shout of "TURN AROUND! We can't abandon them!" came from behind, from a voice I thought I recognised as that of a seasoned practitioner. Nina said: "We don't want mothers to feel as if we don't care…this is not our decision to make…If people want to stay, we have to trust them…Let's turn around."

We both felt that turning around meant some sort of shift but we could not perceive it until later. We made a decision operating on incomplete information, in a matter of less than a minute, relying on the judgement of more seasoned practitioners and other participants of the march behind us. I felt a pull within my body – as if my passions and principles wanted me to continue but my nerves wanted me to turn around. We made an improvised and embodied decision, as we were relying purely on other people's eyes, ears and judgements, and our own instincts. This was an example of us interpreting through our senses rather than through the employment of informed arguments. The instinctively made decision to cease with our initial plan and to turn around in practice marked a shift in the sensible order: from an inclusive act (march in support of all women) to an exclusive one (march in support of mothers).

Persistence:

As soon as we turned around, we regretted it, as we saw that so many mothers had already joined the marching column, so there was in fact no urgency to turn around. "We basically stood up those women waiting for us along the way," Nina sighed. But there was no going back – the gravitational centre of the assembly had already shifted away from 'all women' to 'mothers' and we had to persist, continue with the new plan, and bide our time for further opportunities to shift the order back in our favour. We continued to walk through the protesting crowd and formed a line in front of the stage, stretching our flag wide. It was important to occupy a space visible to all, so we could act as a reminder that IWD belonged to all women, not only mothers. We made sure that whoever as much as glanced in the direction of the stage could see the flag and us as part of the protest and IWD march, hoping that our presence might shift the order back to 'all women'. Nina found a volunteer to replace her holding the flag and went to speak to the protest organisers about a speech, the content of which was intended to reiterate the importance of solidarity and to underline that the mothers' problems were common to all.

Above my head, on the stage, one of the mothers spoke about the government "sinning against mothers". A burly man, wearing nationalist insignia on his jacket, started shouting profanities at us and pulling at the flag. He raised one of his hands, as if preparing to hit one of the people holding the flag, and I pulled him away by the back of his jacket, while still holding the flag. A few of the journalists and protestors dragged him away. We were not deterred and we persisted, standing and holding the flag. Moreover, the attempted assault instigated sympathy towards us amongst some of the protestors

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standing nearby, who started chanting the slogan from the flag as the man was dragged away. This hint of support was encouraging and in a way confirmed that persistence was a good tactic.

I glanced back over my shoulder and spotted Nina talking to some of the organisers beside the stage, wondering what was going on. Time was passing; my legs were starting to cramp from a lack of movement, as the mothers delivered speech after speech about motherhood, not once mentioning the word 'women', not even as a slip of the tongue. In between the speeches the audio speakers boomed with various songs celebrating mothers. My ears ached with the noise. Yet we persisted, maintained our bodily and aesthetic presence in front of the stage, as Nina continued trying to engage the mothers' leaders in discussion. Whatever hopes for a shift in the order (from 'mothers' to 'women') I may have mustered earlier when the protesters chanted our slogan, gradually started to fade away. Yet, at the very least, just by occupying a prominent spot, we were usurping the sedimentation of the order – the 'mothering' of IWD: we could not be unseen or ignored.

Subverting:

I glanced again at Nina and Jana, who looked concerned as they joined in conversation with the mothers' leaders. We were too far from one another to be able to communicate verbally, so had to improvise through body language. As Jana locked her eyes with mine, I used the opportunity to slightly jerk my head upwards, as a way of asking something along the lines of: 'What's going on?' and Jana shook her head, signalling that the talks

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were not going well. I asked someone to replace me at my spot and went to join the WRC group of practitioners and volunteers. Luka explained to me that Nina was frustrated because the mothers' leaders had changed their minds about everything previously agreed upon. As I listened to Luka, a small group of marchers approached us to say that they could no longer stand there as they felt "cheated and tricked", because they understood that "WRC was fighting for the 'unmothering' of IWD, not for reaffirming it as a mothers' day". Lara and Marija apologised and explained that they were surprised as well, but that women's lives were at stake because of the revoked benefits and because of that WRC could not revoke support, but that they completely understood if others wished to leave.

Nikola, one of the volunteers, expressed frustration with the mothers' speeches, loudly proclaiming:

> *I'm fed up with this mother, mother, mothering! Every speech sounds the same! Don't they have a crumb of courtesy left in them to thank all of these people who came to give them support but are not mothers?!*

One of the elderly women standing in our vicinity responded by saying that she was one of the protesting mothers and that it was important to stay on course and not lose track of their agenda, but:

> *Not today. This bothers me as well. Every time I hear one of those songs and praise for mothers I feel a knot clenching in my stomach as my daughter cannot bear children, you see, and yet she stood by me all these weeks, here on this pavement, so why is she less worthy than me and all these women up there? That's not right.*

Encouraged by the interaction between Nikola and the protesting woman, the group around them started to make jokes, linking to whatever the mothers were saying in their speeches. Spontaneously, through humorous interjections, the group started shifting the gravity of the assembly towards 'all women', reordering through subversion. One of the mothers complained in her speech about the administrators of a Facebook group for not pushing their cause more vehemently, to which the crowd started to chant in mock-lament: "Admin, do you have a mother?" subverting the well-rehearsed line from most of the speeches (e.g. Prime Minister, do you have a mother? President, do you have a mother?). Another mother said that "the mother is the most sacred being", to which the crowd responded with a chant: "All bow to the supreme deity", causing an uproar of laughter. The humour somewhat elevated people's spirits and dissuaded some from leaving the protest, which meant that all hope was not lost after all. I could not hear and pick up on all the jokes but what I could see and hear was that people laughed in groups and, more importantly, did not leave. The order of the sensible, although still in favour of mothers, began to unsettle through subversive humour.

Nina and Jana approached us and explained that the mothers were placing restrictions on their previous agreement but these started to crumble as the crowd grew increasingly frustrated. After "hard negotiations" (Jana), the mothers agreed to allow a narrow category of mothers-practitioners to speak, and only two of them, after a group of mothers finished with their speeches. It was an act of exclusion but allowing at least some of the women to speak was better than nothing, so Nina and Mina, being mothers, agreed to speak. Initially, WRC members asked me to write a speech and deliver it, as an ordinary woman who was neither a practitioner nor a mother, as they wanted to "broaden the relevance of IWD beyond mothers but also beyond NGO membership"

(Lara). Since I was there from the beginning of the campaign, and strongly believed in the idea that IWD should be a medium for fostering solidarity between diverse women, I happily accepted. Now, however, it was clear that I did not belong to the order assembled by mothers and I was prevented from speaking. Nina, as a mother and practitioner, offered to deliver my speech, while the rest of us continued to swap places at the flag in shifts.

In the meantime, jokes on my account ('half-woman', 'child-woman', 'half-activist', 'satan's child', 'zero') started to pour in from friends and new acquaintances, to everyone's delight, including my own. Some even extended their mock-condolences for the fact I was not counted a 'full' human and we pretended to be grief stricken. The whole interaction looked like a humorous play for onlookers, who gradually began to come up with their own quips and remarks about motherhood, which assured me that, through humour, they understood, at least partially, why it was important not to neglect women's experiences outside motherhood. The humorous subversion added weight to the WRC position and the order of the assembly shifted a bit more towards 'women'.

Resolution:

The resolution phase was marked by the coming together of a number of aesthetic elements and in a relational recognition of some kind of closure between the parties. It was enacted through an ordering of bodies on the stage, the colour and presence of a flag, intensity of voice, choice of language and the responses of the listeners.

A practitioner speaking at IWD

Nina and Mina came up on the stage, a red flag from the previous IWD march, which the mothers appropriated as their symbol throughout their protest, stretched behind them.

Below is an extract from the speech I wrote, but which Nina delivered:

> *Women, comradesses! We are the group that is most profoundly hit by transition and corruption, the consequences of which we've felt on our skins for decades. We've been removed from a large part of the labour market, held captive in either our homes, the grey economy or in service industries...performing jobs for which we are either unpaid, paid poorly or cash-in-hand, although the figures say that we are more educated, more ethical and more hard-working. When introducing austerity measures, the government saves at the expense of the already impoverished and disenfranchised groups, these mothers, who have been persisting in the fight for their rights on this pavement for weeks...Mothers' suffering is*

my suffering, and their burden is the burden of all of us, one for which we are ready to plant our backs in support. Women, we make up half of this country! Let's not forget that. And so: Let's be as loud as they want to silence us! Let's be proud as much as they are trying to humiliate us! And most importantly of all: Let's be as united as much as they are trying to divide us! I wish us all a happy Women's Day!

My/Nina's speech has a resolving effect by making a link between all women in Montenegro and protesting mothers, pointing to women's impoverishment fostered by transition and corruption for the purpose of creating a sense of inclusion, a wider bond between women; stressing that it is not only mothers who are affected by poorly devised policies, suspicious privatisation processes and corruption. I/Nina emphasise the resolving bond by citing research which states that women in Montenegro are on average more educated, deemed more ethical and do not shy away from work, even if the work means spending longer hours in lower paid and unpaid jobs. By drawing this link, my aim when writing the speech was to shift the axis regarding the meaning attributed to IWD (a day when all women come together to raise common demands), as well as to resolve the tension between women and mothers. I also constructed a common enemy, without specifying so explicitly, in order to allow for broader identification – something all women could easily relate to. Such framing was designed to unite and create an assembly, an order, which was to include diverse women.

Nina's passionate delivery of the speech infected the crowd, something I feel I could not have pulled off in an equally powerful way. The aesthetics of the delivery were absorbing and encompassing, bringing home the resolution of the moment. She played with accentuating certain words, like "us" and "we", to stress the commonality and inclusion, and made tactical pauses to allow people to absorb the lines she uttered. The collective

mode of Nina's oratory accentuated the resolution, lending it an affective force. As if deliberately staged, the wind carried Nina's hair backwards to reveal the tensed tendons in her neck, dancing with each vocal motion. From below the stage, she looked like a tall, looming liberty statue – a recognised figure (one of 'us') – in a newly formed order of bodies on the stage. In turn, people shouted confirmations back at her, in the form of exclaimed 'yes-es', spontaneous applause and excited shouts, like 'Truth!', 'Spot on!' etc. Finally, when she made the loudest exclamation, wishing all women a happy Women's Day, she received long applause, cheering and encouragement in the form of a repeated 'Bravo!' and multiple hands raised in the air, including a group of mothers behind me. Suddenly, it felt that the gravitational axis of the tectonic plate of solidarity had shifted further again – this time towards all women. Even a few mothers who subsequently addressed the crowd changed their narratives to include other women as well.

Resolution of the order was experienced and enacted in an embodied and aesthetic way, through the coming together of words, bodies, symbols and body language. It was a relational acceptance of a changed order, as indicated through the crowd's confirmation of recognition and participation; yet it was also a reordering that was persuasively won, through assertive bodily presence and symbolism.

Embodied reordering summary

In relation to the sub-practice of embodied reordering, I explored how WRC practitioners attempted to make the political subject of 'woman' intelligible by realigning assembly aesthetically, so as to encompass many diverse groups of women. Forming a 'hegemony'

– a public assembly, in the analysed episode, between diverse groups of people, was an important aspect of democratic practice and I explored the dynamics within such hegemony, paying attention to the embodied aspect of it and how certain groups strove to make themselves dominant and 'sensible'. In the ethnographic episode, these attempts were made against the protestors, who attempted to ground a political subject of 'mother'. The first reordering of the 'sensible order' took place through an improvisational form of decision-making rather than informed debate. The second reordering took place through acts of persistence in the face of exclusion. The third reordering took place through subverting, using humour to trigger a reordering. Finally, the dimension of resolution encapsulated settling upon a temporary order by contesting parties through a relational coming together of bodies, language and symbols.

IX Discussion

Introduction

I now discuss my findings in relation to my stated contributions (Chapter 1) and the literatures on NGOs and democratic practice, filtered through a performative lens. I return to Butler to provide an embodied and performative interpretation of the data. I relate the data to Butler's theorising, discussing how practitioners enact democratic practice within and through re-iterative normative frameworks of gender expectations, patriarchy and corruption. I discuss how practitioners' bodies enact democratic practice and how they relate to the vulnerable bodies of others in doing so (Butler, 2006, 2011 and 2015). Overlaying this performative interpretation, I discuss such enactments in relation to theories of deliberative and agonistic democratic practice, which I claim are drawn upon in piecemeal and overlapping ways.

The discussion sections are structured according to the three practices presented in the data chapters, which also map against three of my contributions to knowledge, with gender being a constant theme across practices. I structure each sub-section of the discussion by providing: first, a brief summary of the practice; second, an overview of the broader utility and limitations of the reviewed literature; third, by discussing the literature in more depth against the findings in each sub-practice.

9.1. Embodying democratic practice

Embodying democratic practice focused on the embodied performativities of practitioners in their day-to-day work. I termed it embodying democratic practice in order to highlight practitioners' bodies as sites of such practice, where the possibilities and tensions of democratic engagement are played out with and through bodily acts. I also wanted to emphasise the physical struggle in performing democratic practice and how it bears on the bodies of practitioners.

The NGO literature recognises the tension between NGOs and patriarchy (e.g. Lokar, 2007; Tsetsura, 2013), corruption (e.g. Dollar et al, 2001; Sadiku, 2015) and requirements stemming from international stakeholders (e.g. the UN, EU etc.) (e.g. Harrold, 2016). These place demands on their practices within a country in transition, yet the literature does not offer insight into how these tensions unfold, especially how they bear on bodies.

Conceptually, this data section was relevant to some of the agonistic and deliberative dimensions of practice, albeit enacted in embodied, performative ways. Deliberative understandings of democratic practice can help us better understand the 'pull' of the rational (Blau, 2011: 46) underway in the ways in which practitioners make sense of 'self' and their duties as democratic subjects. Agonistic democratic theory can help us understand the passionate identifications (Mouffe, 1999) practitioners and their allies hold and we can see in the data how such identifications enliven and unsettle democratic practice. Through Mouffe (1999; 2014) and Ranciére (2012) we can also begin to

understand how identifications are partially achieved through visual means and can become more adept at seeing pluralism unfolding in multimodal ways.

I interpret these forms of democratic practice in ways that go beyond the theories of democratic practice considered, theories that give primacy to language over the corporeal and material. Through drawing on Butler's notion of embodied performativity (1999; 2011; 2015), we can understand both the bodies of practitioners, and their relational democratic engagements, as incorporating, re-configuring and exceeding the norms purported through democratic theory.

Understanding democratic practice as embodied and performative enables us to notice it occurring not merely in more formalised debates, within designated times and spaces for practicing 'democracy', but wherever the performative norms of a society are enacted and wherever bodies are present – in offices, squares, streets, and even homes. Deliberation occurred in my data in both spoken and unspoken ways – for example, when practitioners felt injustice, which prompted them to seek resolution or consensus, outside linguistic intersubjective space. I found that bodies themselves generated democratic practice and acted as sites upon which such practices were enacted, beyond deliberation. For example, the act of a hunger strike cut out deliberation and proceeded straight to an embodied democratic act, which enacted a new subjectivity of practitioners-mothers in solidarity. Drawing on Butler in relation to this section also helps me move beyond the account of relationality posited by Mouffe (2009a; 2013), who states that identities can only be understood as a negotiation *against* an 'other' in agonistic struggle. Butler's (2006 and 2015) embodied performativity enables me to

foreground the vulnerability and compassion of such relationality, where bodies act with and in response to one another to generate democratic practice.

Having discussed the broader relationship between the 'embodying democratic practice' chapter and reviewed literature, and the contribution made by my approach, I will now move on to consider each sub-practice in turn in order to highlight my contributions in more depth.

Transversing

Transversing referred to the movement that takes place between subjectivities in democratic practice and I illustrated it in relation to the protest of mothers. The democratic element of practice here refers to transversing subjectivities with the aim of protecting liberty and equality. Such transversive movements enacted a common agency necessary for building assembly between groups and subjects. Primarily, this sub-practice was concerned with working in and through difference, often in conflictual ways. It was underlined as a relational, incremental and everyday form of embodied democratic practice that occurred in a range of settings.

When Habermas (1989[1962]; 1996) addresses deliberation in the public sphere, he advocates for face-to-face dialogue, where people can raise and justify their claims on the basis of whether they are true (objectively), just (socially) and sincere (subjectively) (Habermas, 1984: 398). Interlocutors are positioned as making such claims in language and the inference is that they are made in settings that allow the time and space for patient and lengthy dialogue. What is noticeable here is that Habermas maintains that

these public sphere sites represent "concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered" (1996: 361).

It might be possible to re-interpret what occurred in the dimensions of *exposing* and *inhabiting* through the lens of validity claims. For Habermas, form takes precedence over content, so how debate occurs matters more than what is communicated. In the case of the mothers' protest, one could argue that WRC practitioners regarded the claims of mothers as empirically and factually problematic, in the sense of rejecting the category of motherhood as privileged. Nevertheless, they did recognise their claims as sincere and as the product of the dominant hetero-normative matrix of patriarchy. Ultimately, the cause of the mothers did register with WRC practitioners and others, despite not redeeming all of the validity claims. We can make sense of this conundrum after first considering what can be gleaned from an agonistic reading.

The agonistic account of democratic practice offered by Mouffe (1999; 2009a; 2013) offers a vocabulary for identifying whom practitioners stand in an agonistic and antagonistic relationship with and a way of considering the implications for practice, thereby also providing, by extension, a set of guidelines for the relationship. In my data, mothers initially stood in a somewhat antagonistic relation to practitioners, which gradually transversed to agonistic. Government by and large remained in antagonistic relations during this particular episode. In the case of mothers, being in agonistic relations with practitioners meant the two groups could unite against an external antagonist, albeit through an uncomfortable process of challenging one another's identifications. In the sense of agonistic relations, we can therefore see that conflict proved generative of democratic practice and transversing difference. Conflict between

mothers and practitioners helped assemble a more durable alliance, by facilitating a movement between subjectivities. Difference between mothers and practitioners was never collapsed in the process of transversing but rather remained, and recalibrated, contributing to the maintenance of the democratic practice.

Drawing on Mouffe and Laclau, we can take a step back conceptually and posit broad alliances formed through transversing as crucial for democratic practice. Their account of identity as always relational, and dependent on an external and antagonistic other, helps us to see how chains of equivalence (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 2007) are formed across difference, in order to attain certain demands. We can even point to the alliance formed by the mothers and NGOs, highlighting some of the populist character of the particular transversing highlighted in the data (Laclau, 2007; Mouffe, 2018). Transversing can bear some hallmarks of populism, in the sense meant by Mouffe and Laclau, when a diverse range of groups and individuals are drawn together to make collective demands. Crucially, and differently to reactionary right-wing populism, such a chain is articulated against the very system itself (in the case of the mothers' protest, a government operating outside the framework of liberty and equality), rather than a minority group, such as immigrants. Transversing can adopt a 'popular' hue, in addition, through tapping into sedimented and favoured identifications in a society – in this case, the role of mothers.

To address my critique of democratic theory in relation to transversing, Habermas' account erases the body and embodied aspects of democratic practice in encounters with others (intersubjective spaces). The suffering bodies of mothers that propelled me to question my political stances would be rendered irrelevant through his account and it is
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difficult not to regard such a rendering as a masculine practice. Mouffe's insistence on the primacy of language in working across and with difference did not quite capture the embodied richness of working within transversing. Her differentiation of antagonism and agonism, combined with her predominant focus on language, can leave the impression of a somewhat disembodied and even relatively consistent understanding of how people in a set of relations navigate difference and bind together in democratic practice.

The dimension of exposing draws out some of the embodied aspects of transversing missing within theories of democracy and can provide insight into how chains across difference are assembled within democratic practice. My findings in relation to exposing showed that understanding could be reached in an unspoken way, prior to any dialogue commencing. Practitioners exposed themselves to precarity and vulnerability in order to build and strengthen democratic agency. As I – and practitioners – exposed ourselves to the precarity of others, particularly the protesting mothers, a claim was made on us, and we developed a "heightened sense of [the] expendability and disposability that is differentially distributed throughout society" (Butler, 2015: 15). But the message was delivered in a pre-verbal way. The vulnerability of others prompted a reconfiguration of the political stances previously held by practitioners, in the case of the mothers' protest, in terms of advocating on behalf of women who were suffering as a result of a breach of the rule of law that practitioners opposed (and mothers supported at the time).

Here, Butler's account of vulnerability and relationality can help enrich understanding of claims made upon us in the field, where bodies were "speaking before uttering any words" (Butler, 2015: 156; see also Pullen and Rhodes, 2014; Ross-Smith and

Kornberger, 2004). These claims heightened our sense of embodied relationality, where the democratic dimensions of exposing and inhabiting take place "'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's…the action emerg[ing] from the 'between', a spatial figure for a relation that both binds and differentiates" (ibid: 77). In that moment of connection I felt both different, in the sense that I had not experienced the same deprivations as the mothers, and yet also the same, in the sense that I too had been brought up within an oppressive culture of patriarchal norms. Understanding was developed as people 'felt' each other out, testing assumptions and positions against the precarious and vulnerable bodily presence of others. Democratic claims, then, can be made via the body, through simply sharing a space with another body and experiencing its precarity – my political stance shifted as I encountered mothers whose bodies emitted suffering and pain.

In turn, mothers experienced a disruption of their sense of self, a "decentring of the narrative "I"" (Butler, 2006: 6). Their 'infrastructure of support' (Butler, 2016: 19) was removed and this can be understood in two ways: first, in the material, as the government revoked their benefits and second, in embodied and discursive terms, as the government reneged on an understanding of the 'sacred' role of mothers within the collective. Through experiencing such vulnerability, the mothers were more open to transversing to alternative infrastructures of support – in the form of building an alliance with practitioners. This alternative infrastructure was not just technical but encompassed the symbolic and the embodied. Turning to Ranciére (2012) and Butler (2011, 2015 and 2016), we can understand the movement and emergence of an alternative agency, from the perspective of mothers, as enacted through the appropriation of new signifiers from practitioners – infrastructural and relational

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symbols of solidarity, democracy and feminism - in order to augment their subjectivity. Such augmenting was enacted through a mix of bodies, texts and visual signs and it is difficult (and undesirable, in relation to the focus of this research) to conceptually uncouple any of these in isolation (e.g. Alcadipani and Islam, 2017; Heizmann and Liu, 2018).

Finally, in relation to transversing, I posit that passions (Mouffe, 2014: 149) do not necessarily bear confrontational dimensions. In my data, passions were transversed into compassion. This can be seen most clearly in relation to inhabiting the subjectivity of others. Here, practitioners experienced deprivation in order to better understand it and advocate against it. Drawing on the notion of inhabiting through compassion, we can extend understanding of what Connolly (2004 and 2005) means by 'agonistic respect', a deep acceptance and openness to others based on our 'common condition' (Connolly, 2004: 154) of incompleteness and therefore dependence upon one another. According to my findings, cultivating agonistic respect may require a form of inhabiting through the body, otherwise developing respect for the other's vulnerability and hardship surely becomes something of a theoretical exercise.

Talk of 'carrying home', being 'tormented' by and 'being with' protestors in the data signals a deep, corporeal and somewhat antagonistic manifestation of inhabiting the subjectivity of others. 'Inhabiting' goes a step further than exposing, the word evoking a lingering and persisting feeling when some of the discomfort and pain of others is adopted. This discomfort is perhaps underplayed by both Butler and Connolly, whose emphasis tends to the more positive and generative experiences of relationality, albeit filtered through the notion of precarity. Raising notions of discomfort and pain leads me

to consider how practitioners experience conflicting subjectivities, which I now discuss in relation to the sub-practice of foregoing.

Foregoing

Foregoing was explored as a sub-practice that denotes the practitioner as a site of democratic practice and I illustrated it through the story of Marija and her lost pregnancy. I highlighted how foregoing involved the antagonistic battle between different subjectivities at play upon the bodies of practitioners. These subjectivities consisted of various demands on and of self – the maternal self, the professional self, the emotional and rational self, and various other people, who are represented as needing energy, care and attention. Despite the contest, the battle at play always seemed to culminate in the same result: the emergent agency favoured the posited other whom the practitioner served. Such agency was enacted through persistent masculine discursive claims on the body towards rationality and discipline.

Key to conceptualising foregoing is Mouffe's (1999) notion of adversarial conflict in democratic practice. For Mouffe (1999; 2013), and to a lesser extent Connolly (2004 and 2005), conflict is constitutive and generative of democratic practice in the sense that if meaning is contingent, there will always be a range of clashing interpretations at play. Conflict can therefore be generative as it makes apparent ineradicable differences, the clash of which will produce "vibrant democracy" (Mouffe, 2013: 7).

Mouffe's account of agonism always seems to assume more than one person present in democratic practices – 'us' against 'them' (Mouffe, 2013: 79). Yet my data demonstrated how antagonistic relations can occur upon the subject of the practitioner rather than in any particularly public form of debate (Knights and Clarke, 2014). Different aspects of self and posited others in need vied for dominance upon the site of the subject. In the case of Marija, we saw how her maternal and emotional selves battled the rational and professional selves allied with the presence of the demands of others. In some ways Mouffe helps us understand this clash of identifications, in that she states that a subject is "precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of...subject positions" (Mouffe, 1991: 80). Further, she claims that we are only knowable in relation to what we are not, and that this unknowing that constitutes our knowing is experienced as a "radical negativity, the ever present possibility of antagonism" (Mouffe, 2014: 155). Yet such theorising is reserved in Mouffe for accounts of practices between people, rather than upon the self itself. My claim with foregoing is not that we need to retreat to an autonomous view of self but recognise the inter- and intra-implication of the 'I' in the 'we', in the words of Butler (Butler and Athanasiou: 2013: 107). Antagonisms 'external' to the self are reflected in and through the self, and vice versa.

It is important at this juncture to re-emphasise the distinction between agonism and antagonism. Agonism, in Mouffe's (2009a: 13; see also Rhodes and Harvey, 2012; Rhodes, 2016; Smolović Jones et al, 2016) terms, is a clash between adversaries who each subscribe to the basic principles of liberty and equality, whereas antagonism is a clash between "enemies" (Mouffe, 2013: 7), those who do not share an allegiance to democratic principles against those who defend them. In my data, foregoing was primarily antagonistic, where certain aspects of the self seemed to relate to other aspects

as "enem[ies] to be destroyed" (Mouffe, 1999: 755). Such antagonistic struggle bears material consequences as it is lived out in an embodied way. This was brought home vividly in the experience of Marija, who lost her pregnancy, as her professional and rational selves antagonised her maternal and emotional selves (e.g. Clarke and Knights, 2015).

We can draw on Butler (2006) here to understand the pull upon the self of the vulnerable and precarious other, whom practitioners seek to serve in their practice (Dale and Latham, 2014; Rhodes, 2012). Marija is clearly shaken and driven by ameliorating the suffering of others: "No one should be brought to…such an inhumane condition…They are starving, all of them, so malnourished!" This could be interpreted as a democratic demand by the other, made upon the body of the practitioner. Yet the demand does not really arrive in an agonistic form that would allow for Marija to work through a process of clashing identifications but in a hostile and antagonistic way. Placing Mouffe's sense of antagonism with Butler's embodied and relational account of agency therefore helps us identify a dark side to democratic practice highlighted by neither author. Foregoing can be interpreted as a democratic practice, as practitioners were overwhelmed by serving the liberty and equality of others. Yet, in other ways this serving was distinctly undemocratic, in the sense that antagonism lies outside the framework of democracy and could therefore be viewed as a shadow side of democratic practice.

Returning to Butler (1999; 2011), we can draw on her account of reiterative norms as a way of framing understanding of how various norms within the field of democratic practice unfold upon the body of the practitioner. The antagonistic battle of different

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aspects of self could be said to mimic the existing contest of social norms. In the context of my study, these norms can be identified as patriarchy in antagonism with democracy. Specifically, in the case of Marija, we were able to see how her masculine and rational self was enacted as an aid to posited vulnerable others and so mimicked the norms of the benevolent but strong male protector over vulnerable and helpless women. The norms of patriarchy that shape gender relations (victim and saviour, in this instance) imprinted so strongly upon Marija that its agency overpowered the possible emergence of alternatives. Finally, in relation to norms, one might counter that the pull of the masculine and rational is a prevalent one in organisations in general (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Plester, 2015). We can develop these insights more specifically in relation to democratic practice by acknowledging the strong presence of Habermasian norms of disembodied and rational practice. Marija was not immersed in Habermas' ideas, but she was situated within the normative framework of NGO culture in Montenegro, to a certain extent. From my time in the field, the dominant approach of most other NGOs (WRC was usually more agonistic) was pervaded by masculine rationality and the need for detached, efficient and composed practitioners. It is quite possible that these norms of NGO culture would have produced a certain masculine pull towards an ideal of professional NGO worker.

Shielding

The sub-practice of shielding denoted the enactment of a series of protective 'shields' by practitioners, for the purpose of strengthening both vulnerable people and new alliances formed in the face of antagonistic outside agents. Through shielding, practitioners

exhibited an instinctive sense of when and how to engage with others as enemies or adversaries. Shielding did not consist of a single, homogeneous shield, but a series of shields, erected by various actors, each of which offered a different form of supplementary experience and expertise – ranging from the use of technical expertise to support enacted through bodies. Shields gained their force through their co-emergence in language and through the body. Shielding was not simply a theoretical exercise, in other words, but one that required the simultaneous knowledge of activism developed by practitioners over the years and a corporeal commitment to the principles of democracy.

Conceptually we can make sense of shielding through Mouffe's (2009a: 13) distinction between enemies and adversaries. My data shows that these are not stable categories, however, but that actors and groups can veer between the two as events unfold. Distinguishing between the two and knowing how to respond, in order to offer protection to citizens, was important in maintaining practice within the framework of democracy. This differentiating and protecting was palpable in the episode of the mothers' protests. On the one hand, practitioners assisted protestors in aiming their efforts at the most effective target – protecting the rule of law. On the other hand, practitioners prevented agents of the government from normalising a breach of the rule of law and in doing so they defended the democratic framework of liberty and equality. By naming the government as 'enemy', through the assertion that it was breaching the law, practitioners sought to legitimise a series of democratic responses, such as assembly and protest. Also apparent in the data was the shifting of this identification of enemy-adversary, as practitioners switched shielding tactics to the more agonistic practice of

seeking to engage through an established range of institutional tools – writing appeals, reports to international organisations and engaging with the media, amongst others.

Conceptually, this shifting between shields can be understood as an amalgamation of deliberative and agonistic practice but also as a blurring between the two not readily acknowledged in the literature: the knowledge required for deliberation merged with the power offered by an embodied presence. Habermas (1996: 372) underlines the importance of expertise within civil society to counter-balance and influence the system (institutions and government) and states that such knowledge is valuable, provided it is not used as a tool of domination within the informal public sphere. In my data, WRC's switch from a focus on embodied presence to the production and dissemination of knowledge was a decision arrived at intersubjectively, following discussions with mothers. Habermas, however, is silent on how such a non-domineering application of expert knowledge unfolds.

My proposition is that such an unfolding happens in an embodied way. Practitioners did not apply their expert knowledge in isolation from mothers, nor did they try to replace their tactics. The introduction of supplementary experiential knowledge was a consequence of, and happened in tandem with, numerous engagements and conversations with the mothers, as they shared a public space of protest, which was often marked by harsh conditions - cold, wet, scorching hot and physically intimidating. Through such embodied experiences, practitioners gained knowledge – the two did not exist in isolation.

Discussion of knowledge and embodied engagement with allies in the practice of shielding holds the possibility of enriching understanding of how chains of equivalence are formed. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) state that such chains are articulated by a diverse group of people, brought together through a particular issue, which can be generalised to accommodate broader political demands. Mouffe (2009 and 2013), in addition, emphasises the importance of pluralism in a democratic practice, implying strength in diversity. While Laclau and Mouffe (1985) acknowledge that one group may enjoy more prominence in leading such formations, they do not account for how differential forms of knowledge may be infused and worked with in practice. My data shows that the process is a relational and embodied one, where participants in the chain learn about one another and adapt. Further, Laclau and Mouffe, and Mouffe in her subsequent work on pluralism, do not acknowledge the protective function of some participants in a chain over others. Such protecting seemed an important practice that fortified the chain through care and empathy.

We also need to consider the corporeal effect of shielding as an important dimension of democratic practice. Butler's (2015: 8) claim is that bodies in assembly exceed, are "in excess" of the purely spoken and that their plural presence stakes a demand in and of itself, "bodies assembled 'say' 'we are not disposable', whether or not they are using words at that moment" (ibid: 25). Similarly, Ranciére's (2012) notion of the order of the sensible is an embodied one, where certain bodies are noted and acknowledged by people in power more than others, with the political act envisaged as one of asserting bodily presence within an order that is then altered. Drawing on the notion of shielding, I can posit that the presence of practitioners in relation to vulnerable protestors helped render the collective assembly more visible. The physical presence of practitioners

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offered a different collective presence to the assembly – one that arrived with associations of previous actions and the knowledge developed through them – without practitioners 'speaking'. The bodily presence of practitioners shifted assembly from a localised collection of bodies protesting their particular form of precarity to a more general cause of shared precarity in society.

Finally, absorption was an important dimension of shielding that signalled this protecting function as something corporeal and relational. Such a corporeal aspect of shielding can be understood through drawing on Butler's (2006, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2016) understanding of relationality through vulnerability and precarity. Such connectivity and relationality was clearly significant in the assembling of democratic coalitions in my study. In the case of Mina, she literally absorbed the deprivations of those she represented and was in an alliance with, experiencing the pain of hunger alongside them. However, Butler does not account for instances where one subject might adopt a protective stance in relation to the other, which in turn instigates the production of new subjectivities. My data demonstrated that through democratic practice, emerging agency between practitioners and those they represent was neither purely corporeal nor linguistic but was enacted simultaneously through words and the body. As the physical boundaries in the act of absorption became blurred, so too did the language – particularly notable in my data with the shifting use of pronouns.

Summary

Embodying democratic practice denoted the corporeal side of democratic engagement and especially surfaced practitioners as sites upon which such practice unfolds. In discussing this practice, I particularly drew on accounts of democracy, both deliberative and agonistic, but read them through a performative perspective to draw out how they were enacted in embodied ways.

The first sub-practice of transversing denoted the movement between subjectivities in generating democratic agency. It was concerned with how practitioners work with and through difference. Habermas' (1984) notion of validity claims was offered as one way of understanding how practitioners work with difference but this was ultimately too disembodied a view to capture what took place in the field, as was Mouffe's (1999 and 2013) distinction between enemies and adversaries. I placed some of the insights from these theories of democratic practice within a performative frame and noted how exposing involved a relational sense of appreciating and working amidst difference, undermining any notion of an autonomous self in democratic practice. Going further still, notions of inhabiting seemed to go beyond Butler and theories of democratic practice, implying a visceral and constant, even tormenting, dimension to working with and within difference.

The second sub-practice of foregoing denoted instances of democratic practice being played upon the site of the practitioner's body. Mouffe's (2013) agonism and antagonism were important here, as was Butler's notion of a pull of the vulnerable other (Butler, 2006), as they provided a way of conceptualising a battling of subjectivities upon the site

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of the subject. I noted, however, that Mouffe does not discuss democracy as something that plays out upon bodies. I argued that these battles were primarily antagonistic, rather than agonistic, struggles where masculine and 'disciplined' norms seemed to drag practitioners back from alternatives. We can therefore understand foregoing as a sub-practice that walks a fine line between democratic and undemocratic practice and could be conceptualised as a shadow side of democratic practice.

The third sub-practice denoted protecting people's democratic rights through shielding. Mouffe's (1999 and 2013) distinction between enemies and adversaries helped us see how practitioners' experience could help citizens navigate the framework of democratic engagement. Habermas' (1984) account of the importance of factual knowledge in democratic practice reminds us not to downplay this side of practice. Filtering such insights through Butler (2006 and 2011), however, enabled us to see a movement between embodied and more disembodied shielding.

9.2. Navigating corruption

In navigating corruption I explored the ways in which practitioners confronted and worked around corruption as they strove to generate democratic practice in a country in transition, where endemic corruption pervades nearly every segment of people's lives. Exploring such democratic practice in depth required identifying and analysing the corrupt practices that practitioners encountered, as these existed in a co-dependent relationship with democratic practices, shaping one another. In particular, I identified two dominant corrupt sub-practices generated by institutional representatives, closely

related to the enactment of patriarchal norms (gaslighting and privatising), and one by GONGOs (colonising), against and through which practitioners performed democratic practice, in their day-to-day work. I termed these democratic sub-practices dispelling (in relation to gaslighting), publicising (in relation to privatising) and unsettling (in relation to colonising).

The literature on NGOs and corruption was useful in understanding the 'watchdog' function of NGOs in keeping government accountable to its citizens and protecting the public from various forms of power abuse (Antlöv et al, 2010; Herrold, 2016; Jezierska, 2015). Indeed, a large portion of WRC work involved staying vigilant to illegal and unethical practices enacted by institutional representatives and reacting against these. This body of literature also helped me understand that NGOs can sometimes contribute to the corrupt environment by either being "briefcase NGOs" (Dupuy et al, 2015: 419), where the agenda of international donors is implemented uncritically, or as "GONGOs" (Smith, 2010: 250), where they act as shell organisations established to pursue the private interests of corrupt government actors. The latter was particularly important for my fieldwork as it helped me identify such NGOs encountered in WRC's work, which sought to inhibit the generation of democratic practice and to obstruct the work of practitioners. What this body of literature lacks is a deeper understanding of the corrupt practices that may be encountered in countries in transition, how they manifest and how practitioners engage with such contexts in their work.

The overall impression gained from both deliberation and agonism is that democratic practice is generated in a somewhat benign environment, where each participant is committed to the common goal of promoting, establishing and advancing democratic

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practice (e.g. Habermas, 1984 and 1987; Mouffe, 2009a and 2013). Proponents of deliberation and agonism do not provide a framework for understanding the breadth and depth of corruption as an inhibitor of democratic practice, nor do they explore how their posited practices may be established in such corrupt environments.

Habermas recognises that the lifeworld is susceptible to 'colonisation' (Habermas, 1987: 196) by an instrumental rationality, which may lead to a deformation of the lifeworld, a position that could be helpful in the context of trying to understand corrupt societies. The more society evolves in instrumentally rational ways, the more a lifeworld distorts and, in time, instrumentally rational systems may overpower the lifeworld and decrease the possibility for acting communicatively (Finlayson, 2005; Outhwaite, 2009). Such instrumental forms of rationality could include corrupt practice for private gain, even though such a connection is not made by Habermas. As a consequence, decision-making in systems is performed via formal, institutionalised procedures, bypassing the communicative action of social actors, making their engagement redundant. While such colonisation of the lifeworld could be perceived as practice that reflects the imbalance between the lifeworld and the system, in which the system strives to achieve efficacy in decision-making at the expense of input stemming from the lifeworld, such performativity on the part of systems, while harmful, cannot be judged as necessarily corrupt. Nevertheless, the model presented by Habermas is useful in helping me understand how the lifeworld of my scene of study has gradually distorted in recent decades, infiltrated and overcome by corrupting rationalities, where such rationalities become instrumentalised and incorporated within mainstream logics.

However, although Habermas provides a means of understanding the creep of corruption into a lifeworld, he does not provide a way of understanding how actors can seek to perform democratic practice in a context of endemic corruption, where malign forms of strategic action overwhelm communicative action. His solution of insisting upon communicative action would have been at best a naïve strategy in the environment I inhabited as a researcher.

The agonistic democratic practice literature helped me distinguish between 'enemies' and 'adversaries' (Mouffe, 2009a: 13), where enemies will strive to undermine the process of democratisation. In my data, it was evident that sometimes certain institutional and NGO representatives engaged in practices that went against these principles of democracy and were more focused on an "elitist notion of democracy" (Doorenspleet, 2015: 479), which would uphold the dominance of a particular privileged group (Smith, 2010). In light of my research, Mouffe's dismissal of undemocratic agents as 'enemies' who fall outside this space appears as an overly convenient way of eliminating endemic corruption as a consideration for democratic practice. Often, participants in my study had no choice but to try to engage such enemies, as they occupy official positions, meaning that they are, in practice, impossible to circumnavigate. In fact, the situation was even more ambiguous, as practitioners had little choice but to engage *and* oppose corrupt people and organisations, meaning that government officials often occupied a grey zone between enemy and adversary. More helpful than Mouffe directly was Rhodes' (2016) notion of agonism as a form of engagement that is more fluid and can be used to unsettle the status quo, disrupting 'sovereign' logics of power and normalising dissent as a civil practice.

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Butler's account of reiterative norms was useful in terms of understanding the movement – the navigation – of practitioners through an environment of corruption. Practitioners were embedded within a normative framework of corruption, the power of which was inescapable, and they were always restricted within the boundaries of such pre-existing, sedimented social norms (1999; 2004; 2011). Their daily work took place in situations where the norms of corruption were made routine through continuous reiteration (Butler, 2011: 70), repeated and reaffirmed via both informal and formal social institutions. For example, practitioners were accustomed to corrupt politicians applying patriarchal norms in meetings, speaking on behalf of marginalised women, or simply talking over them.

This interpretation suggests that practitioners cannot escape the work of corrupt norms in a society, but also that a persistent reinscription of corrupt norms will bear on practitioners, opening the possibility of them becoming corrupt themselves. Yet, those reiterative norms, which partially govern subjectivity, also open a space for different identifications and therefore practices to be enacted, as those very norms produce the conditions for resistance and reinscription (Butler, 2004: 333). In my data, practitioners agentically resisted corrupt norms, reiterated by institutional and NGO representatives, and in doing so enacted 'counter-practices' that undermined and unsettled the corrupt status quo.

However, such counter-enactment was not smooth and easy (and not always successful) and it bore vigorously onto the bodies of practitioners. While Butler (2011: 91) suggests that defying norms can be a violent process, when she talks about subjects' desire to be recognised as 'viable human beings' (ibid: 82), she does not provide a first-hand, detailed

account of how such a process unfolds. I now contribute to a better understanding of this unfolding through discussing each sub-practice of navigating corruption.

Gaslighting-dispelling

Gaslighting was explored as an undemocratic and corrupt sub-practice where institutional representatives employed a range of tactics in order to discredit practitioners and make them question their sanity. I used first-hand experience of gaslighting in order to denote how corrosive of democratic practice such corruption can be, especially when encountered by someone who did not have in-depth experience with it at the time. Dispelling, on the other hand, was explored as a democratic sub-practice aimed at dissipating corrupt gaslighting norms. Here, I used an episode featuring a more experienced practitioner, Nina, who worked against the gaslighting of police officers.

In the examples I used in the navigating corruption findings chapter, institutional representatives employed tactics in order to systematically distort communication (Habermas, 1970) and confuse those interlocutors (practitioners) they perceived as threatening the status quo. Gaslighting was particularly evident during my encounter with institutional representatives at a roundtable discussion regarding the law on gender equality. Institutional representatives' tactics involved: ruling – changing the communication rules during deliberations arbitrarily, and weaponising victimhood, where they assumed the status of victims when challenged, in order to shift the narrative away from the main topic. These tactics, in Habermasian terms, undermined the underlying structure of communication – its rules and the identity of participants.
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Questioners become perpetrators, perpetrators became victims and the rules were applied arbitrarily, a secret code for a privileged elite. Unlike Habermas' interpretation, however, in my study these tactics were experienced in embodied ways, as institutional representatives used their body language alongside their speech acts to enact the role of victim (e.g. they made grimaces, which denoted sadness and indignation), and these enactments produced affective responses, such as confusion, embarrassment, anger, etc. in others.

Disparaging was a dimension of gaslighting that presented as an antithesis to both agonistic respect (Connolly, 2005) and assumptions that deliberators enter dialogue with good intentions, orientated towards reaching understanding (Dux, 1991; Erman, 2012). In my data, disparaging was employed to exclude, to close space and restrict access to deliberation. Practitioners were rendered inept in front of others, whenever they raised queries regarding corrupt practice.

Collective affirmation was an example of generating a temporary hegemonic constellation of 'us' – those in the know about the interests and rules at play in gaslighting, versus 'them' – people questioning this practice through insisting upon the principles of liberty and equality (Mouffe, 2013). Both collective affirmation and disparaging constituted democratic actors as external antagonists – 'outsiders'. In my study, the smooth enactments of such hegemonies gave the impression that the tactics underpinning their formation were well rehearsed amongst institutional representatives. These conceptual resources demonstrate that some aspects of the theory of agonism can be useful as a means of practitioners understanding how they are

being positioned within deliberative processes, although they do not provide a way of conceptualising how these are experienced and navigated by practitioners.

The dispelling sub-practice enriches understanding of how agonism might be used to hold corrupt institutions and individuals to account (Rhodes, 2016) through the fog of gaslighting. Yet, the context in which practitioners work is not a benign environment but one through which they need to navigate, balancing risks of reprisal with the desire for promoting democratic norms. In doing so they draw on a range of tactics. These tactics cross over between modes of democratic practice and embodied presences.

Butler (1999) states that phenomena can be normalised through the reiteration of norms within speech acts. The more speech acts are repeated, the more sedimented the intelligibility of whatever they are aiming to affirm. I identified such a reiteration of speech acts in dispelling, as practitioners attempted to refocus the discussion on the needs of the people they represented, and away from the various digressions institutional representatives engaged in. Reiterative speech acts were supplemented by presenting evidence – a dimension that reflects an aspect of Habermas' communicative action relating to redeeming the second validity claim. Namely, this aspect of deliberation specifically refers to drawing on factual knowledge in dialogue and supporting claims with evidence if we want them to be accepted as credible (Habermas, 1984). Yet the presenting of evidence in my data was not used as a means of upholding the rules of deliberation but in order to instigate a response from interlocutors (either verbal or emotional) and to refocus their attention to the issue they gathered to discuss. The repetition of the issue scheduled for discussion, and presenting evidence in relation to it, was performed in the form of a dry, vexing monologue by practitioners, cutting

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through the theatrical commotion enacted by institutional representatives who posed as victims. It was an embodied enactment of a validity claim, in other words.

Another dimension of dispelling, which I termed instigating compassion, was closely related to the previous dimensions, as it was also aimed at provoking a response from interlocutors. Yet in this instance the provocation was aimed at interlocutors' emotions. Rather than allies, practitioners engaged 'enemies' (Mouffe, 2013) emotionally with the case of family violence, trying to reach understanding through evoking compassion. This embodied, emotional engagement of interlocutors, especially those they stood in conflict with, is something that is insufficiently considered by Mouffe and overlooked entirely by Habermas, yet proved to be a useful tactic for engaging institutional representatives in democratic deliberation. Democratic theory can here be supplemented by Butler's insights into relationality through an experience of shared vulnerability (Butler, 2006), as practitioners invited institutional representatives to recall their own vulnerability in relation to an abused minor – "Imagine if your child was being treated in this way", as Nina said to a police officer whose neglected practice exposed a child needlessly to more violence.

Finally, the dimension of tactical withdrawal encapsulates some of the aspects of strategic action (Habermas, 1987), where speakers are concerned with achieving "a desired result" (Niemi, 2005: 518), but this was employed selectively and pragmatically when the embodied aspects of practice appeared as though they had run their course. This tactic can be interpreted as a 'manifest' (ibid) kind of strategic action, where intentions and desired goals are obvious and overt (Habermas, 1984: 333). Nina, the practitioner, accepted part of the blame for the actions she was accused of by police

officers, even though both parties (officers and practitioners) likely knew that these actions were strategic deflections. For practitioners this was a way to extract themselves from a gaslighting distraction, enacted by members of the police force, and to refocus the discussion onto the case of violence. Manifest strategic action was used here as a means of attaining democratic ends, as a precondition to deliberation.

Privatising-publicising

In this sub-section I explored the enactment of patriarchal norms by institutional representatives as 'privatising'. Such corrupt practice represented the creep of purportedly 'private' and 'domestic' norms into the public sphere and actions of public officials, where it served to protect the perpetrators of family and gender-based violence and hide their crimes. To illustrate this practice, I used the episode depicting the concerted malpractice of the Centre for Social Protection (CSP) and the police, which left a woman exposed to more violence. In contrast, I explored the democratic sub-practice of NGO practitioners seeking to reform 'privatising' tendencies as 'publicising' (public-ising). Publicising was explored as a performative practice that seeks to close the gap between professed public standards of liberty and equality and the 'privatised' practice of public officials. Here, I used the episode featuring Andrea's experience with the police, the abuser and the victim of family violence in order to highlight the embodied ways in which practitioners enacted the law aimed at protecting liberty and equality.

Privatising:

The NGO literature recognises patriarchy as a corrupt series of practices that inhibit the generation of democratic practice (Lazda, 2018; Lokar, 2007; Tsetsura 2013). Yet this literature stops short of providing detail concerning how practitioners engage with and combat patriarchy, particularly when democratic practice and notions of democratic standards cross over into issues of welfare. One of my contributions is to demonstrate how the private and public realms overlap in democratic practice: that the personal issues within a family home are also democratic matters, where practitioners seek on a micro level to defend people's rights to liberty and equality. Such defending, in my data, entailed the protection of a peaceful life, free from violence and the threat of violence.

Habermas' (1996) understanding of lifeworld is that which comprises our social life outside formal institutions and was useful for understanding how certain norms persist through social organisation and practice. He argues that a lifeworld provides a reservoir of meaning and a space for cultural exchange, which, through the means of communicative action, creates social integration (Alexander, 1991). However, Habermas does not provide insight into what to do when such a reservoir of meaning is heavily informed by sedimented patriarchal norms, which are perpetually affirmed through practice. If the third validity claim in deliberation refers to the cultural and empirical soundness of the claim (Habermas, 1984: 38-39) does this mean that a patriarchal claim (drawn from a patriarchal cultural context) would be redeemed as valid in democratic deliberation? Of course, Habermas (1996) states that the content of a lifeworld is always open to challenge and critique. Yet it is difficult to imagine that interlocutors whose worldview is deeply patriarchal would be particularly receptive to such a challenge

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through purely communicative means, especially when many of the patriarchal norms are normalised to the extent that they are taken for granted as factual truth and sometimes are not even verbalised.

In terms of agonistic democratic practice, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of the chain of equivalence was useful for understanding the role of patriarchal norms in the formation of a chain between institutional representatives and male abusers. Such a chain was posited against women and practitioners, thus further developing knowledge as to the application of chains of equivalence away from the strictly formal political sphere (Islam et al, 2017; McLaughlin and Bridgman, 2017). I posit that such chains are not overt and formally established but performed through the common enactment of patriarchal norms in both private and public spheres, forming tacit bonds between institutional representatives and abusers. Similarly, NGO practitioners were not always confronted directly by the actors within such a chain. Rather, the enactment of patriarchal norms, especially when it came to institutional representatives, was packaged through selective, skewed and arbitrary reference to law, protocols and procedures. As with gaslighting there was some ambiguity, therefore, in whether institutional representatives were always, or predominantly, enemies, adversaries or allies.

Butler helps us understand the anti-democratic practice of privatising in terms of the enactment of norms that define and control what it means to be a woman or a married woman and to possess a female body. In a patriarchal setting, a woman's body is "expendable" and her life is valued less than a man's, counter to democratic norms of liberty and equality (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 43). Dominant and persevering

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normative frameworks, such as patriarchy, bear on the organisation of an entire society, "dispossessing whole populations" (Butler 2015: 151), rendering them "ungrievable…in public view" (ibid: 152). Such dominant normative frameworks are accomplished through continuous reiteration, affirming the 'truth' of certain phenomena, through speech/body acts (Bowring and Brewis, 2009), such as violence against women. In my data, when the woman – a victim of violence – reported the abuse to CSP, the social workers undermined publicly declared norms of liberty and equality and instead reverted to corrupt and undemocratic 'private' norms. In other words, the patriarchal norms of violent relations were not only enacted in the private sphere (home) but were reiterated further through everyday bureaucratic actions.

Publicising:

Habermas (1987) argues that what is communicatively agreed upon in a lifeworld amongst social actors should feed into the administrative system in the form of various regulating mechanisms (laws, rules, protocols, etc.). He further argues that bringing a private matter (e.g. family violence) to the arena of public deliberation does not "imply an infringement on individual rights" nor violation of intimacy, as deliberating upon private matters "is not necessarily the same as meddling in another's affairs" (Habermas, 1996: 313). Namely, every issue which in the eyes of social actors deserves regulation (e.g. legal prohibition of domestic violence) should be publicly deliberated upon because the "general public sphere is unconstrained" (Habermas, 1996: 314) in terms of what can be brought up for deliberation, no matter how 'controversial' the issue might be. But what happens when patriarchal interests dominate the lifeworld? Habermas does not

offer us a framework for understanding how practitioners can seek to bring the 'private' into the public, especially when patriarchal norms of behaviour permeate most of the public sphere as well, despite the existence of laws that contradict such patriarchal norms.

One could interpret the work of practitioners as enriching Habermas' theorising through offering a form of embodied and in-the-moment deliberation with agents of the state who should know better. In my data, Andrea did not only spell out the legal procedures in dialogue with representatives of the police in some predetermined space for public deliberation but also physically occupied the crime scene. She positioned her body in a strategic way, enacting the law through and with her body – embodying the law that stands against patriarchal norms and exemplifying how it should be interpreted and enacted in practice.

Mouffe's (2013) account of agonism might help us frame the engagements of practitioners with institutional representatives as confrontational, in the service of reiterating democratic norms and challenging sedimented identifications but cannot take us much further. When Andrea positioned herself between the victim on one side and the police officers and abuser on the other, while spelling out legal procedures, she was challenging the patriarchal identifications of police officers with an alternative set of identifications – of police officers upholding the rule of law regardless of their private preferences (e.g. their inclination to protect the male abuser).

The accounts of both deliberation and agonism are ultimately too disembodied to be of much analytical help in understanding publicising practices that took place in my study.
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Butler's (2015) work on assembly is more suitable for helping us understand the renegotiation between private and public as a form of assertion, where bodies "assert and enact themselves by speech or silence, by action or steady inaction, by gesture" (ibid: 156). Butler claims that bodies gathered in public assert something even when they are silent, that they say: "We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life: we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life." (Butler and Athanosiou, 2013:196). However, rather than taking place in a large public assembly, the practitioner in my study asserted public standards of liberty and equality through her body in the private sphere of somebody else's home. She placed her body in between the victim and the abuser, accompanied by police officers, on the threshold of a private home, asserting that this woman was not disposable and should be recognised as a full human being.

We can understand the dimensions of repetition and embodying the discourse of law as speech and bodily acts enacted in concert for the purpose of normalising publicly declared standards of democratic practice. Not only did Andrea hold her place, marking the legal boundary between public and private spheres, but she also spelled out repetitively legal norms and procedures that should have been followed, as if trying to drill the words of the law through the patriarchal mindset of police officers.

Colonising-unsettling

I termed the corrupt sub-practice 'colonising' in order to denote the act of GONGO members infiltrating the spaces designated for generating democratic practice in order to obstruct the work of NGO practitioners. In doing so they employed corrosive tactics

(e.g. foreclosing dialogue and self-exclusion) and so actively eroded the time, energy and credibility of practitioners dedicated to generating democratic practice. In contrast, I termed the democratic sub-practice of practitioners 'unsettling' in order to highlight the labour-intensive effort involved in such endeavours, where practitioners had to be constantly vigilant of GONGOs' manipulations and be prepared to respond adequately when faced with these. Such engagement was time-consuming and tiresome, as practitioners had to actively prevent colonising from settling and becoming a norm. In my analysis I drew on an episode featuring practitioners' engagement with a GONGO representative, during reporting to a UN body, which I participated in directly.

The NGO literature has begun to flag the phenomenon of the GONGO (Dupuy et al, 2015; Smith, 2010), highlighting how these organisations either unquestioningly promote donors' agendas or act as agents for corrupt and even criminal interests. But knowledge of the practices of GONGOs and their interactions with non-corrupt NGO practitioners is under-explored. My data strengthens understanding of the position of GONGOs more conceptually in relation to democratic practice.

I described the practices of GONGOs as colonising because they insert themselves into the spaces where others strive to generate democratic practice and corrode the generation of knowledge and meaningful dialogue. We can understand this colonising partially through turning to Habermas' (1987: 196) notion of a colonisation of a lifeworld through instrumental rationality, where GONGO members deploy 'strategic' action for their own, or the government's, private interests. In addition, we can enrich our understanding of GONGO tactics by interpreting the dimensions of foreclosure and self-exclusion as instances of systematically distorted communication (Habermas, 1970),
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where representatives of GONGOs deliberately obstruct dialogue, systematically and persistently, over a period of time in order to avoid challenge.

We can also turn to Mouffe (2009a) and Butler (2015) to understand the colonising practices of GONGOs. These organisations tend to avoid confrontation at almost all costs, seeking to remove themselves from the prospect of agonistic engagement, and this withdrawal has the effect of taming democratic practice (Mouffe, 2014; Roskamm, 2015). We can turn to Butler's (2015) notion of assembly to enrich understanding of how the self-excluding and silent bodies of GONGO practitioners speak through their 'gestures' (Butler, 2015: 156): evading contact, not turning up to meetings, or, when present, foreclosing dialogue through adopting vague and even cryptic language. GONGO practitioners also insert their bodies in spaces necessary for furthering their aims, colonising literal space, as well as the time and energy, of rival NGO practitioners and representatives of international organisations. The presence of GONGO workers can feel like an empty yet life-absorbing corporeal presence, a zombification of lifeworld encounters: offering evasive and banal statements in response to reasoned, researched and/or passionately held commitments.

My research presents an initial framework for understanding how NGO practitioners might yet seek to pursue forms of democratic practice amidst the colonising incursions of GONGOs. Sleuthing can be related to pursuing Habermas' (1984: 38) second validity claim, insisting that claims made by GONGOs (including whether they really exist as organisations at all) are supported by facts. In practice, this is an embodied experience, however – time consuming and tiring. In addition, the truth is not pursued solely through

dialogue, as Habermas (1984) claims, but is an investigative piece of work that takes place through a range of activities.

The dimension of 'confrontation' helps us extend Rhodes' (2016) notion of agonism used to hold participants in democratic practice accountable by showing that such practices can be extended to the agents of corrupt governments (GONGOs). We can enrich the notion of agonism by drawing attention to its sustained character over time. In the example in the data, when we finally managed to secure the presence of Kristina, we embarked on continuous questioning, confrontation and challenge, as a counter-practice to her attempts to foreclose dialogue.

Finally, the dimension of 'marginalisation' helps us understand that sometimes, undemocratic means might need to be employed in the face of dealing with corrupt participants. Conceptually, we can make sense of this dimension as a form of 'latent' strategic action (Niemi, 2005), where, in the episode in the data, we kept Kristina occupied with her plans, while presenting the façade that we were prepared to consider them. Marginalisation is also an embodied experience, where bodily tactics, such as speaking in a particular order and for extended periods of time, have the effect of re-configuring an order of the sensible (Ranciére, 2012) by excluding certain bodies from counting as valid participants in a democratic process (Butler, 2015).

Summary

Navigating corruption was discussed as a practice that acknowledges the inescapability of corruption within the scene of study, something under-developed in both the NGO and democratic practice literatures. I contributed by conceptualising navigating as a subtle and embodied process, generating knowledge of democratic practice by interpreting deliberation and agonism as embodied practices enacted through a context of corruption, which pervaded the working lives of practitioners. I also drew on ideas from the NGO literature concerning the 'watch-dog' (Smith, 2010) function of NGOs in protecting people's democratic rights but interpreted such a function as an embodied and proactive one, of practitioners physically employing their bodies to defend democratic norms.

The first sub-practice of 'gaslighting-dispelling' drew attention to the ways in which institutional representatives erode the credibility of practitioners through a fog of corrupt practices and how practitioners seek to dispel such practices through recourse to democratic practices. I drew on theories of democratic practice to enrich understanding of how corrupt practices divided groups and distorted the basis of their communication. To conceptualise the dispelling response of practitioners, I turned to deliberative democratic practice, with its emphasis on the use of factual evidence and knowledge, and a more embodied, Butlerian practice of re-iterating norms and instigating compassion.

The second sub-practice of 'privatising-publicising' discussed the ways in which 'private' patriarchal norms are dragged into matters within the public sphere, infecting

democratic norms. It also discussed how practitioners counter such privatising through seeking, in embodied ways, to move the practices back within standards of liberty and equality. I drew on theories of deliberative and agonistic democratic practice to understand the seep of private patriarchal standards into the public realm, and Butler's (2006 and 2011) notion of what counts as a liveable life, to discuss the effects of such practices on the bodies of women. In response, I positioned publicising as a matter of enacting democratic standards through bodily/speech acts (Butler, 2011).

The third sub-practice of 'colonising-unsettling' sought to expand knowledge about the operation of GONGOs (Dupuy et al, 2015; Smith, 2010) and how practitioners navigate their influence in everyday democratic practice. I drew on Habermas (1984) and Mouffe (2009a) to conceptualise how GONGOs colonise democratic space and seek to tame democratic conflict through underhand means. In contrast, I drew on notions of democratic practice to conceptualise how practitioners combat the corruption of GONGOs through insisting upon informed and evidence-based engagement, as well as the centrality of challenge in public life. In addition, I discussed unsettling as a practice that can be informed by non-democratic means to achieve democratic ends.

9.3. The aesthetics of assembling

I termed this practice 'the aesthetics of assembling' in order to denote the artful aspects of the act of public assembly and the practices of NGO practitioners in facilitating, shaping and influencing assembly. To illustrate this practice I explored an episode featuring the IWD march that coincided with the protest of mothers. The acts of people

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gathering in streets to voice their political demands, carrying placards and various other artefacts, chanting and delivering speeches, linking with one another, are aesthetic acts, which hold a performative power to enact certain practices and subjectivities. In the discussion that follows I predominantly draw on the work of Ranciére (2009, 2012 and 2016), Laclau (2007) and Butler (2015) to explore the conceptual significance of the two sub-practices of the aesthetics of assembling: 'aestheticising equivalence' and 'embodied reordering'. Before that, I outline the theoretical contribution of the practice as a whole.

The NGO literature does not seem to consider the role of NGOs in public assembly, let alone explore the aesthetic practices involved, which seems like an oversight, one that could be remedied from a reading of NGO work in relation to democratic practices. Habermas views aesthetic rationality as a distinct dimension of communicative rationality, closely tied to redeeming the fourth validity claim, which relates to the evaluation of the sincerity of expression (1984: 20). Although Habermas elsewhere states that artworks have emancipatory potential, as they "promote the maturation of the person's subjectivity and provide the motivational structures necessary for moral autonomy and scientific thinking" (Boucher, 2011: 62), in terms of deliberative democratic practice, he is more concerned with style of communication (Habermas, 1984: 95) and whether or not interlocutors' intentions are "genuine" (Chang and Jacobson, 2010: 664). His preoccupation with one particular form – speech - rather than the content of deliberative democratic practice, which might include aesthetic forms of communicating, is of little help here.

Mouffe (2013) states that art can make visible "what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate…giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the…existing

hegemony" (ibid: 93), especially when enacted collectively. She argues that for an "artistico-activist" (2013: 97) practice to be critical and to instigate change, it is not sufficient for it to only problematise the phenomena it aims to address. Artistic practice within democratic practice must, in her view, supply the means of articulating new identifications that are not yet available. Such an account of the aesthetic within democratic practice was insightful for understanding that artistic practices, such as carrying creative placards and flags, singing and marching, can operate on two levels. First is the "deconstructive" (ibid: 93), assisting people to "dis-identify" (ibid) with dominant regimes of patriarchal power; and second, on the level of re-identification, is providing aesthetic resources to support participants in generating new forms of subjectivity, as was the case with the use of a mix of popular rock songs and socialist slogans in the IWD episode recounted. However, even though Mouffe underlines the importance of artistic practices for democratic transformation and recognises the entanglement of art and politics, she does not offer a developed conceptual framework for understanding how such entanglements unfold.

Although she does not explicitly treat bodies in assembly as 'aesthetic', Butler helps us understand how the physical presence of bodies, and relations between bodies, can constitute democratic practice. She does touch upon parodic performances in *Gender Trouble* (1999), which possess a subversive power to alter but can also further entrench sedimented norms. Specifically, she talks about gender as a "corporeal style" (ibid: 190), of stylistic acts in "ritual social dramas" (p.191) that are continuously repeated. She draws on the example of cross-dressing as an "imitation of gender" (1999: xxxi) to demonstrate both the subversive but also the "punitive" (ibid: 190) character of deviating from a normative script. A person may change their appearance (e.g. through

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cross-dressing) in an attempt to de-naturalise certain gender norms. However, such acts may also serve to further 'consolidate' "hegemonic norms" (Butler, 2011: 85) by merely citing existing norms. We can draw on this theorising to better understand how the women in my episodes tried to problematise certain sedimented norms through stylistic and performed means, stepping outside the ritual ways in which women were supposed to behave, and to better understand some of the risks they took in doing so.

Butler can also help us better understand the aesthetics of assembly at play in my data, in the corporeal power of bodies to jointly stake a claim for recognition. According to Butler (2015), any public gathering, "vigils or funerals, often signify in excess" (Butler, 2015: 8) of language, meaning that they connote something that is not necessarily "written or vocalised" (ibid). This signifying is a valuable conceptual resource for understanding that democratic practice can be enacted in excess of words but also that the presence of diverse bodies in a particular place can challenge norms in a way that goes beyond any one, or even a few, bodies. Diverse bodies, in the sense of educated and experienced practitioners mingling with mothers predominantly from rural areas, by itself delivers a message through the collective effect of the assembly.

Although we can read aesthetics into Butler's account of norms and assembly, she does not provide an explicitly aesthetic lens. Her work accounts only for bodies and their relationality in vulnerability (Butler, 2006), and so when read in isolation against my data, may miss some of the richness of aesthetic modes of assembly, in-person or online, which can be evoked beyond bodies, through a range of forms, such as music, colour, visual art and the rhythms and textures of bodies and texts. Ranciére (2012) helps us somewhat here in the sense that he provides a framework for understanding the

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aesthetics of politics and how aesthetics can become politicised in democratic practice. His notions of the sentence-image (2009) and of orders of the sensible (2012) will be drawn upon in more depth in discussing the excess that Butler refers to, in the sub-practices below.

Aestheticising equivalence

In aestheticising equivalence I explored the ways in which diverse people assemble a basis for solidarity and common action using aesthetics as a medium for achieving this (Ranciére, 2009). In the episode featuring the campaign related to IWD, I explored the artful connection of particular experiences of women, conveyed through the medium of online video, with general causes that tie them together in a chain. The chain of equivalence (Laclau, 2007; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) here was constituted through the dimension I termed 'grounding-airing'. This is because the connection had the effect of enacting both a sense of familiarity with democratic subjects, the 'ordinary' women participating in the event, the kinds of women most people would know, and also of collectivising their experiences into principles of equality through the 'air' of online technology.

I referred to the second dimension of aestheticising equivalence as 'sensory imbrication', which built on Ranciére's (2009) account of the sentence-image in democratic practice. Through this dimension, practitioners used aesthetic means to assemble a basis for common action and solidarity, an equivalential chain between different groups of people; they transformed particular issues people voice into a common platform for action. This

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dimension was explored through the episode featuring the IWD march. The assembly gained its performative impetus through blending visuals, audio, rhythms and texts, which come together in a way that enacted meaning for participants (see also Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Munro and Jordan, 2013).

The contribution of grounding-airing gains its value through the application of a multimodal analysis in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) and Laclau's (2007) notion of a chain of equivalence. Lacalu and Mouffe's focus is conceptual but some efforts have been made to translate the framework into organisational and political contexts (see Griggs and Howarth, 2004 and 2008; Islam et al, 2017; McLaughlin and Bridgman, 2017; Smolović Jones et al, 2016). However, the extant literature has not explored how chains of equivalence can be articulated through aesthetic mediums or in online spaces. This is a conceptual and empirical gap worth addressing, as the concept holds great value in better understanding the inter-subjective enactment of interests and passions.

Butler (2015: 8) acknowledges that online activism counts as a particular form of assembly but does not expand on how we might make conceptual sense of relational positioning in a digital context. Likewise, Habermas (1996: 361) sees virtual spaces as public spaces but advocates for deliberation in person, between people occupying a common physical space. Mouffe does not focus on the digital as a specific medium for democratic practice at all. Both Mouffe and Habermas seem to tacitly, and often not so tacitly, favour face-to-face democratic engagements. This is something of an oversight, as the capability of online spaces to generate a certain 'social capital' (Carroll and Simpson, 2012) seems plausible.

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In my analysis, the online domain was inclusive in a way that more traditional forms of democratic practice simply are not (see Srnicek and Williams, 2016). Many of the people featured in the online videos simply could not have taken time away from their work and family commitments to join in with the IWD march, or were geographically too distant from events in the campaign. The digital space helped them constitute a democratic subjectivity through making visible a diverse range of problems and experiences (Butler, 2004: 44), such as unemployment, poverty, harsh working conditions and so on, created by dubious acts of privatisation and the destruction of the welfare system (Lokar, 2007).

Rendering the sedimented practices of oppression visible, online videos enabled the generation of a chain of equivalence (Laclau, 2007; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) between the participants by virtue of revealing that the conveyed issues, problems and concerns were not particular (only *my* problem), but that they cut across a diverse population (*our* problem). Moreover, the online videos served to "unsettle the 'I'" (Butler, 2011: 68) of the individual online participants and revealed that such 'I's represented a "sedimentation of the 'we'" (ibid), of a collective that emerged through the normative etching of corrupt practices. For instance, the notion of being a 'working class woman', although manifesting in qualitatively different ways, connected women through experiences of a common struggle against poverty and injustice.

Missing from Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualisation, however, is an aesthetic sense of how experiences within a chain are articulated in such a way as to draw others in, and they thereby overlook a rich and sensory understanding of constitutive articulation within and across a chain. In my data, bodies and their vulnerabilities were significant in expressing democratic demands – they were significant because others (including me)

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heard and felt the call in an embodied way. Yet these calls took place in a digital space through a "plural form of performativity" (Butler, 2015: 8), rather than in face-to-face encounters. Videos, collectively, provided viewers with an opportunity to recognise themselves in their vulnerability but in such a way that "vulnerability enters into agency" (Butler, 2016: 25) and enacts joint action.

Visual material provided a means for expressing something that "may be more difficult to express through language" (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 31) alone. In this sense, streamed videos did not only serve to convey the verbal messages uttered by participants but also conveyed a sense of familiarity with the women (people filmed themselves in their homes, in pyjamas, surrounded by family photos, children, etc.), which in turn fostered a sense of relatability (this could be me).

We can dig deeper into how the aesthetic made connections between people and problems in my data. Ranciére (2009), in relation to political and democratic art, talks of the aesthetic potential of a 'sentence-image', where a combination of language and images may 'undo' (ibid: 46) dominant representative connections, opening the way for disruption and the creation of fresh associations, new areas of the 'sayable' (see also Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Munro and Jordan, 2013). In my data, the colour red in the context of the IWD march served a visually unifying purpose of creating a sentence-image assembled between people, their clothes, accessories, inscribed placards and banners.

Moreover, the colour red combined with other auditory and visual artefacts to mobilise meaning sedimented through a range of practices from the workers' movement, a shared

socialist past, school recitals, IWD celebrations, female bodily functions, etc. It was a sensory imbrication, which allowed for the agentic enactment of new subjectivities. The coming together of image, text and music generated a provocative, confrontational, but also unifying meaning, a particular chain of equivalence that connected contemporary struggle with that of past Yugoslav democratic traditions and the women's struggle globally.

Embodied reordering

In this sub-practice I explored the ways in which practitioners struggled to make the political subject of 'woman' intelligible in assembly with and against protestors, who in turn attempted to ground the political subject of 'mother'. I now discuss this power interplay between practitioners and protesting mothers as an ordering of the sensible (Ranciére, 2012), which shifted through a range of embodied acts. To illustrate such embodying reordering I used the episode featuring the IWD march, capturing the moment when marchers and protestors converged into a public assembly.

Ranciére's (2012) theory of the order of the sensible provides an understanding of how certain bodies enjoy visibility and prominence, whereas others are cast aside, as simply 'insensible', outside the dominant order of knowing. For Ranciére, orders may change through aesthetic means – acts of reordering are seen and felt through embodied acts, as the excluded assert their stake for recognition as equal members. There are always "performing bod[ies] that work to fill in the gap between the words…and the materiality" (Ranciére, 2016: 136). In my ethnographic episode I explored how WRC practitioners

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and mothers struggled with one another to assert a particular subjectivity within an assembly. Two orders met and overlapped in the form of street assembly: the IWD march, rooted in notions of feminist equality, and the mothers' protest, initially at least defined around protecting a certain privileged subjectivity.

What my data demonstrated was that the order of the sensible is not merely a useful way of understanding the tension between an antagonistic ruling bloc and resisting subjects but also the dynamics within resistance itself. Although Ranciére does not talk about an order of the sensible in such a way, for my study it can help us see the heterogeneous character of assembly. It also foregrounds the notion that assemblies are corporeal, the configuration of which can shift in a relatively short space of time. Ranciére underplays the heterogeneity of orders of the sensible and embodied responses to them. He also does not provide either a vocabulary or empirical examples for helping us understand how orders are challenged through bodies.

Drawing on Mouffe (1999; 2009a), we could interpret a shifting of an order within assembly as a matter of competing identifications between adversaries within counter-hegemony. Nevertheless, Mouffe's reading is primarily based in language and perhaps misses the embodied, improvised and in-the-moment enactment of shifts. Furthermore, she likens democratic encounters between allies as 'conversions' (Mouffe, 1999: 755), brought about as people's identifications shift. My data showed that the experience was more piecemeal and partial than this. Connolly's (2004) notion of 'pluralising' rather than pluralism is useful in seeing the incompleteness of groups engaged in democratic practice and how one's dependencies on others for identification means that a group's sense of itself will shift – though perhaps not convert - through encounters. Yet he does

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not provide a rich and in-depth account to help us further knowledge of the detailed and contextual embodied unfolding of the experience.

Butler (2004) does provide a means through which we can better understand the rich and embodied ways in which assembly pluralises and shifts and we can combine her reading with aesthetics to enrich our understanding. She says that identity is a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, 2004: 1), which means that the subject will always be confined by the existing normative frameworks within which that subject is embedded. Nevertheless, as meanings 'exceed' their intended purposes, it follows that a speaker has limited power over words and their effects (Butler, 2011: 171). The subject has the power to reconfigure its subjectivity through continuously reiterating norms, which may yet "go awry…and produce new and even subversive effects" (Butler, 2009: iii).

The dimension of 'embodied improvisation' could be interpreted as relational responsiveness, "composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as the site by which those terms are differentiated and related" (Butler, 2006: 22). In my data, the consensus (Habermas, 1996) between practitioners and marchers on the decision to turn around and join the protestors was not enacted through an informed, respectful dialogue where validity claims were redeemed but in a fleeting, spontaneous moment, where decision-making was informed by embodied responses to unfolding aesthetic cues and a sense of relational responsibility to others. Butler (2004) states that one improvises within a normative framework, in relation to available normative resources, but my data enriches this understanding by showing how such improvised decisions can be enacted within assembly, in the moment, within a cacophony of noise

and confusion. These are not calculated decisions based on a consideration of norms, in other words.

Butler (1999; 2004; 2011; 2015) argues that norms are constantly repeated and that they etch us in a particular way. In my study I was able to observe the clash between two different normative frameworks, where different subjects ('all women' vs. 'mothers'), vied for prominence by attempting to ground a particular subjectivity in the assembly. For instance, when the order of the sensible shifted towards 'mothers' in my example, the practitioners stretched a flag carrying a unifying slogan in front of the stage so that everyone who observed the mothers delivering speeches were able to see it. By doing so, practitioners persisted in preventing the grounding of the subjectivity of 'mother' as dominant.

Butler (1999; 2011) argues that subjects may subvert the dominant normative framework and enact a different kind of subjectivity in relation to it, as these norms can act as "sites of phantasmic promise" (2011: 90), providing an escape route to a "liveable life" (2015: 62). However, she warns that such subversion may not necessarily be successful, and that attempts at "denaturalisation" (2011: 85) of sedimented subjectivities may be a violent process[35]. In my data, subversion happened through humour. The role of humour in relation to Butler's concept of performativity has been noted in organisation studies by Plester (2015) as one of the ways in which toxic masculinity is maintained and reinforced. However, in my data, humour served to unsettle the hegemonic constellation of 'mothers' and instigated reflection on the part of

[35] In the film *Paris is Burning*, which Butler uses to illustrate her point, the main protagonist, a transgender character called Venus suffers violent death as a consequence of defying the norms of sexual difference.

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some of the protestors. People responded to a humorous quip by one of the participants in the march/protest and it spread in a chain reaction further into the crowd. Furthermore, humour was injected from the crowd, on egalitarian terms, rather than from the stage in some orchestrating fashion. The humour disrupted the order of the sensible by merging subjectivities through the medium of laughter, bringing the protesting mothers and marchers closer together.

It is important to note here that such subversion led to a temporary resolution within the assembly, rather than a new and longer-lasting formation of subjectivity. The struggle between practitioners, other marchers and the protesting mothers continued, albeit with an altered power dynamic underlying the order of the sensible, where some of the practitioners managed to be accepted on an equal footing.

Summary

The aesthetics of assembling was discussed as a practice that denotes how democratic subjects form a sense of collective democratic agency through aesthetic means. I sought to empirically enrich Mouffe's (2013) positioning of art within democratic practice and Ranciere's (2012) notions of the order of the sensible, the aesthetics of politics and politics of aesthetics, as well as his (2009) account of the sentence-image. I placed these two perspectives in conversation with Butler (2015) and Laclau (2007) to theorise an embodied aesthetics enacted between allies in a chain of equivalence. The practice particularly focused, in all its sub-practices and dimensions, on how difference is aesthetically and performatively articulated in assembly.

In the sub-practice of grounding-airing I sought to contribute to knowledge of how chains of equivalence (Laclau, 2007; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) are formed through aesthetic means. I did so through drawing out some of the aesthetic aspects of forming a chain in a digital space, through film. A multimodal analysis of the chain revealed a common but also intimate and distinctive repertoire of visual signals that formed the basis for collective sensemaking. Ranciere's (2009) account of the sentence-image helped us see how new meaning can be brought to life in the physical assembly of people in a march, with a multimodal reading drawing out the ways in which colour, sound, image and rhythm form a collective democratic chain of meaning.

In the sub-practice of embodied reordering I provided a more empirically rich account of aesthetic orders within assembly by combining in conceptual dialogue insights from Ranciere (2012) and Butler (1999, 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2011). Ranciére's (2012) order of the sensible was posited as a useful overall framework for understanding how orders of power within assembly are embodied and aesthetic ones. However, I drew on the work of Butler to theorise the relational, shifting and embodied richness of a reordering of the sensible. In particular, I emphasised how embodied acts help shift the aesthetics of order through subversive humour and the re-iteration of norms. Packaged together, these contributions offer a rich, embodied and aesthetic account of how diverse groups of people come together and struggle in the process of enacting collective democratic agency.

X Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter I first remind the reader of my research question, as well as the objectives I set out to achieve in this study. Second, I provide a summary of the contributions I sought to make. Third, I offer some reflections on what I have learned through the methodology adopted and pursued. Finally, I explore some of the limitations of my research and reflect on directions for future study.

Revisiting my research question and objectives

At the beginning of this study I posed the research question: *How do people working within an NGO in a country in transition performatively enact democratic practice?* The question suggests that I was interested in learning more about the lived experiences of practitioners as they strove to generate democratic practice in a country in which democracy was in its nascent stages of development. In my study I approached NGO practitioners as subjects situated within a larger context of assumptions and norms regarding the meaning of democracy and what it meant to be a democratic practitioner: e.g. those generated by government, the political context of the research site and the identifications of those people NGOs work with. However, I simultaneously approached them as agents of democratic practice, who actively informed such a context. In this respect, my first objective was to understand this broader context that WRC

practitioners were situated within and how it informed their practice. Furthermore, I explored practices generated in relation to such a context, paying attention to the overt and more discreet ways in which these practices unfolded. This objective was significant for understanding in more depth the embodied ways in which NGO practitioners enacted, reproduced and shaped democratic practices in a context where democracy was inevitably entangled with other socio-political norms, such as patriarchy and other forms of corruption.

Revisiting my contributions to knowledge in relation to the research question and objectives

The overarching contribution to knowledge in my study lies in providing rich insight into the experiences of NGO practitioners who enact democratic practice. I provided an embodied account of what it means to generate democratic practice in a country in transition ridden with endemic corruption, including patriarchy. In doing so, I employed insights from Butler's (1999, 2006, 2011 and 2015) theory of performativity, which I combined with theories of deliberative and agonistic democratic practice (e.g., Habermas, 1984, 1987 and 1996; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 1999, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2014 and 2018), as well as my own ethnographic account. I drew on the literature on NGOs and democratic practice to sketch the background to my study and to highlight areas that could benefit from ethnographic insights.

In the process, I argued that the NGO literature tends to overlook practice related to democracy in favour of outcomes. In addition, it does not provide a gendered account of

how women NGO practitioners might enact democracy in the face of various forms of corruption. My contribution is important because at present the NGO literature risks becoming divorced from the lived experiences of people who work within these organisations and could present a view of NGO work as a neutral and unitary implementation of uncontested tools and knowledge. It is important that we appreciate more fully the range of tasks, pressures and possibilities that are enacted through the agency of practitioners in this field. In terms of democratic practice, these are important contributions because they bring theories of democracy into the arena of empirically explored practice. In doing so, my research has shown that these theories make little sense in and of themselves but rather merge and become something more novel and multi-dimensional through performative engagement.

The NGO literature and theories of democratic practice can leave the impression of practicing democracy as a disembodied activity. Yet my study foregrounded corporeal engagement, through which the bodies of practitioners emerged as sites of democratic practice. In theorising the bodies of practitioners, I filtered accounts of democratic practice through the lens of performativity in order to surface the embodied ways in which practice was enacted.

Drawing on aspects of deliberative and agonistic democratic practice, but also going beyond these theories, I contributed by illustrating empirically how practitioners work in embodied ways to build alliances through difference, which I presented under the headings of 'transversing' and 'shielding'. Drawing on Butler's (2006) notions of relationality and precarity I showed how practitioners generate democratic practice through exposing themselves to others and even inhabiting their embodied
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subjectivities. Further, in relation to shielding more specifically, I demonstrated the cross-over between embodied and more disembodied engagement, as practitioners transition between the two in order to protect liberty and equality. I enriched insights into antagonistic and agonistic practice (Mouffe, 2013) through interpreting these as performative aspects of practice that can take place upon the bodies of practitioners, as well as between democratic subjects in dialogue or debate. I also questioned whether such practices might easily spill into undemocratic forms of 'foregoing', where subjects are tormented by antagonisms.

My analysis drew attention to the ubiquitous character of corruption, which shapes the context in which practitioners strive to generate democratic practice. The NGO literature recognises corruption as a problem for democratic practice but does not provide a detailed account of types of corrupt practices or how practitioners engage and work in such a context. Scholars of democratic practice by and large assume a somewhat benign environment, where all participants are equally dedicated to the broad principles of liberty and equality – or, if not, are simply excluded from the process (Mouffe, 1999: 755; Habermas, 1996: 166). Yet overlooking corruption as a lived reality for practitioners means eliding how corruption seeps into and co-constitutes the democratic practice produced in settings akin to Montenegro. I contributed to knowledge of democratic practice by interpreting deliberation and agonism as embodied practices enacted through a context of corruption, which pervaded the working lives of practitioners. I drew on the work of Butler (2011 and 2015) to analyse how practitioners continuously responded to and 'navigated' a corrupt environment. They 'dispelled', in subtle and reiterative ways, those attempts to confuse and obfuscate via gaslighting practices; they exemplified, through their bodies, public standards of liberty and equality and resisted

attempts to re-configure these as 'private' matters; finally, they grappled in democratic and undemocratic ways with corrupt and fake NGOs, GONGOs.

Considerations of aesthetics are less developed in the area of democratic practice and, indeed, in the broader NGO literature. My notion of 'the aesthetics of assembling' drew attention to the ways in which participants in democratic practice formed a sense of collective democratic agency through aesthetic means. This contribution is valuable because it helps us understand the sensory and affective ways in which democratic practice can be generated beyond the linguistic, especially in relation to the formation of collective democratic agency. In exploring this practice I filtered accounts of aesthetics developed by Mouffe (2007 and 2013) and Ranciére (2009 and 2012), as well as some insights from the organisation studies literature on aesthetics, as it pertains to bodies and spaces (Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Munro and Jordan, 2013; Plester, 2015), through the lens of Butler's plural performativity (2015) and Laclau (2007) and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion of the chain of equivalence. I contributed to knowledge on the formation of hegemonies by showing how the aesthetics of democratic practice can act as a binding force between diverse groups, helping them to identify with the intimate but also the common – in online and face-to-face environments. I also contributed to better understanding the dynamics within hegemonies by demonstrating how aesthetic orders of the sensible in groups seeking to practise democracy can be viewed as dynamic, shifting with various aesthetic interventions.

Underlying all of the findings was the inescapable and constant dynamic of gendered democratic practice. My research was undertaken in a predominantly female-staffed organisation dealing in practices that, albeit aiming to benefit the whole of society,

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related to women predominantly. In Montenegro, where democracy remains on a declarative rather than a substantive footing, principles of liberty and equality do not extend equally to all genders. This is something that is largely rendered invisible in existing studies pertaining to NGOs and democratic practice. Democratic practice, in the NGO literature, is addressed as something that is gender neutral and attained through the application of various 'impartial' programmes aimed to fit all circumstances and identities (e.g. Carbone, 2009; Kneuer; 2016; Munck, 2015). My data illustrated how designing programmes aimed at democratisation, and generating democratic practice itself within these programmes, cannot be performed without taking into account the contextual norms practitioners operate within. This is because each context carries within itself different sets of normative frameworks that people operate within, frameworks that bear on practitioners and the practices they generate through them. Gender norms and counter-enactments were dominant in all three of my highlighted practices and my theorising can offer qualitative and empirical depth to better understand the gendered experiences of practitioners in the field.

Whilst not the focus of the study, a number of implications of relevance to practice were surfaced, and I summarise these below.

The highlighted tension between democratic ends (helping others achieve liberty and equality) and undemocratic means for achieving these (antagonistic clashes upon the subject) presents a problem, but also perhaps an opportunity, for practitioners. The tendency of practitioners was to push themselves to extremes in terms of working commitments. I experienced these demands myself, albeit for a limited amount of time, whereas for WRC practitioners they represented a way of life. The sub-practice of

foregoing perhaps drew out the extreme working patterns of practitioners most clearly. The dominant functioning of foregoing was antagonistic, and it operated as a dark side of democratic practice, holding the possibility of serious negative effects for the wellbeing of practitioners, in terms of stress, burnout and other mental and physical risks. While a core tenet of performativity is that norms bearing upon the subject cannot be escaped or relinquished, practitioners could seek to transit undemocratic antagonisms into democratic agonisms. One might envisage that a practice of critical self-reflection could foster recognition of these antagonisms and offer possibilities for their reinterpretation and reincorporation as generative agonistic practices. It could be possible to apply the principles of agonism to care for the self, recognising that liberty and equality apply to aspects of the self as much as to others. I might also add a material point, which is that were the funding of this particular organisation sufficient – perhaps as a result of less funding going the way of corrupt GONGOs – extreme work patterns might be ameliorated.

Another practical implication of this research lies in placing corruption, including patriarchy, under the spotlight as a major inhibitor to generating democratic practice. Familiarity with the literature pertaining to democratic practice and NGOs, as well as my experience in the field, taught me that corruption is routinely overlooked by both scholars and international stakeholders directly invested in promoting and supporting democratisation efforts in countries in transition. For instance, statements such as "Montenegro is a leader in the [European] integration process and a positive example for the region", uttered by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, earlier this year (see, Lenoir, 2018) seem flawed in light of this research. The findings stated here can serve as useful qualitative evidence for practitioners, beyond the numbers, drawing
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out a counter and shadow tale. Hopefully, this study can also provide practitioners with an alternative articulation of corrupt practices and counter practices in their lobbying efforts to the bodies of the EU and other supranational stakeholders.

Seeing corruption as pervasive and inescapable, through drawing out the detailed and rich experiences of practitioners, international stakeholders participating in the democratisation process of Montenegro (e.g. supranational and international organisations) might recognise the difficulty of generating democratic practice in such a context and adopt a more responsible and responsive role in combating corruption in cooperation with NGO practitioners. One way to do that would be to encourage more collaboration amongst genuine NGOs and to incentivise such collaboration through the targeting of funds at such endeavours (assisting them to build capacity to receive funds directly, rather than via a corrupt government or large international organisations). International and supranational organisations might also assume a more explicitly critical stance towards GONGOs and their colonisation of time, space and energy, and government wrongdoings, such as breaches of the rule of law and arbitrary application of laws in practice, which bear material consequences for people's lives.

Furthermore, my study can serve as a call to government and supranational organisations implicated in the democratisation process of countries in transition (e.g. various bodies of the EU) to stop treating gender equality as a discrete unit within democratic practice, pertaining to the principle of equality, and to start approaching patriarchy as a performative practice of gender that harmfully pervades all aspects of human life (hooks, 2004), as illustrated in this research. Allowing for the principle of equality to be broken down into discrete parts masks the multifaceted working of

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patriarchy and prevents it from being treated as a form of corruption that seeps into all aspects of human life, including institutional practice.

Finally, women's organisations are usually dealt with as a sub-strand of broader chains of equivalence within considerations of populist left movements (Laclau, 2007 and Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, Mouffe, 2018). My time in the field showed me that a women's organisation could genuinely be a driving force of democratisation for all – standing for and with people of all genders, LGBTQI people, those with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, for example. Feminist-driven alliances have the power to surface and open up a myriad of issues people face in countries in transition, yet these issues are rendered invisible and obscure within the present status quo. In particular, my data demonstrated that women-led movements can provide a generative frame for connecting people's experiences into a broader social and political platform for common progressive action: they formed into a potent counter-hegemony to neoliberal logics of 'democratising'.

Limitations and directions for future research

The relationship between ethics and democratic practice surfaced as an important area for future research, a focus that could have been developed more with an increased word count and more time. This was especially clear when I started exploring vulnerability and relationality in my data, through Butler (2006), where she draws on Levinas (e.g. 1985 and 1999) to accentuate the need to acknowledge "the precariousness of the Other" (Butler, 2006: 134) when we enter "the sphere of ethics" (ibid). Care for others' vulnerability was prominent in my study, yet the ethical side of such care was not overtly

explored. Future research might explore how explicitly ethical engagement drives democratic practice, pushing subjects into engagements and considerations with others that might not otherwise have surfaced. Likewise, future research might focus on how democratic engagements surface ethical dilemmas, such as the conundrum I posed in relation to the adoption of undemocratic means of attaining democratic outcomes.

Another limitation worth raising in relation to my study is the heavy focus on the body in 'embodiment'. While I was aware of post-humanist research, having engaged in the past with Barad (2003 and 2007), as well as the emerging research on socio-materiality within organisation studies (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007; Putnam, 2015; Symon and Pritchard, 2015), and while I recognise that bodies are entangled within the socio-material fabric of everyday life (see Butler, 2011; Cabantous et al, 2016), I made a conscious decision to give prominence to bodies in my research. Such a decision was made as a consequence of being in the field and feeling so much of democratic practice through my own body. I experienced first-hand how much democratic practice bears on the bodies of practitioners and Butler's conceptualisation of the body provided me with ways to surface this performativity and explore it in more depth. While I do account for aspects of the socio-material world, especially in my data section on the aesthetics of the assembling, focusing more closely on how the entanglement of the socio-material etches certain democratic practices into existence is a fruitful avenue for future research. For example, future research could draw on aspects of my data that were more overtly concerned with the material, such as the design of office space to encourage democratic practice, or even the materiality of money, and how salaries and bribery affect democratic practice.

Another limitation relates to an impression that might emanate from this research: namely, that corruption is something that taints only those countries in nascent stages of democratic development. It would be rather naïve to imagine that countries with more consolidated democratic frameworks are free or safe from corruption in democratic practice. While the examples of corrupt practices explored in Montenegro might not necessarily translate into different contexts, the prerequisite that emerges from this research is that democratic practice cannot be studied (or practiced) in isolation from the normative contexts that work to undermine principles of liberty and equality. If we are to accept the definition of corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (Epperlon and Lee, 2015: 176), we must also accept it as a more pervasive phenomenon not restricted to developing countries (see Graeber, 2014, who makes a similar point throughout his book). In a UK context, perhaps NGOs, charities, pressure groups and even political parties work with and against a backdrop where the public realm is distorted for private gain all the time. How else might one explain the influence of a press in the UK, owned by billionaires, which routinely seeks to demonise and marginalise progressive causes? Adopting a frame of corruption might be a fruitful and provocative means of exploring democratic practice within 'developed' countries.

Methodological reflections

Opting for an ethnographic approach was, in hindsight, an appropriate one, as it allowed me to integrate myself into the world of practitioners and experience first-hand how it felt to enact democratic practice and what such work entailed. Upon reflection, identity ambiguity was something I experienced throughout the research. What I mean by this is

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that I struggled to distinguish between my identity as researcher and as practitioner, which became even more complicated by the subsequent friendships that developed in the field. I spent a lot of time trying to distinguish between my identities and ultimately failed in this endeavour, as neither my participants nor I could ever be completely sure when I was speaking/performing as researcher, practitioner or friend. It finally dawned on me, well into the fieldwork, that I was trying to defy the very paradigmatic framework employed in this research, assuming that I had autonomous agency and power to draw clear lines between my various selves. Perhaps part of my learning, which I could develop into further research, is the notion of a developing and democratic practitioner-researcher, as someone operating on an equal footing with research participants, seeking both knowledge generation and social change. Trying to defy paradigms of research identity, I developed a self-cautioning mantra: 'whoever you are, do not do harm'. Such a mantra forced me to be as reflexive as I possibly could be, while also acknowledging that a researcher cannot "extricate herself and...assume the position of an outsider" (Fotaki et al, 2014: 1252) and that there will always be aspects of myself that are inaccessible to me, that might, in the view of others, cause harm. Therefore, I engaged in dialogic reflexivity, exposing myself in all my flaws and vulnerabilities (Butler, 2006; 2016) to participants/practitioners/friends' scrutiny and critical feedback. Such relations between us were underlined by a sense of reciprocity and fairness, a democratic engagement between equals in the field.

A multimodal approach to ethnographic research allowed me to account for sensory data in general. It broadened my horizons and made the task of seeing performativity beyond language more tangible – a multimodal approach allowed me to see the 'unsayable', 'invisible' and 'unthinkable' (Ranciére 2009; 2012; 2016). Although I initially wanted my

participants to take their own photographs in the course of their work, this did not materialise, as practitioners were simply too busy to indulge my request, despite in principle being enthusiastic. However, from a vantage point, this would have been a good way to instigate conversations concerning what practitioners perceived as valuable in their practice, as well for them to try to encapsulate those aspects of their work that they were perhaps unable to verbalise to the extent they would want to. In retrospect I ought to have been more insistent on this approach, but at the time was influenced by my own tiredness and a sense of not wanting to impose too much on practitioners' time.

Being in the field as an ethnographer, although fulfilling and exciting, can be all consuming, dominating every segment of one's life for an extended period of time. Therefore, extracting oneself from the research setting once the fieldwork is completed can potentially be a difficult process. Caretta and Cheptum (2017) advise kindness upon exit, with the acknowledgment that we are implicated in each other's lives and that a research setting is not a "geographical location but rather a set of relations nurtured, contested and developed during the course of long fieldwork" (ibid: 415).

At the onset of the fieldwork and in dialogue with research participants, agreement was reached between us that I would spend 11 months in WRC as a participant-observer, after which I would return to the UK and resume my research-related obligations at the university. However, as time passed and I became more attached to both practitioners and the democratic practices we enacted together, it became increasingly difficult to imagine the moment of departure. So instead of spending energy devising an ethical way to extract myself from the research setting, I redirected my efforts to thinking about how not to do so. I realised that I may have entered the field as a researcher but that I was
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coming out of it as friend and practitioner-researcher who was invested in these relationships, as well as the practice that we produced jointly, which rendered the 'rule' of extraction somewhat redundant. The relationship between research participants and myself was founded upon the democratic basis of fairness, reciprocity and equality, so excluding myself seemed an act of treachery to the principles of liberty and equality we aimed to apply in practice. Ultimately, I still have not extracted myself from WRC, although I have indeed returned to the UK. Practitioners and I still maintain regular contact, most evenings, in fact, and they still keep me involved in conversations relating to their practice, and I engage from a distance (e.g. through building an online library and facilitating knowledge exchange between people I met in my previous research projects and WRC practitioners).

Prior to commencing my fieldwork, I understood conceptually that democratic practice entailed continuous and dedicated engagement but having finished my fieldwork I now understand in an embodied sense that democratic practice is truly a way of life.

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