

**Performing activism:  
How female activists develop dialogical organising practices to fight precarity**



*Flo6x8 Performance and Bank Occupation with Corrala Utopía — Cuatro Palabritas Claras: Tangos del Titi (<https://youtu.be/6ungE6rODPA>)*

WORK IN PROGRESS

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**Lucia Garcia-Lorenzo\***, **Lucia Sell-Trujillo\*\***, **Paul Donnelly\*\*\*** and **Agus Perez\*\***.

*\*Psychological and Behavioural Science, London School of Economics.*

*\*\*Psicología Social, Universidad de Sevilla.*

*\*\*\*Management and Organisation Studies, Technological University of Dublin*

## ABSTRACT

Activism entails provoking, opening and/or maintaining ongoing dialogues to enable those in unstable, unequal or precarious conditions to become visible and have a voice. However, a generative engagement with activism requires not only the ability to speak, occupy, and perform in public spaces but also to open them up to allow for alternative perspectives and conditions to emerge. We look at female activism through the lenses of liminality and performativity to understand how a group of Spanish female activists develop dialogic organising practices when fighting against precarity. We use a qualitative study, conducted over nine years, focusing on the experiences of participants of two activist collectives in Seville, southern Spain, that emerged as a consequence of the Great Recession. Our female activists experienced a journey —from becoming part of anti-precarity collectives and performing activism to disengaging from it, reminiscent of the liminal stages of separation, limen and aggregation. The analysis of observations, ethnographic accounts, videos, and interviews illustrates how, to perform in liminal spaces, the activists crafted ‘backstage’ and ‘frontstage’ spaces during their fight against precarity. On the one hand, activists built safe spaces in which they could (re)imagine their subjectivities and develop resistances to hegemonic voices. On the other hand, they staged and enacted those contestation scripts by appropriating and opening up private, public, and institutional spaces. Our results expand current understanding of dialogical organising, especially among female activists, by looking at the spatial and dialogical practices whereby precarious actors, who do not have a ‘place’ within the symbolic distribution of places, create spaces for themselves and for the possible.

**Keywords:** Dialogic organising, equality/inequality, female activism, gender, performativity, liminality, precarity, social change.

## INTRODUCTION

Organising is entirely dependent on dialogue (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002) as every act of organising foresees a response. Along with seeing organising as dialogue between and among individuals and groups (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002), we also see organising through dialogue as a process that is generative, grounded in diversity, and critical of power (Heath, 2007). Being generative, dialogue provides new ways of seeing, communicating, and acting (Bushe & Marshak, 2014; Heath, 2007) but requires heterogeneity of perspectives to elicit contestation, and diversity to activate the conditions necessary for creativity and change (Hammond et al., 2003). A clear marker of power is the lack of dialogue about alternatives to hegemonic perspectives. Since dialogue moves continuously on, engaged participants have influence, while those who are disengaged do not (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002). Considering power invites resistance, however, and it is the interplay between the two that stimulates the generation of new perspectives. That is why dialogue's democratic function is to draw out and amplify voices that may not display "the right kinds of rationality" articulated by dominant voices (Hammond et al., 2003, p.142). With our research we aim to respond to the recent calls for dialogical organising (Hjorth et al, 2022) to be opened up to account in particular for disruptions and dissensus (Lyotard, 1984; Ziarek, 2001) to enable us to support "those that are living in fragile, unequal and precarious conditions" to have a voice (Hjorth et al, 2022, p.3).

For those who actively fight to be heard, language—often taken as the archetypal means of dialogic exchange (Bakhtin, 1981)—is not the only way to provoke dialogue; physical contact, visual art, music, and dance performances are also means to open up spaces where contestation becomes possible (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002; Lynn, 2008). Activism requires, therefore, a theoretical and empirical focus that considers the 'interstices' or the spaces in between legality and illegality, visibility and invisibility, and formality and informality that allow unrecognised actors to simultaneously stay 'out of sight' and 'be seen' in order to be able to both safely organise and creatively generate new dialogues.

We propose, therefore, to look at female activism through the lenses of liminality and performativity. We see activists' performances as an unstructured form of "public liminality...performed in the village or town square, in full view of everyone" (Turner, 1979, p.96) during which 'everyday life', with its emphasis on predictable practices and pragmatic routines, is temporarily suspended. The suspension of social order and the ongoing performance of public liminal acts can facilitate new perspectives to be enacted in dialogue and the transition to alternative forms of order and identity (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2021; Beech, 2011; Garcia-Lorenzo et al, 2018). From this perspective, we explore *how a group of Spanish female activists perform activism through dialogical organising to fight precarity*.

To answer this question, we focused on performances of female activism from two collectives in Seville, southern Spain, that emerged in consequence of the Great Recession. As participant observers, we generated ethnographic accounts of the Corrala Utopía collective, formed in 2012 by 43 families that lost their homes, jobs and social support, and of Flo6x8, a guerrilla flamenco collective formed in 2008 that performed flamenco interventions in bank branches and other public spaces. In addition to observing and generating ethnographic accounts of the two collectives, we completed 20 interviews with female activists from the collectives at two different moments in time — 9 in 2015, when the collectives were still active at a moment of full engagement in ongoing dialogues, and 11 in 2021, to generate a reflection on past performances.

Our research shows activism as a collectively organised process, carried out as 'public liminal' acts and performed both in visible (frontstage) and invisible (backstage) spaces. This is a dialogical organising process based on generating new perspectives and engagements.

We begin our paper outlining the theories we use to frame the journey of female activists, summarising research on dialogue, organising, female activism, and liminality. Then, we elaborate our methodology. Thereafter, we present our preliminary findings in the form of narratives, before concluding with a discussion of our findings.

## THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

### *Dialogue, organising and activism*

Coming from the Greek *dialogos* —from *dialegesthai* meaning to ‘converse with’, from *dia* meaning ‘through’ and *legein* meaning ‘speak’ (Oxford English Dictionary)— language is often taken as the archetypal means of dialogic exchange (Bakhtin, 1981). However, dialogue can also happen through other means, such as physical contact, intuition, visual art, music, and dance (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002; Lynn, 2008).

Dialogue is an ongoing, dynamic, and fluid process (Bohm, 1996). As a constant stream of meaning, dialogue may be understood as expression, experience, process or as a way of being (Lynn 2008, p.13). Furthermore, not only is dialogue infused with meaning at all times but also with context and history (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002). Bakhtin (1981) argued that dialogue is inherently social in nature, such that appreciating dialogue entails recognising its social context and character and the point of view of all its participants and the relationships between them (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002). Indeed, it was in the works of such scholars as Bakhtin (1981), Buber (1937) and Freire (1970) that dialogue became once more concerned with communal living rather than mere knowledge building — dialogue became again “an authentic way of being” rather than just a type of communication (Rule, 2009, p.927).

Hatch and Ehrlich (2002) contend that organising is entirely dependent on dialogue in the sense given to the term by Bakhtin (1981) — fundamental to dialogic thinking is that “nothing means anything until it achieves a response” (Holquist, 1990, p.48). Since an utterance is invariably an answer, Holquist (1990, p.60) argues that an utterance “is therefore always conditioned by, and in turn qualifies, the prior utterance”. Thus, every act of organising foresees a response, which is in keeping with Weick’s (1979) concept of the double interact, such that organising happens not in the act of organising but in the relation the act of organising shares with its response (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002). Dialogue assumes, and is impossible without, relationship (Rule, 2004). As relational beings, how we see and make sense of the world is both contextually and historically situated in our interaction with

others (Gergen, 1999; Janssens & Steyaert, 2020). Understanding reality as a process of social construction serves to acknowledge that meanings are contextualised and created collectively through dialogue, with organisation seen as “fields of conversation” where disparate realities are continually co-produced, sustained and/or transformed (Gergen, 1999). Conceptualising organisations as dialogic underlines their communicative features, meaning making capability, and layered multiplicity, along with underscoring a relational and dynamic view of organisation or organising as “always unfinished business” (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002, p.124). Indeed, “the dialogic organization is not a fixed entity, but an unfinished process of dynamic communicative interactivity” (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002, p.124).

Along with seeing organising as dialogue between and among individuals and groups (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002), organising through dialogue can be seen as generative, grounded in diversity, and critical of power (Heath, 2007). Being generative, dialogue provides new ways of seeing, communicating, and acting (Bushe & Marshak, 2014; Heath, 2007). As a process that “allows for changing and being changed” (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, p.10), dialogue generates new ideas, thoughts, and outcomes through the meaningful interactions between parties as part of a transformative process (Oswick et al, 2000).

Conceived as a “vehicle for the mobilization of new ideas” (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002, p.108), dialogue creates understandings and produces outcomes that cannot be known before the dialogic experience (Deetz & Simpson, 2004). It makes possible a “flow of meaning...out of which may emerge some new understanding. It’s something new, ...something creative. And this shared meaning is the ‘glue’ or ‘cement’ that holds people and societies” (Bohm, 1996, p.6) and organisations together. Thus, as meaningful interaction between people as part of a transformative process, dialogue enables “participants to escape the realities that they enter and enables them, working collaboratively, to formulate models of understanding or action that incorporate multiple inputs” (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 368). While it is one thing to call for change, Hatch and Ehrlich (2002, p.115) note that finding “the imagination to make it so” is a dialogic process.

There is a strong link between dialogue and creativity (e.g., Deetz, 1995; Deetz & Simpson, 2004; Hammond et al., 2003; Heath et al., 2006), with McNamee and Shotter (2004, p.97, emphasis in original) asserting that “dialogue makes possible a special kind of *first-time creativity*, the creation ‘out of the blue’ of a way of acting in response to, or in relation to, the unique character of one’s current surroundings”. Creativity as a relational quality goes beyond creative thinking however, as creative actions do not take place just ‘inside’ the mind but ‘in between’ people, people and objects, and across time. Every creative act can be seen as distributed, engaging a dynamic system of actors, audiences, actions, artefacts, and affordances in constant dialogue (Glăveanu, 2014).

Through the heterogeneity of perspectives that elicit contestation, diversity activates the conditions necessary for dialogue to generate creativity and change (Hammond et al., 2003). Creativity comes out of difference in the sense that differences offer the impulse to create and the resources needed to generate novelty. As Bakhtin (1984) suggested, differences are not to be avoided but cultivated; as diverse perspectives of the world, our voices are intrinsically polyphonic and multiple, and we constantly address others, even when there is no audience present. Accordingly, a diversity of perspectives in dialogical organising opens spaces of possibility (Janssens & Steyaert, 2020).

The development of new perspectives through dialogical organising implies occupying (physically, socially and/or symbolically) a new position from which we can relate to the world (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002; Heath, 2007). Thus, diversity of perspectives in dialogue are not so much different ideas or points of view but diverse action orientations or ways of relating to the world that cut across the psychological, the social, and the material. More diverse perspectives do not necessarily lead to increased creativity, agency or possibility. In fact, they can sometimes be disorienting. It is what we make of these differences that matters. Acting on different perspectives means using them to generate new understandings and using their potential to transform self, others, and the joint situation they find themselves in (Glăveanu, 2021, p.47).

Following Deetz (1995), we encounter diversity in dialogue at multiple levels when activists negotiate their roles (identity), relationships to one another and the community (social orders), what they view

as true (knowledge), and what they value when organising collective actions. Appreciating dialogue means interpreting talk from the point of view of all its participants and the relationships between them (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002, p.109). Thus, seeing dialogue as grounded in diversity (Heath, 2007) serves to highlight that, because dialogue unfolds in the context of interactions between people, it also unfolds in and through multiple voices and their differing contextually and historically situated perspectives (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002; Heath, 2007). Notwithstanding the multivocal character of dialogue, Bakhtin (1984, p.75) observed that “voices are not self-enclosed or deaf to one another. They hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another”. Thus, in addition to the multiplicity of voices expressing multiple meanings and interests that comprise a dialogue, each utterance bears traces of other voices, meanings and interests (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002).

As a critique of power, dialogue sheds light on how power is negotiated and shared (Heath, 2007). One of the most obvious markers of power or hegemonic perspectives is the lack of dialogue about alternatives. In keeping with Foucault’s (1991) observation of power as a phenomenon that hides its own origin, hegemonic perspectives are taken for granted and typically go unnoticed. As some individuals or groups in a society have more power or influence than others, the voices of some are more easily heard and have, in any given situation, more opportunity for expression and communication than others. In sum, dialogical interchange and dominance are intrinsic features of the dialogical self (Gregg, 1991; Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993, 1998; Taylor, 1991).

Drawing on Habermas (1979), Heath (2007) presents a dialogic model where reciprocity and symmetry between participants serve as normative conditions for good dialogue to facilitate sharing power and critiquing dominant voices. Reciprocity means participants must have an equal chance to express themselves, while symmetry implies each participant must have an equal chance to engage with and challenge what emerges in the course of dialogue. However, there are impediments to sharing power. One such impediment is discursive closure or the inability to contest something (Deetz, 1995). An example of such closure that serves to silence voices and systematically distort dialogue,



is disqualification (Deetz, 1990), which authorises and privileges some voices while at the same time disqualifying others. Engagement, and the influence it affords, is not necessarily determined solely by participants in a dialogue; participants can be co-opted through others appropriating the act of engagement in service of their own interests (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002).

Since dialogue moves continuously on, engaged participants have influence, while those who are disengaged do not (Hatch & Ehrlich, 2002). Considering power invites resistance, it is the interplay between the two that stimulates the generation of new perspectives. All protests are politically oppositional performances that, to be successful, must “move others” (Eyerman, 2006, p.196) and it is when changes occur that “society itself may be said to have moved” (Eyerman, 2006, p.194). As Hammond et al. (2003, p.142) argue, dialogue’s democratic function is to draw out and amplify voices that may not display “the right kinds of rationality” articulated by dominant voices. Thus, dialogical organising (Hjorth et al, 2022) needs to be opened up to account for disruptions and dissensus (Lyotard, 1984; Ziarek, 2001) and to enable us to support “those that are living in fragile, unequal and precarious conditions” to have a voice (Hjorth et al, 2022, p.3).

Female activism is an example of how some voices can be consistently excluded from the public sphere (Craddock, 2017). Habermas’ (1989) concept of the public sphere advances that deliberation about matters of the common good should be open and accessible to all, with inequalities of status bracketed such that participants would deliberate as if they were social equals and focus on the argument itself, all to generate a strong sense of agreement about the common good. However, Fraser (1990, p.64) asserts that this conceptualisation of the public sphere acts as a “mask for domination” and that bracketing “usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates”. As Fraser (1990, p.64) notes, pretending that inequalities of status — gender, class, ethnicity— are not present when they are “does not foster participatory parity”. Tracing the gendered division between the public and private spheres, Lister (1997) argues that the public sphere is associated with “men”, “citizen”, “male breadwinner” and the “world of paid work”, while the private sphere is associated with “women”, “non-citizen”, “female homemaker” and “domestic

unpaid work”. With women entering the labour market in increasing numbers, this has resulted in the “double burden” of both paid and unpaid work (Kremer, 2007). This gendering of the public and private spheres has influenced political participation, with Dodson (2015, p.378) arguing that “gender organises the political sphere in ways that systematically constrain the ability of women to exercise their political voice” and Beard (2014, p.3) contending that women are punished for speaking out if their voices are not ignored to begin with.

With a tendency towards being blind to “the ways in which power may be exercised within practices of resistance”, research can overlook how activist spaces can serve to recreate and strengthen the very gendered structures they seek to reject (Coleman & Bassi, 2011, p.205). Kennelly (2014, p.253) draws from the experiences of women “overwhelmed by the neoliberal weight of responsabilisation and their re-traditionalised gendered subjectivities” to highlight how activist work remains decidedly gendered and highlight how activism is gendered in terms of its emotional effects. The “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 2003) produced by neoliberal subjectivity and established gender norms is “felt by women within social movement organising as burnout, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders” (Kennelly, 2014, p.244). In a context of neoliberal responsabilisation, the gendered impacts of activist work are routinely misrecognized as individual failings or personal decisions, which impacts on who continues with or becomes disengaged from activist work (Kennelly, 2014). Thus, Kennelly (2014, p.250) argues, women who “might ‘choose’ to ‘change the world’...bear the burden of that ‘choice’ as an overwhelming and impossible responsibility”.

On account of its explicit and unequal effect on women, along with essentially bolstering gender roles and norms more generally, austerity is a feminist matter (Craddock, 2017, 2019). However, when it comes to anti-austerity activism, critiques of austerity from a gender perspective come up short (Craddock, 2017, 2019; Emejulu & Bassel, 2015; Manguashca et al., 2016). Such a lack seems to be due to the anti-austerity movement being more concerned with class politics to the exclusion of gender (Craddock, 2017). Indeed, when seeking to raise gendered critiques of austerity, women activists have experienced exclusion because difference could undermine movement unity (Emejulu,

2017). When attention is paid to gender, it is limited to the economic impact of austerity on women (Maiguashca et al., 2016). Nonetheless, women activists have encountered sexism within anti-austerity movements (Emejulu & Bassel, 2015; Maiguashca et al., 2016), such that the movements can be seen to be facilitating, however unwittingly, the kinds of prevailing structural oppressions they are seeking to eradicate (Craddock, 2019). Thus, with issues of gender seeming to be excluded from such movements, feminist activism can be found at the margins, in liminal spaces where it is organised and performed by women and for women (Craddock, 2017, 2019).

### ***Performing activism in public liminal spaces***

Turner's (1977, 1979) theory of liminality is a foundational frame to explore the ways in which activists' performances create a public liminal space where dialogical organising might occur through the interactions between performers and audiences.

The term "liminal" was first used by van Gennep (1960) to name the middle or transition phase of a three-phase rite of passage that begins with separation (end of previous identity and social position) and ends with aggregation (assumption of new identity and social position). Turner (1977) further developed the concept, calling the in-between liminal stage "anti-structure", to stress the opposition of the liminal to clearly articulated social structures. Along with transgression, inversion, and parody, liminal processes notably include the reflexive contemplation of structures that have been suspended, enabling critical and creative attitudes (Daskalaki & Simosi, 2018). Social invisibility and lack of a given 'social position' are central characteristics of this liminal condition, which removes limits from everyday life and opens everything to question. Hence, a liminal transition is a dangerous time, with no sure standards for behaviour. There is a potentially bewildering and frightening limitlessness but liminality holds also the potential for creative resurgence (van Gennep, 1960). The concept of liminality enables us therefore to understand borders, gaps, and movements between states, positions, and systems not as empty space but, rather, as space/times where new organisational forms can be

created, played with, and experimented with. It is in liminal conditions that activists can use various ‘interstices’ –the spaces that fall between the cracks of events– to create, and creatively become, something different.

Turner (1979, p.468) argued that “for every major social formation there is a dominant mode of public liminality, the subjunctive space/time that is the counterstroke to its pragmatic indicative texture”. Thus, borders of space, time, and social dominance become ambiguous. Turner believed that ritual is critical to social order. However, instead of retaining social order, Turner viewed ritual as a temporary time of escaping social order. Specifically, because ritual is escape and not order, it involves experiment and play: “There may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play’s the thing” (Turner, 1979, p.466). Turner drew a distinction between the liminal as the authentic state of being on a threshold, and the liminal-like state of liminoid as that which is a playful choice. Turner also saw the evolution of serious performances in rituals (liminal) into modern entertainment performance (liminoid), such as film, theatre, and television.

It is not merely the extension of liminality into modern performance that makes Turner’s work so important, but what happens in that space and how the liminal space is crafted. Out of liminal situations emerge “episodes of status reversal” called *communitas*: “the mutual confrontation of human beings stripped of status role characteristics — people, ‘just as they are,’ getting through to each other” (Turner, 1979, pp.470-471). Turner (1982) distinguished three types of *communitas* in society: (1) “spontaneous,” which imparts a feeling of power, is a direct “confrontation of human identities,” and has “something ‘magical’ about it” (p.47); (2) “normative”, which subcultures “foster and maintain relationships or spontaneous *communitas* on a more or less permanent basis” (p.49); and (3) “ideological,” which serves to break the flow of spontaneous *communitas* by intervention of an “experiencer” that looks to dialogue, “language and culture to mediate the former immediacies” (p.48). Through the intervention of the “experiencer”, or “performer” the possible, a “‘utopian’ model of society” can be developed (Turner, 1982, p.48). Although *communitas* appears in the absence of structure to create new ideologies, Turner (1977, p.132) believed they would always “decline and fall

into structure and law”. However, Turner (1979, p.474) was so convinced that new social realities could be “legitimated in the very heat of performance, emerging as a sort of artefact or popular creativeness” that public liminal performances are regarded as “dangerous” by those in power. Thus, the sense of equality, solidarity, and genuine care for one another that occurs within a liminal phase can be viewed as a provocation and direct threat to the current social order. The potential of *communitas* to carry over, post-liminality, is also a powerful catalyst for social change. As Turner (1982, p.45) put it, people within a liminal phase/space are a “kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change”.

Cavicchi (1998) draws on Turner’s liminal suspension of societal structures to point to performativity as a venue for questioning society’s roles. He uses ‘fans’ or ‘fandom’ as an example of the impact a performance has on the audience that supports and engages in activism. The engagement does not fully vanish with the end of the performance on the stage, but extends beyond the liminal into the future. In this way, the performance holds the capacity to carry over feelings of social responsibility beyond the liminal, even when *communitas* dissipates. Cavicchi (1998, p.188, emphasis in original) explains:

Such participation beyond the performance frame points to more than a temporary time-out to reaffirm or reshape existential meanings; it is, like religion, a continual *source* of such meaning. [It] sustains the reflexive properties of performance so that every time one acts as a [follower/supporter], one is launched into a realm where personal, cultural, and human values are brought into relief and opened to scrutiny.

This is also why Turner (1982, p.474) cautioned that the liminal space could pose a danger to “whatever powers-that-be who represent and preside over established structure”. The practices of cultural performance and performativity have a specific role for groups positioned at the margins of social structures. Members of marginal social groups that are deprived a voice and of the “modern” advantages of marketization, welfare, and improved living standards find symbolic ways to provoke dialogue and “reposition themselves, sometimes through deploying the very codes of the modern that have framed them as its others” (Schein, 1999, p.364).

But performance liminality has its limits: when the performance ends, both performer and audience return to their own worlds. Although they may return with enhanced knowledge of the other's world, and leave with traces of the performance to inform future responses, they are bound, once again, by restraints of society, custom, and law. And yet, both performers and audience retain some of the *communitas* beyond the liminal performance (Schein, 1999).

Turner's (1977) work on liminality, being 'in between' social statuses has also a strong spatial component to it, since youngsters are made socially as well as physically 'invisible' during rites of passage only to regain visibility as adults. However, for those on the margins, passage is suspended as their state of invisible in-betweenness becomes part of the everyday. The spatial translation of this 'being stuck in limbo' is a life in the interstices. Those confused spaces that exist in between the legal and the illegal, the formal and the informal and the deserving and the undeserving equally entail strategic opportunities for provoking dialogue and for contestation. The interplay between visibility and invisibility on the one hand and control and contestation on the other is thus of key importance. We will argue that it is through engaging in a dialogue between visible and invisible, control and congestion that activists construct (i) safe spaces that function as a 'backstage' where they can conquer their fears, (re)imagine themselves and develop resistance and (ii) they appropriate public spaces as 'frontstage' where rights claims can be staged.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To explore *how a group of Spanish female activists perform activism through dialogical organising to fight precarity*, we adopted a qualitative, longitudinal (October 2012 to December 2021) approach. To ensure qualitative rigour, we followed the guidance of Gioia et al. (2013).

### ***Research context and data collection***

We focus on Spain because, amongst OECD countries, it was hit particularly hard by the Great Recession and the austerity that ensued, the collateral effects of which included increased unemployment and precarity, increased vulnerability and exclusion, and deepening inequality

(Córdoba-Doña & Escolar-Pujolar, 2019; Gálvez & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2016; González-Ferrer & Moreno-Fuentes, 2017; Royo, 2020; Sanz-de-Galdeano & Terskaya, 2020).

We focused on a number of situated activist experiences of female participants of two collectives in Seville, southern Spain, that emerged in consequence of the Great Recession and accompanying neoliberal responses. As participant observers, we generated ethnographic accounts of the two collectives. The first ethnographic work focused on the Corrala Utopía<sup>1</sup> collective, which was formed in 2012 by 43 families that lost their homes, jobs, and social support. The second ethnographic work focused on Flo6x8<sup>2</sup>, a guerrilla flamenco collective formed in 2008 that performed flamenco interventions in publicly loaded spaces (such as bank branches and the regional parliament), transforming the sites, through music and dance, into spaces of creative expression. The activists of both collectives knew and supported each other, to the extent that Flo6x8 aided and led a flamenco intervention at the bank that owned the apartment building occupied by members of Corrala Utopía<sup>3</sup>. In addition to observing and generating ethnographic accounts of the two collectives, we completed 20 interviews with female activists from the collectives at two different moments in time — 9 in 2015, when the collectives were still active, and 11 in 2021. The interviews were conducted in various public places and the average interview length was around 90 minutes. Every interview was tape-recorded and followed British Psychological Society ethical guidelines. During the in-depth interview process, we asked participants about the reasons they had to get involved in activism, their experiences whilst being involved in the activities of their collectives, and their transition into everyday life once these collectives were no longer active. We focused on generating their personal stories, the non-completed narratives that address transitions, unfinished processes, and evaluations. Our aim was to explore the development of narratives of self and their activist position, sense-making, and reconstructions of their participation in collective action.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://corralautopia.blogspot.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/Flo6x8>

<sup>3</sup> <https://youtu.be/6ungE6rODPA>

Given the high visibility of both collectives at the height of their activism, we also collected data from media sources, to gain an appreciation for the conditions and cultural understandings of activism in Spain. Our aim is to straddle the micro-macro boundary, looking at the development of activist narratives and practices within particular social and historical contexts (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012). The use of various methods of data collection enabled us to include different viewpoints to refine our understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### ***Data analysis***

Along with the ethnographic data, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic and narrative analysis using NVivo and followed inductive and deductive approaches and quality indicators to meet required qualitative research standards (Gioia et al., 2013). We all participated in the analysis and common work was carried out to interpret the data.

For the analysis, we followed the Gioia et al. (2013) protocol, with first-order concepts emerging inductively from the data. We followed an iterative process noting similarities and differences to cluster the codes we identified into first-order concepts. Transitioning from open coding to more abstract coding, we shifted from inductive to abductive inquiry to generate themes that helped us describe and explain what we were observing. For the final stage of our analysis, we grouped the second order themes into aggregate dimensions.

The data were analysed in two stages. First, we conducted a full thematic analysis to identify and analyse patterns of meaning across our dataset. This analysis also enabled us to obtain general knowledge about the process, the challenges that female activists faced, their engagement and everyday actions, and their experiences and evaluations both while active and when their collective was no longer active. These themes, among others, were included in the coding framework as first order concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). Second order themes emerged as our analysis uncovered the liminal (Turner, 1977) transition our female activists underwent: first, separating from a previous, clear identity and position in their social structure; second, performing activism in an unstructured



social and personal period of uncertainty; third, in some cases, starting to outline a new identity and social position as activists or (dis)engaging and becoming assimilated in a new social position.

After obtaining an overall view of how our interviewees understood the different stages of their liminal transition into activism, we sought to identify particular *dialogical practices through a second analysis*. We focused on both personal narratives, where our female activists described the process of their engagement within their collectives and positioned themselves within particular events in relation to other significant actors (Riessman, 2008), as well as on recordings of their performances during their time as active participants in staged protests.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Our female activists experienced a journey, from becoming part of anti-precarity collectives and performing activism to disengaging from it, reminiscent of the liminal stages of separation, limen, and aggregation outlined by Turner (1977).

### *Separation: Becoming part of the collective*

In the context of the Global Financial Crisis, while the banks were afforded bailouts from the government and allowed to repossess homes with non-performing mortgages, (female) citizens, unemployed and facing eviction, experienced a journey that transformed them, as well as their context.

Some of them became part of the anti-precarity collectives as a way to contest dominant narratives that disqualified and silenced them.

In 2010, a brutal labour reform arrived and took away my years of [employment] service. What they had always said [was] “girl, you work two years and then you gain a permanent contract”. All that became a lie and my world fell apart (...) So when we reached the wrecked 2010 and we lost the little we had, and then in 2011 the *Indignados* movement appeared... It was the start of something in Seville. Everything materialised in a collective way but, with the effort of many, it could not be a single struggle... and I learned that even if we'd get out of the crisis I was not going to live with the values of before and if I had learned to live with 600 euros I was going to try to live with 600 euros, right?. (Corrala activist Marivi, 2015)

Some others, previous housewives, had their lives transformed by the fear (or fact) of homelessness and eviction within a system that rendered them responsible, despite the problem not being of their making.

So I saw they were taking away my flat. The Municipal Housing Company sent some letters saying that I owed them money and I had to hand them the keys...If I was homeless, they would take my son away...12 years old, right? I was not going to allow my son to sleep in the streets either...so I said I am going to squat because of my child...I fought for him all my life. They were not going to take him away from me...my son is the one thing I have to fight for. And I said, “No. My child has to have a home, like any other child, and go to school neat and clean”. And that was the start of it all. (Corrala activist Paqui, 2021)

They became legitimate activists going from being socially and institutionally rejected, to becoming the public voice of the excluded.

### ***Performing activism in liminal spaces***

The female activists in the two collectives we explored engaged in public performances as a way to make sense of the crisis and develop a dialogue with different audiences. The eviction of the Corrala Utopía activists resulted in the collective squatting in an empty apartment block owned by a bank bailed out by the government. Their occupation forced the opening of a dialogue among activists, as well as between activists and other stakeholders, to contest the injustice and highlighted a way to both re-address the precarity they were thrown into and seek social transformation. Particular public performances by the *corraleras* included *caceroladas*<sup>4</sup>, occupations of bank branches, and other public demonstrations on the streets of the city as seen below.



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<sup>4</sup> [Cacerolazo - Wikipedia](#)

In the case of Flo6x8, their performances were staged as flamenco dances, evocative of flash mobs, organised through guerilla tactics relying on secrecy and anonymity to enhance their creative collective power.

We take great care of the representation of the collective. We try to avoid protagonism, the focus on a spokesperson so that too much attention is monopolised, to protect us from the police and to be the voice of all — like the *zapatistas*. That's what leads us to change our names. Nobody uses their real name; there is a kind of washing of authorship. (Flo6x8 activist Paca la Monea, 2015)

Through high quality flamenco performances and subversive chants, dances, and bodies located in spaces of economic power, Flo6x8 redefined the bank branches' meaning and temporarily opened up highly alienating privatised spaces subjected to extreme forms of control. Bank branches are, after all, the site where the physical monetary element of capital resides. Its transformation into a space of public spectacle became a form of re-addressing injustices. The filming of the Flo6x8 actions and viralization through social media platforms became a code, a form of language, to also question the narrative of austerity into one the underprivileged, evicted citizen could emotionally understand.

So, aside from the show, Flo6x8 is also resistance. It has something beautiful as it happens in a place that does not belong to the citizen, that has been separated from us all, from society. The bank represents the unbalanced power structure, so we give it a new meaning. We rob the bank of its space and, whoever is there or shares the video (...) has a chance to share the experience, to make it their cause, to claim it as part of the public. (Flo6x8 activist Fiskalita, 2015)



The video frames above show two different bank occupations to protest the government's bailout of the banks during the Global Financial Crisis. The apparent chaos of the occupation was the result of a highly tactical action where the flamenco dancers confronted, through their bodies, the economic practices of the bank branch as a site. Additionally, the recording and social media viralization of the actions also became channels for dialogue, as different audiences could engage emotionally and elaborate about the 'political wrongdoings of the elite'.

### *The backstage of activist performances: Developing dialogical practices in 'safe spaces'*

Many of our precarious female activists faced the struggle of being positioned within the 'field of visibility' and subjected to institutional surveillance and police control, with a very tangible sense of potential punishment as their activities could be prosecuted. They were therefore simultaneously excluded and included in their community. Typically, their status as squatters or bank intruders severely limited access to formalised and institutionalised spaces during the first period of their activities. However, Corrala Utopía and Flo6x8 members belonged in informal and, thus, alternative spaces that allowed them to organise themselves, which was crucial in their activist formation processes. In this con-text, female activists faced a double challenge. On the one hand, such spaces were needed to ensure a certain level of comfort, secludedness, and invisibility to be able to safely organise and receive/give emotional support and care, whilst they also needed to convince others that participation was safe.

[In the corrala,] people's doors were always open. You had your purse and no one stole your money. And you didn't lack anything... If you needed food, then you'd come in and a plate was put aside for you... like in the old days, we always talked about it. As if it were a neighbourhood *corrala*, that's what we wanted to do... help each other: if one of us doesn't have to eat, or if she is ill, we're all there to care for her and the kids... I swear if they ask me, I'll come back. (Corrala activist Paqui, 2021)



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nKrpC-CfHTu4JIg3huvvggy4Ky1KMX4zV/view?usp=sharing>

On the other hand, they need to be sufficiently visible, stable, and recognizable to allow other actors to respond and engage in dialogue with them. Female activists relied on their partial inclusion in, and recognition by, alternative social movements, and their budding organisational arrangements (e.g., through horizontal assemblies and housing support centres) to create such safe spaces.

The group was very difficult, complicated — we knew that from the beginning. Some were women with complex personal histories, right? And I think that it worked well to rely on some of them who had natural leadership and pulled the others. And then we took on responsibilities, we made work groups, and each one signed up where they thought they could contribute more... a little bit like that, following some loose forms of participatory methodology. And then, for example, we met regularly... I don't know

how many times a week, but we did a thousand things: we did assembly workshops, community building activities to learn how to participate... some sort of provision of the rules of the game, a common framework... and we healed the fears about what we had gone through and we embraced ourselves for what might happen. (Corrala activist Vilma, 2015)

By strategically navigating in-between zones, they looked for interstices in the institutional and spatial environment that could provide them with a 'backstage' to develop and prepare their public activist performances while training and developing as activists.

At the end, what the women wanted was not even a solution to the housing itself. What they demanded was a kind of psychological support, understanding on the part of someone. What they need is to talk to people, right? I remember that, for example, the first videos we made to tell our story, the idea that almost all women repeated was "I have felt supported since we started meeting with the group", "I liked talking to other people who have my same problem; you feel that you are not alone". (Corrala activist, 2015)

The spaces provided more than training and experimentation. They became spaces for dialogue and healing, and were actively created to provide communal encounters amongst the female activists. In the case of Corrala Utopía, these spaces were transient but negotiated with local agents within neighbourhoods mostly affected by evictions.

We were looking for how to organise ourselves with the women... and we had no place to meet. But we kept going until we found the Corrala. And this is our perfect place... But before, we used to meet in the basement of a building under construction. We had little parties to introduce ourselves to the neighbours and so on... We had several meeting spots, and kept switching between the bar, the church and a barracks. (Corrala activist Vilma, 2015)

As such, these sites became spaces for performative dialogue, defined as such by the female activists.

It was their communal practice that brought these spaces into being performatively safe and it was their alliances that resulted in the physical space being defined as secured.

For Flo6x8 activists, the creation of the interventions involved a network of activists with a proven 'track record'. Their support of each other speaks of a permanent dialogue and precedes their involvement and will ensure continuation. Their physical spaces for rehearsal were mainly interlinked within the alternative network of flamenco studios in Seville, where flamenco artists, audiovisual professionals, and activists engaged in creative dialogue to put forward an economic and political claim.

The one cool thing with Flo6x8 is that you pick up the phone and call an electrician friend: "Hey, I need you to sort out a problem. We can't get into the *Santanderes* because the door is ironclad. Can you give me a hand?" And he says, "If it's for Flo6x8, I will." Why? Because it's really cool. If he saw that you were making it big, he would tell you, "How much money is there?". All this is based on trust (...) of

some people who have been there for a long time... When over the years people see that you've been active, shown initiative and that you're not moved by personal or economic interest, nor to get famous, then trust is generated. It is as simple as that. And when my phone rings and one of those people calls me, I'll pick it up and I'd pay a lot of attention, because whatever that person proposes is sacred to me... That's how things are, no more and no less... It would be great if things made more sense, if they were more coherent, right?, if they were part of a project, but it is just because there is an accumulated experience, and we build on that experience. (Flo6x8 activist Paca la Monea, 2015)

As we can see, both collectives face some strategic challenges whilst generating a space to claim in order for their voices to be heard within a given field of performers, collectives and organisations. Becoming a (female) activist requires to engage within a space of safety (backstage) and a space of display (frontstage). Whilst the invisibility of the former reflects on the tactical, the visibility of the latter is needed to potentially develop their cause, position themselves as valid partners, and create a more equal space for dialogue.

### *The frontstage of activist performances: Staging claims in public liminal spaces*

By performing activism, the members of Corrala Utopía and Flo6x8 shifted their social position and became transformed through their liminal experiences. The evicted housewife became the provider and public speaker. The flamenco dancer became the guerrilla warrior. Through people's expectations, they were also able to transition into a different form of order. As both collectives became active at the same time, we were able to engage as participant observers in the alliance by which Flo6x8 enabled Corrala Utopía activists to occupy a branch of Ibercaja bank, the owner of the building taken over by Corrala Utopía. The song writing, the time dedicated to learn flamenco codes, and the actual rehearsals provided a space to bond, relax, and engage amongst the two collectives and other activists and professionals, such as film and stage directors and academics.



The multiplicity of actors, the engagement between different disciplines, and varied inputs and roles bring to focus how dialogue is more than a conversation. For our collectives, organising the public

performances required a safe space to rehearse backstage so that activists could engage in dialogue with wider audiences in social media to challenge the financial power represented by the bank, forcing the bank to open a negotiation on the conditions of las corraleras, that was eventually joined also by representatives of the local and regional governments.

And at the same time, some people decided to call a demonstration at the main office of the regional government, just when we, the ombudsman, and the regional government were about to meet... And we always prepared each negotiation table beforehand with the ombudsman and the regional government representatives. That is one of the reasons we were so successful, because everyone knew where they were going, and the purpose of it all. (Corrala activist Verena, 2015)

The strategic going back and forth between safe and public spaces is essential to explaining the social phenomenon of female precarity activism. Occupying and reappropriating public locations is a way of 'creating space' for our female activists in places where symbolically, legally, and spatially there is no recognized place for them (e.g., bank branches). The sites where female precarity activists staged their claims were carefully chosen for their symbolic meaning and communicative power.



Moreover, the performativity and theatricality of staging protests against precarity becomes apparent when we examine how our activists not only appropriated but also transformed the spaces they occupied by provoking and opening them up to dialogues. An example are the Flo6x8 interventions where our flamenco activists provoked direct engagements with bank officials with their bodies and through dance.



### *Becoming (dis)engaged*

Activism as a dialogue does not stop when the public performances stop, not even when the female activists themselves are no longer engaged in their collectives. The nature of dialogue brings together traces of the past into the present to inform the future. This becomes more poignant when dialogical performativity is involved as the engagement of the body retains a mark, a movement, a dance or a shout that allows the possibility of future performances to come into play.

Activism has helped me to share, to think in a different way; to be more open even though I was already quite open... We are opening our minds all the time when the other person gives you another point of view that you think is a valid one. But I also have the impression that within that openness, I think it has paved the way for me, and paths that open into several other paths and then with that ramification... I had access to very interesting people. I have had very nice moments with them, unique experiences. I would not change anything of what I've lived. Some of those people are still here, and many moments I will never forget because they are already inside of me. As a woman, it has shaped me as a person, it has made me see that not everything is feminism, that not everyone who is active is an activist... And, I'm sorry to say, as a woman, I have felt the weight of the patriarchy full on. (Flo6x8 activist Noelia, 2021)

When the public display of activism is over and the performance finished, the female activists' dialogue continues through moments of reflective detachment (Glavenau, 2020, p. 137). They reflect not only about 'the self' and the new identities or skills they have developed, but also about the new perspectives gained through their performances. Thus, the public exposure resorts into some form of accountability that brings about, even years after they were involved, a greater sense of ethicality, and an awareness that other orientations (positive and negative) emerged through their engagement in dialogical organising.

You get up in the morning like an automaton, you have to go to the demonstration, you have to help in this eviction, this, that, the other... You get a full on busy schedule... I have fallen ill, I have become ill, and depressed... I mean, you get into a dynamic of marginality, and no, this is not... this is a bottomless pit, this is a road with no return. And you have to find a way to stop, to raise awareness, to fully engage in caregiving politics. (Corrala activist Peral, 2015)

This self-critique and constant revaluation enables improvements over time, a constant betterment that would not otherwise come. Female activism brings about the political as a way of doing, as a practice.

I need a space for my feelings. Once I arrived at my current home I realised that...my mistake at Corrala Utopía had been being strong, being dynamic, being too active. We had the matriarchs, the older ladies, and we also had people who worked in the shadows doing things that were not seen. That was my case and my mistake ... I don't know how, but the day of the eviction, we were camping in the main square, and I took a little gadget to do massages, and I was doing massages to my neighbours. I, the most tense person there, was massaging the others. (Corrala activist Marivi, 2021)



When reflecting about themselves as activists, they ponder the cost of being publicly accountable and becoming lost within the collective. Sometimes, in order to dialogue as equals with other institutions and collectives, they deny their specific achievements and talk with a public voice that, at times, might deny their work and accomplishments.

Because I don't know how to manage egos or how to deal with the socialisation of achievements... but I think that some women tend to socialise their success and then when you leave, they fuck you up and they don't care... So you have spent your whole life socialising your achievements and now you leave and want to be acknowledged? You should have beat your chest before... self-care is very important. I think we have to learn to be very sincere and very careful. As women, assertiveness is very necessary and I think we do not handle it collectively. (Corrala activist Eva, 2021)

Some other times, they forewent their needs, their selves, and their state of being to the point that the cost of remaining activists became too high whilst the struggle also fizzled out.

You know how many activists I know, women, with depression who have disappeared and don't want to see anyone ever again?... I mean, when I started to verbalise how I felt, people came to tell me "I'm feeling so ill". And then on a mental level... people with broken nerves and their heads spinning. (Corrala activist Clara, 2021)

Others also feel that engaging in activism has had negative effects, as it also resulted in their lives being more precarious than before. They felt pushed further down the margins with little chance or will to return to the life they lived before.

A bit disappointed with..., I don't want to return to what it was before, even though I had a good salary, around €1,900, but... I have learned many worthy things in this period (...) but it is also very taxing, full of exhaustion, people's depressions... It all seems very nice, but the backstage is also very hard. You don't even have time from your personal life for anything... So it's very complicated to understand that I don't want to go back to what I was doing before because it doesn't seem like the right way to live... but this is also very precarious... But, on a professional level, I am very down because I felt that I was a good worker and now part of my own identity is damaged. I am still working but without getting paid. That seems complicated to me to understand. (Corrala activist Peral, 2015)

Our female activists have partially moved to other forms of activism that reject the communal in favour of embedding the struggle into their everyday life and the use of social media to espouse their views as relevant public characters. Whilst most of them remain politically active, they carefully choose where to engage and take the time to negotiate a fair space of action and inaction where they, as individuals, can also feel of value.

I used to go to everything for a cause, but now I look very carefully at the coherence of the proposal they make when they call me. For example, they recently asked me (...) to do a workshop to raise awareness about the critical value of flamenco... but they almost didn't want to pay me. I mean, they want to give flamenco its place? How can you have the nerve to tell me that you want to raise the value of flamenco and tell me to pay for my own trip? Before, maybe I'd take it and leave whatever I had to do and I'd go and do it. And I'd feel good ... And then I'd think about it and feel abused. But then I'd

fall again, wouldn't I? Not anymore. Now I tell them "this is worth this". "We don't have money". "Oh, no?... Then use some of your salary to pay us." It's as easy as that... There is no other way. (Flo6x8 activist Maca, 2020)

Activism and its public struggles have also transcended physical spaces taking over some other contemporary fora. In fact, Flo6x8 performances were strategically directed as devices to engage in dialogue in the virtual realm. This enabled Internet and social media users to engage in public dialogues with the collective through the sharing, liking and commenting on the YouTube publications from the safety of their own intimate spaces. People replicated their actions as a way to engage others.

Our most radical collaborative dimension is the viralization on the Internet. We just release a video and there is practically no need to move it through the social networks because it is the social networks themselves that will share it... In this case, it happened just like that, without us realising it. Social media just took on and shared, shared the video to the point that just one of those replications has today 800 or 900 thousand views, and from that point on, all videos had quite an impact. (Flo6x8 activist Paca la Monea, 2015)

Whilst traditional demonstrations had the ability to visually and quantitatively perform the force of a cause by the occupation of streets, online activism in the case of Flo6x8 provided a way to generate alternative discourses in a participative manner within online communities. The viralization of their actions has been part of its success as a collective and a way to keep the conversation going. In fact, our digital ethnographic work allowed us to trace how the performances, as units of meaning, have been used and perceived as part of an ongoing contemporary dialogue. As such, throughout the life of our collectives, and precisely due to the impossibility of their (online) death, our female activists have been championed as heroines.

How great. It made me cry. I felt that this 'sacred' place... the temple dedicated to the God Money was beautifully desecrated and returned to the people, which is who it really belongs to. There is Hope. (YouTube comment, 2015)

But, they have also been viciously attacked, as the actions have also been contested by others of a diverse ideological spectrum.

Whoever wrote the lyrics is entitled by law to live on subsidies from the Regional Ministry of Equality of Andalucía. And she is probably already fed by them. The usual daily ration of victimhood of the gender lobby. Anything to justify the juicy subsidies to the cultural homophobic industry. (YouTube comment, 2019)

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our research explores *how a group of Spanish female activists perform activism through dialogical organising to fight precarity*. Our preliminary findings show that ‘becoming active’ is an ongoing dialogical, processual, and performative endeavour. It is only through being engaged as part of the collective that our respondents become fully active(/ists) and it is only by (dis)engaging from the collective that they can develop further or stop. Through our findings, we show activism as a collectively organised process, performed both in visible and invisible (backstage and frontstage) liminal spaces. This is a dialogical organising process based on generating new perspectives, engagements, and performances through the dialogues between the female activists fighting precarity and organisational, institutional, and public voices and audiences.

The performances against precarity were carried out as ‘public liminal’ acts. Flo6x8 and Corrala Utopía performances were enacted at a time of collective crisis, “when a whole society face[d] a major change” (Turner, 1977, p.456), and were mainly public in character (Turner, 1977, p.467). However, the performances required both backstage spaces, as well as framing everyday spaces (e.g., a bank branch office) as frontstage spaces opening them up from the routine world to enable the inclusion of alternatives to provoke dialogue. These liminal experiences, happening during occasions of significant transition or disruption, are what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) might refer to as ‘becomings’.

Our analysis shows how backstage ‘safe spaces’ were constructed by female activists to overcome barriers to political engagement and participation, to train other activists, to define and experiment with performance strategies, and to create new imaginaries. These spaces were typically informal, unrecognised, backdoor kinds of places (e.g., private houses, basements in common buildings), social ‘blind spots’ held together by the alliances with more recognised civic organisations (e.g., 15M in Corrala Utopía’s case) or the partial incorporation of the activists into institutions. The creation of safe spaces is a continuous pro-cess driven by the dialogical, embodied, and emotional practices of female activists. The collectively constructed ‘safety’ of these spaces provided female activists with

the necessary feelings of comfort, support, and recognition to enable them to make the shift from living ‘in the shadows’ to claiming rights in public spaces.

From the safety of the ‘backstage spaces’, research participants had to engage collectively and enter the public sphere through marches, *caceroladas*, taking over corporate and public spaces, performances, etc. to question and resist dominant voices. It takes significant effort for those who are marginalised to organise and be able to engage in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), where they are not treated as social equals to reciprocally and symmetrically deliberate matters of the common good. Indeed, as Fraser (1990, p.64) argues, the concept of the public sphere as open and accessible to all as social equals acts as a “mask for domination” that “usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates”. As Fraser (1990, p.64) further notes, pretending that inequalities of status —e.g., gender, class, ethnicity— are not present when they are “does not foster participator parity”.

The city’s corners, streets and squares, as well as bank branches and financial institutions, offered activists a ‘front- stage’ to stage their performances against precarity. These insights support the findings of authors who emphasise the crucial role that public spaces play for staging, materialising, and imagining alternative ways of being active in the public sphere (Swerts, 2017). Indeed, it is in public spaces made liminal that the imaginaries crafted in the ‘backstage’ of safe spaces are put to the test. It is also here that female activists effectively transform themselves from passive objects into active subjects. The symbolic malleability of public spaces allows these activists to publicly reveal and contest their conditions of precarity through discursive and embodied performances. This demonstrates that public space does not merely operate as a back-drop for activists’ practices, but that staging performances requires activists to actively erect, maintain, and (de)construct those spaces. In the absence of public voice and recognition, precarious subjects thus use public spaces to create spaces for contestation. Figure 1 below outlines the ambivalence generated in liminal conditions where activists move back and forth between invisibility and visibility. We do not aim to indicate a

clear-cut relationship between invisibility and safety, nor vice versa, but rather to pose these terms in a continuum to highlight the ambivalence of interstitial spaces (Swerts, 2017).

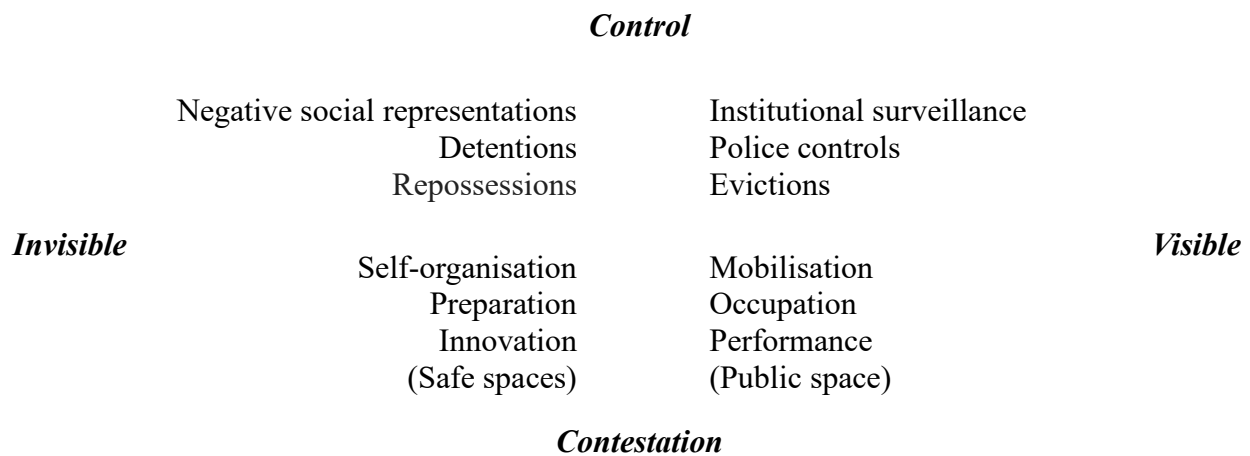


Figure 1. Spatialities of control and contestation (adapted from Swerts, 2017)

Performances were extended through social media as e.g. YouTube videos (digital footprints) remain after the performance is finished and become tools that can be used for teaching how to get organised in the future. Past, present, and future dialogues are therefore generated through the digitally captured performances. The digital videos are themselves a construction of a dialogue, with actual and future audiences engaged in developing comments, discussions and new perspectives and footprints, enabling those that are living in precarious conditions to revive and leverage those encounters.

The female activism, as we have seen performed in public liminal spaces and provoking and opening dialogues, was able to generate the potential for conditions to change, for new futures, and particularly for having a voice. It also generated public engagement for hope and solidarity. Both gender and precarity became contested and new alternatives and ways of seeing and doing in relation to both gender and precarious conditions became possible.

With our research we aim to open up the notion of dialogue in organising beyond its traditional focus on language and communication by incorporating the use of interstitial and liminal spaces to craft ‘backstage’ and ‘frontstage’ spaces that are key to generate the conditions for a constructive exchange of perspectives and where inner, proximal and distant and even future dialogues through the footprints

left by, for example, the digital videos enable the dialogue with future audiences to continue even after the performance has finished.

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