

PART A

6.3. Childcare commons in Poble Sec: Mothers' sympoieisis, neighborhood politics of care and municipal(ist) policy (2015-2020)

This section introduces the practice and problematic of childcare commons in Poble Sec, outlining the research questions, concepts and methodology I used to approach this aspect of commoning and care. We will map out why and how childcare matters to commons and vice versa, and how different conceptual approaches enable us to understand childcare as a key matter of social reproduction and feminist as well as anti-capitalist politics. We will begin to see how mothers' networks and childcare groups subvert dichotomies between the private and the public and open onto new paradigms for struggle and the political. This section thus sketches out some of the key insights we may draw from looking at childcare commons, identifying some of my main concerns and referents.

6.3.1. Introduction

By organizing care work in a way that is not mediated by market or state, commoning care implies a range of practices that provide various degrees of autonomy from both. It involves performing care labor –whose benefits are to be received and shared by all– collectively and cooperatively. Perhaps most importantly, commoning care would mean organizing care work in a non-patriarchal, egalitarian and democratic way (Akbulut 2017).

Starting points, research questions and hypotheses

Care commons, childcare commons, commoning care, reproductive commons: in this report, we shall be discussing (child)care and social reproduction as a matter of *the common*, of *commons* as well as of *commoning*. Each of these three latter terms have different inflections and consequences for a politics of care commons. 'Commons' refer to initiatives, dispositifs and infrastructures, 'commoning' implies a myriad practices and relationships of sharing, complicity, collaboration, networking, value-creating and reproducing, and 'the common' means matters that act as the basis and connective tissue between living beings (rather than resources): air, water, etc. We will be hearing about and learning from concrete experiences of childcare commoning in Barcelona, in order to reflect upon the politics of care commons in the context of late neoliberalism in the global North.

This report presents the results of a 2017-2020 research project on childcare commons in the neighborhood of Poble Sec, Barcelona, undertaken by myself as a local mother. It focuses particularly on self-organized, sympoietic¹⁵ nurseries –'grupos de crianza

¹⁵ This term came to me via Donna Haraway, who picked it up from Beth Dempster, a researcher who coined this term in 1998 –much in tune with Lynn Margulies' 'syntrophogenesis' –to describe systems that are not autopoietic (self-organizing) but rather sym-poietic (organizing together, in relation, interdependently). I believe it is a worthwhile feminist and ecological practice to always add or even replace 'sympoieisis' when we speak of self-organization processes that interdepend with a broader

compartida' for babies and toddlers –in the context of mothers' commoning, local solidarity economies and the municipalism of Barcelona en Comú. In a context of urban individualization and precarity, the 'grupos de crianza compartida' set out to bring together *childrearing* (crianza; broadly speaking the pedagogical, educational and nurturing dimension of accompanying a child in its growth and development) and *childcare* (cuidados; the labors and organizations of care-giving), through a sharing [compartir] of different modalities of care: caring about, taking care of, care-giving, care-receiving, caring-with (Tronto 1994). I shall be returning to Tronto's definitions of care frequently in order to define caring commons not just as crucially engaging *care-giving* and *care-receiving*, as sustained activity and labor, on top of the dimensions of *caring about* and *taking care of*, but also *caring-with* as proto-ecological assemblages (see also Zechner & Hansen 2020).

These groups are important examples of childcare commoning because they combine and articulate matters of pedagogy, care and organization, in ways that can transform all these dimensions, and build sustainable alternatives to the public and private nursery systems for bringing up children and creating community. In the terms of Joan Tronto's ethics of care, they combine concern (caring-about) with action (taking care of) and dedication as well as labor (care-giving) in reciprocal ways (care-receiving), as well as solidary relations to the neighborhood and beyond (caring-with). They may be seen as social-familial-local ecologies of care, as care or reproductive commons that are necessarily imperfect and impure, that 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway) in the very material and relational tissues of the everyday and in the quest for commoning not just childcare but also childrearing, building extended families (Zechner & Hansen 2019) or 'tribús' (Del Olmo 2016). The kinds and strategies of commoning they invent and deploy are particular and situated, and they will be discussed here across the different dimensions they comprise: childcare groups (grupos de crianza), mothers' networks and Whatsapp groups.

This research sets out to open up thus a field of commons practice and debate as located in the sphere of reproduction and as based in a politics of care. The analysis of the politics of care and reproduction within commons has seen increasing attention in research and cultural practice in recent years, drawing on histories and writings of authors like Silvia Federici, yet concrete investigations of contemporary practices of childcare are still new and few (for instance the work of Christel Keller Garganté 2015, Ezquerro & Mansilla 2017, in Barcelona). My modest offerings here include a transversal reading across a series of feminist currents and theorizations –care ethics (Tronto 1994, Raid 2009, Puig della Bellacasa 2017), social reproduction feminisms (Federici), feminist economics (Perez-Orozco 2014, Knittler & Haidinger 2016), cyberfeminisms and interspecies feminisms (Haraway 2016) –aiming to address systemic as well as relational, political as well as economic, and embodied as well as technological (in the sense of Foucault) dimensions. I hope to contribute a grain of salt and seed to these diffuse fields by relaying some examples of childcare

range of processes (as pretty much all organization does).

commoning from Poble Sec in Barcelona, with a specific focus on how these intersect and co-emerge with neighborhood and municipal politics and communities.

These examples stem from a special period of political experimentation in Spain, that was inaugurated by the 15M movement in 2011 and further developed into powerful feminist as well as municipalist movements. Commoning and childcare are thus inseparable from the politics of social movements as well as institutions. The relation of these commons to the public and private is complex and complicated. When speaking of childcare, 'private' does not refer to the private sector of economies so much as it refers to the enclosed spaces of the home, and 'public' does not just mean the abstract sum of state services and infrastructures but directly harks back to local histories of claiming space and infrastructures, to neighborhood and municipalist struggles and their gains. Both the public and commons models are limited in what they can do. By bringing the commons' singularity and the public's universalism into play with one another, the childcare groups invent modes of (self-)governance that can mark new political horizons, in always impure, lively, troubled, unfinished and onward ways. Mothers' networks, too, are spaces of commoning that subvert the dichotomy between public and private. They create lively links between public institutions/spaces (health centers, playgrounds, nurseries) and the private spaces so pivotal to childcare (the home, the family). These networks, though informal and noncommittal, often end up being stronger spaces of reference than both public and family systems.

Pedagogy plays an important role at all levels of this politics of commoning care, based in an understanding of the need to develop bases and tools for (common) understanding, not just when it comes to working with children but also in self-organization and policy -making. Feminist care commoning foregrounds how relations and ties ('vinculos') are subversive and transformative to politics. Across the movements, neighborhoods, new municipalist platforms and institutional actors, the period in question here saw an incessant, multifaceted and complex back and forth between practice and thought, where new concepts grow out of social composition and collective organization rather than being proposed by public intellectuals or scholars mainly. I attempt to stay true to this mode of theorization and storytelling by reflecting lively and ongoing debates and conceptual productions, and the modes of mediation and translation these implied, without trying to fit these into given academic or political categories. I understand commoning as an autopoietic process that generates its own singular logics and collective configurations, as a matter of subjectivity and relations rather than ideology or identities primarily.

This project sets out to translate between practices and discourses of feminist, childcare and neighborhood commoning across Spanish-language and anglophone contexts, since the existing Spanish-based literature on childcare groups (Ezquerria & Mansilla 2017, Keller-Garganté 2017) and the politics of childrearing (del Olmo 2013, León 2017, Llopis 2015, Nociones Comunes 2013, Malo & León 2016) does not frequently echo or translate into Anglophone contexts. There has been a wealth of

practices and reflections on childrearing, commons and care in Spain since 2011, which could contribute a lot to debates and experimentations in anglophone contexts and beyond. Again, Silvia Federici has been one of the rare figures moving between the two contexts, being able thus to develop conceptual frameworks that take both Hispanic and anglophone feminist currents and genealogies into account. Broadly speaking, we may say that the corresponding UK- and US-based debates have focused more on wage labor and welfare when thinking about commons and social reproduction, while Spanish and Latin American debates have dwelled more on community organization and alternative institutions. A difference easily explained by the different forms neoliberalism and enclosures take in the global division of power, labor and extraction.

Spain to some extent sits between those worlds, with both a relatively developed welfare state, though young and weak compared to other EU countries, and a rich history of autonomous reproduction, community organization and local struggle. Poble Sec's childcare groups feed off both worlds, in that they mostly start through encounters at the public healthcare center's post-partum classes, linking into lively neighborhood networks of communication and organization. They also oscillate between the public and the community models in their orientation towards the municipalist present and their own future:

Should the grupos de crianza strive to get funding, become recognized and licensed? Should they affirm their autonomy and disengagement from municipal institutions and policies? Is there a middle way or a transversal approach?

These questions resonate strongly throughout this study, partially resolved in varying ways at varying moments, yet remaining open in the period and contexts here described. My interest in investigating these questions was not and is not to find and relay a final answer or truth, but to give account of the debates, affects, movements, relations and decision-making processes that confront this tension between the public, the commons and the private entails. I aim for my writing to serve as a guide to understanding complexity and the interlinkings of politics, relationality and affect, to shed light on tactical and strategic moments in their situatedness and singularity.

The English language is also a key means to dialogue with the Greek context this research is embedded within, as part of the *Heteropolitics* project and in resonance with childcare, commoning and feminist practices. The *Heteropolitics* project, running from 2017 to 2020 and funded by the Horizon2020 program of the European Research Council, was based at Aristotle university Thessaloniki, and set out to deepen knowledges of divergent commoning practices in Southern Europe. My research on childcare and municipalism in Barcelona ran alongside a set of other studies undertaken by colleagues from the *Heteropolitics* team, benefiting from their legal, anthropological and theoretical viewpoints on commons, and was generously guided and supported by principal investigator Alexandros Kioupkiolis. The commons became very popular as political and experimental framework in Mediterranean Europe –first in Spain and Italy, then Greece perhaps– as the financial and social

crisis of 2008 took its tolls. The *Heteropolitics* project has allowed us to follow up on these developments some ten years after and to engage in labors of translation and comparison between the three countries.

This text on childcare is, thus, part of my larger research project on commons in Barcelona, and it is followed by and entangled with my other focus of research: the municipalisms of 2015-19 in Spain, and particularly in Barcelona, with a view to their micropolitical dimensions. As the reader will soon notice, municipalism keeps spilling over into my accounts of childcare commoning. Indeed, these two contexts inform one another in significant ways in the real life of Barcelona at this time. The feminist politics of Barcelona en Comú, just like the self-organizational practices in Poble Sec I depart from here, refuse to have themselves dissected and (once more) separated out into an ontology that sees care and politics, macropolitical and micropolitical, or everyday and institutions, as opposing poles. Hence, there will be neither a pure account of childcare nor of municipalism: everything will come mixed and entangled, as it is in reality. Similarly, there can be no separating the ‘case’ or the practice from the theory. We will be focusing on the commoning practices of self-organized childcare groups and their neighborhood accomplices mostly, but we will also see how the municipalist politics of Barcelona en Comú often practically, tactically and strategically articulate politics of the commons within public frameworks, in ways that do not merely promote islands of commoning but aim to broadly transform the city and its modes of relation and inhabitation. Inhabitation and space are key sites of struggle in neoliberal times, as urban geographers like David Harvey have amply demonstrated, where speculation on land and property, as well as precarity and coercive mobility produce fragile communities, precarious care chains and many contested urban sites (Zechner, Cobo-Guevara & Herbst 2017).

My work here particularly reflects two of the key research questions of the *Heteropolitics* project, concerning the relationships between the state and the commons –if and how the state could support the commons– and more concretely, the relationship between the commons and municipalism.

My research endeavor started out with a series of situated questions regarding care, reproduction, childcare and commons. *How may we think, define and test reproductive commons in the case of collectively organized childcare in an urban center? What kinds of care networks do they draw on and enable? There is a saying that ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ -how does this reflect on Poble Sec, a highly organized and solidary neighborhood in Barcelona that is indeed sometimes compared to a village for its density of relations?*

And more generally: *What is specific about reproduction commoning, and childcare commoning? What does it mean to think commons from the viewpoint of care and care ethics, and from the situated knowledges of the neighborhood and parenting? What genealogies, discourses, relations, infrastructures and embodiments does the childcare commoning in Poble Sec draw on?*

Leading into some critical political questions: *When do childcare projects merit the name of commons? What are their politics, and what problems and risks do they face – of collapse, sustainability, appropriation, co-optation, exclusion? Who are they driven by and who do they serve? Are they merely self-referential projects of the white urban middle class, or do they manage to reach beyond these identities?*

Then there was also a second block of questions that drove my research, which I initially associated more with municipalism and macropolitical questions, but which soon seeped into my considerations about childcare commoning too, since the specific political-institutional context of Barcelona between 2017-2020 was marked by a claim not just to politics but also to policies of the commons (as led by Barcelona en Comú).

How can we think the relations between the private, the public and the commons when it comes to childcare? What struggles and tensions, but also what complicities and inventions, happen between self-organized childcare projects and the municipal institutions and their agents? Can there be such a thing as policies of childcare commoning, or will these inevitably lead to corrupting and weakening the commoning aspect of these kindergarten projects? We are often aware of the claims that commoners make on the public system, but what claims does the public paradigm make on commons? Should commons be funded? Can commons and commoning be articulated with the claims to universality of public welfare, or are they a danger to it? Can feminist viewpoints help with articulating care, commons and universality in new ways, beyond the discourses of a feminization of politics?

This leads us to the broader questions the *Heteropolitics* project poses, such as *How do commons in general, and childcare commons, more specifically in this case, as a collectively self-organized making and ‘management’ of childcare in terms of a common and shared good, contribute to the promotion of other forms of politics and social relations and historical transformation more broadly? Does childcare commoning point towards collective autonomy and heteronomy, equality, justice, solidarity, sharing, openness and plurality? If commons are to be transformative social practices that lead not just to more democracy but also to more equality (making democracy accessible to all), then what basic things must they achieve in this sense? Do commons always start from shared cultural codes or can they, by departing from shared needs, also create new cultural codes between diverse actors?* I will answer these larger questions little by little, with all the contradictions and ambivalences this involves, throughout this text.

My analysis here will take us through an argument for situated and embedded research into understanding care networks and neighborhood dynamics, whereby we come to understand the local context and define childcare and care as key aspects of commoning. I will be noting the great collective intelligence and care that has been put into furthering childcare commons in Poble Sec - by families, carers, healthcare workers -as well as in Barcelona overall- by the feminist municipalists of Barcelona en Comú and the highly active and experimental social as well as institutional fabric in the city. We find that childcare is actually a matter at the heart of municipalism, not

just as a matter of women's participation but also as the touchstone of the politics of care that Barcelona en Comú has developed across their internal workings as well as political outlook and policies. I will be showing that while much remains to be done, we are looking here at an extremely fruitful and experimental period of political work, where a myriad of previously unthinkable things become possible in politics.

My main aims in this project were (1) to research –to take up, question and produce knowledge– not just through reading and observing but also through practice and relation; (2) to create a situated research set-up that would enable me to inhabit a dynamic, organic and embodied back-and-forth between the lived local dimension, broader debates in the city and social movements, and the academic framework of the *Heteropolitics* project; (3) to imminently and intimately relate the micro- and macropolitical dimensions (Guattari & Rolnik 2006), amongst other things through a refusal to rigidly separate questions of childcare from those of municipalism; (4) and finally to give account of some processes that are otherwise invisibilized, undervalued, silenced, by focusing on care and micropolitics in my studies –a deed particularly in relation to the Spanish political context, which often tends to be abstracted, mystified or even fetishized in English-language accounts.

This text will take you from this introduction into definitional and theoretical implications of care and feminist epistemologies on the commons, opening onto some specific situations and debates on childcare commoning in Poble Sec, in order to arrive, towards the end of this chapter, at some of the implications of childcare commoning on policy and urban space. I have chosen to keep this text on childcare commons closely interlinked with debates on municipalism and micropolitics (and indeed also interlocked in the sense that this text leads directly into my study and analysis of the micropolitics of municipalism in Barcelona 2015-2020). At the end of this long text, you find two appendixes that give a detailed insight into the situation, networks and projects in Poble Sec, as well as an autoethnographic account of my experiences and learning process as a mother and participant within this field.

6.3.2. Methodology

My research as part of the Heteropolitics project ran from 2017-20 in Barcelona, yet my implications with this place and 'field' precede and exceed the project, since I practice situated and embedded research. As a mother whose child was born in 2016, I went through the experiences of childcare myself, and drew on the ties I built in this context in order to render this research collectively relevant. Apart from interviewing local actors (some ten formal interviews, some 10 informal ones) I have been in ongoing conversations with parent-mother-activist-researcher-teacher-neighbors, and I attempted to share not just my questions and findings but also resources within this local ecosystem.

In 2017, I ran two workshops with mothers from my post-partum group, doing care-network mappings. In 2018, I co-organized the 'Comunes y Crianza' colloquium together with a handful other local researcher-activist-parents. This was a precious

occasion for continuing and deepening some conversations and debates both locally and from my research, and its session transcripts are one of my key sources in this text. I am grateful and glad this could happen in such a way, both to the *Heteropolitics* project for its openness and to my local companions for taking up the offer.

My research is thus focused on the neighborhood of Poble Sec, and wider Barcelona to some extent, and therein it has proceeded not just through militant and participatory action research but also through a lot of continuous and implicated observation and listening. Being part of a lively Whatsapp group of 80 mothers was a crucial part of understanding the local ecosystem of mutual aid and care, as were playground visits, conversations, etc. This situated (Haraway 1988), embodied and care-based research method is solidly grounded in feminist politics.

6.3.3. Why and how commons?

Rather than a technically minded study of a specific childcare model, this report seeks to give an idea of a social *ecosystem* of childcare, as implicated in local networks, struggles, debates, politics. Within ecosystems, relations are complex and changing, always part of different dynamics –symbiosis, competition, parasitism, mutualism, predation, commensalism, etc.– and so I try to give account of some cosymbiotic genealogies, their tensions and inventions. This approach draws on analyses of commons as systems (DeAngelis 2017; 2019) and as relations: ‘Commons are not things, but social relations –of cooperation and solidarity. And commons are not givens but processes. In this sense, it is apt to talk of commoning, a term coined by one-time Midnight Notes collaborator Peter Linebaugh’ (Barbagallo, Beuret & Harvie 2019: 6).

In this endeavor I draw on systemic approaches to the commons that refuse to separate resources from relations, internal from external dynamics, or micro- and macropolitical dynamics, but rather insist on the importance of seeing these dimensions as a dynamic whole. In this sense, I owe much to autonomist-feminist inspired theories of the commons as social systems (De Angelis 2017; 2019) and of commons as constellations of struggle (Federici & Caffentzis) that are embedded within broader dynamics of capitalism, neocolonialism, patriarchy, ablism and so forth, and cannot be considered as separate from those (for more examples on this approach, see also Barbagallo, Beuret & Harvie 2019).

One basic tenet in this kind of research on and with commons is the research into relations, constellations, tactics and conjunctures –rather than a search for broadly generalizable organizational principles or recipes, or indeed technical or prescriptive definitions of commons or commoning. No commons without context, complexity, contradictions –and indeed also conditions, change, care. Or, in the words of De Angelis: ‘...once we understand commons as social systems, we realize that the tension between commons’ endogenous and exogenous forces is a tension that necessitates productive articulation rather than categorical differentiation and contraposition’ (De Angelis 2019). Easier said than done, particularly in academic

cultures that stake their claims to neutrality based on principles of dissection and categorization that stem from (classical) natural science. Hence my insistence on entangling childcare and municipalism, care and institutions, etc.

De Angelis opposes Ostrom's emphasis on endogenous matters - 'insufficient coordination skills, a fall in trust, burn-outs, diminished purpose, excessive free-riding, an inability to adapt effectively to a new context' (De Angelis 2019: 218). When it comes to her description of failing commons, De Angelis (De Angelis, Stavrides & An Architektur 2010) dismisses related individualist notions of 'the tragedy of the commons' (Garret Hardin) that blame failure on supposed selfishness or human incapacity rather than systemic forces. My emphasis on micropolitics, and indeed also on interdependence, could not be farther from such Rousseauian notions of individual failure or insufficiency. The focus of my analysis of relations, affects, networks and mutual dependency is on the inventiveness, openness and generosity that enables both limits and potentials of commons. I am interested in enabling constraints (following Brian Massumi and Alfred North Whitehead) and in collective intelligence when it comes to trying to stake out ways of living, inhabiting, caring and working that run counter to the dominant neoliberal logics of individualism, profit, efficiency, expansion or development. As George Caffentzis says, '...the anti-capitalist supporters of the commons... look to the larger class context to determine the dynamics of 'the drama of the commons' (Caffentzis 2012). In this sense, a difference between reproduction commons theories and commons theories like those of Ostrom is also that the former are transformative, positing an active social and political potential and role of commons, and that they take the gendered as well as class and racial dimension of commoning into account (an exemplary case of this is Federici 2004).

At the core of this is the question of resisting enclosures and recuperating space for anti-capitalist, decolonial, anti-patriarchal modes of relation and conviviality: not as isolated islands but as sympoietic zones within wider contexts. De Angelis notes that this kind of 'radical concept of the commons has only re-emerged recently' (De Angelis 2019: 210). Federici and Caffentzis, too, emphasize this anti-capitalist aspect of commoning, noting that many times cooperation can and does become captured by capital or the state (examples here range from platform capitalism to free labor to tamed unions, etc.). I agree on the importance of a differentiation between resistant and mainstreaming processes of commoning, while at the same time recognizing the difficulty –or outright impossibility and indeed, also, undesirability sometimes– of characterizing processes in one sense or another.

Commoning is based in processes of cooperation where there are always several forces at play, and the tactics and solutions they invent and adopt vis-a-vis capital and the state merit careful consideration before they can be categorized and judged, hence the care I take in laying out the different aspects, tensions and forces at stake in childcare commoning in Poble Sec and Barcelona. The complex and ambivalent relation between the commons and the public/state is a recurring problematic in this

study. Here ‘the state’ comes in the form of municipal institutions, themselves partly subverted by municipalist movements and histories (from Barcelona en Comú to the republican anti-fascist municipalism of the 20th century). The meaning of claiming or re-claiming public services and infrastructures, and social rights -which may be seen as a mode of ‘commoning the public’- is a radical mode of struggle and, indeed, of commoning in contemporary Spain and Barcelona, as housing movements from the PAH (Colau & Alemany 2014), the Marea movements for healthcare, education and so forth, or indeed movements for the welcoming and regularization of migrants and refugees show.

In this sense, analyzing relations and affects has the purpose of deepening our understanding of the lived realities of inhabiting this tension, ambivalence and also openness between the commons and the public, as it existed in Barcelona during the time this study refers to. A constant labor of trying to detect both moments and dynamics of weakening, corruption and subsumption, as well as moments and dynamics of empowerment, rooting and growth in commons, my analysis goes by the Spinozian principle of investigating what increases and decreases our capacity to act, collectively and across different phases and configurations. I attempt to provide a modest but dense account of some of the phases that both childcare and municipalist commoning went through in the period from 2015 to 2020, from the viewpoint of struggles of horizons and capacities for action and for building collective power. The lines between the inside and the outside of the community and the institution are not always clear then. Agents may be impure in their positions, relations, movements and tactics, and a myriad of tactics are being tested and invented in this open political arena, as contradicting strategies vis-a-vis commons and the state come to play in manifold and dynamic ways.

While this project is focused on commons, I also share the approach of Barbagallo, Beuret and Harvie (2019: 6) when, in the spirit of Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis, they refuse to see commons as ‘a panacea for the issues that beset the contemporary left,’ as a master signifier to read all problems and struggles through. The commons might more properly be seen as filling ‘a lacuna in radical thought, providing a way in which we might practically work out how we are to live with each other and the world without the violence of the state or the rule of capital’ (Barbagallo, Beuret & Harvie: 6). To be sure, crafting care commons is a major task at *any* scale in societies that privilege individualism, nuclear families and the outsourcing of care. It is this entanglement of (life) practice and thought, however minor it might appear, that I am concerned with here, attempting to provide a contribution to rooted, situated praxis as much as to itinerant thought and translocal theorization.

6.3.4. Reproductive commons

The particular angle on commons most relevant to my research on childcare is that of reproduction. This strand of commons thought has been inaugurated by Silvia Federici to a large extent, in synergy with autonomist and Marxist feminism. Federici

most poignantly connected primitive accumulation with women's labor and bodies, thinking the problem of enclosure from the viewpoint not just of land and resources but also of relations and care (Federici 2004; 2012; 2019). In this view, reproduction commons need to be considered from a dual viewpoint: 'In societies dominated by capitalism, people are reproduced as workers but also, at the same time, they are reproduced as people whose lives, desires and capabilities exceed the role of the worker' (Barbagallo, Beuret & Harvie 2019). There is a tension between autonomy and heteronomy inherent in this kind of commons thought –stemming obviously from its autonomist and feminist roots– that sometimes embraces ambivalence while at other moments taking clear sides vis-a-vis capital and the state. Furthermore, reproduction commons exceed both the idea of a predominance of the immaterial, as in theories of immaterial, digital, knowledge commons, in autonomist Marxism, and of reproduction as revolving entirely around women, as in some feminist theories, or of the social and economic. The reproduction perspective on commons encompasses, thus, many layers and dynamics, across micro- and macro, waged and other types of labor, care and reproduction, everyday life and capitalism, etc. At its best, it allows for a transversal analysis of commons that can 'locate reproduction as the strategic site from which to build and sustain power' (De Angelis 2019: 220).

Massimo de Angelis, in a text summing up the reproduction commons perspective of Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis, notes four of its insights and potentials: (1) to identify 'reproduction commoning as the process through which collective interest and mutual bonds are generated' -what I am speaking about in terms of organizing around needs and of needs shaping shared interests in this study on childcare; (2) reproduction commoning as 'the first line of resistance against a life of enslavement,' relating to the possibility to reproduce one's own conditions and means of survival; (3) as a way to delink reproduction from capital's measure of things, from its values, from its line of command, and (4) in consequence, also 'decoupling from systems of violence, the prison, the war machine, the custom office...' (De Angelis 2019: 219). And perhaps most importantly for the context of neoliberalism and precarity my research speaks of, 'Through reproduction commoning we turn the abstract conception of solidarity into a living collective body, which develops its resilience vis-a-vis capital, better able to endure capital's myriad attacks' (De Angelis 2019: 220).

To this, I add two key aspects in my research, and a concept. First, speaking of the reproduction of bodies and of resilience and resistance, childcare can of course be a key site for the production of other kinds of subjects and subjectivities, that escape or subvert the link between the school and the factory or the office, defying the notion that education should serve to produce docile or excellent worker-subjects. Radical pedagogy, when combined with a commoning-based organization of sites of education, can brew a very powerful mix for anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, feminist subjectivation. This last point brings me to a second key aspect of my viewpoint on commons, one that is omnipresent and that I will be exploring in particular in relation to the micropolitics of municipalism: commons as sites of the

production of subjectivity. The production of counter-hegemonic conditions, economies and institutions can never exist durably or radically (rootedly) without a concomitant production of subjectivities, as embodiments, knowledges, cultures (see for instance also Guattari & Rolnik 2006, Zechner, Cobo-Guevara & Herbst 2017, Vercauteren 2007). Commons and commoning have to be inhabitable, embody-able, else they are mere abstractions or impositions doomed to die or turn into dead institutions.

Finally, looking beyond the framework of autonomist-Marxist and autonomist-feminist commons thought, it is useful to take into account the notions of cosymbiosis or symbiogenesis, as present in the work of feminist scientists and scholars such as Lynn Margulies, Donna Haraway (2016) or Anna Tsing (2017). These offer a complex and refined way of thinking about the relations between autonomy and heteronomy, as well as the formation of subjects and their milieus (in line with the thought of Gilbert Simondon). Commons and capital co-evolve and feed off one another, in a metastable way, that can tend or resolve one way or another, yet knows no pure subjects, no autonomy proper, no outside. Commons in this sense, which is indeed the sense shared by theorists of reproduction commoning, are not islands or utopian enclaves. Rather, commoning is about strengthening a certain tendency or dynamic of collectively determining one's own cultures, means, conditions, with the outcome always remaining open. What I aim to explore in this report are not major theories, all-encompassing notions or grand solutions, but rather ethical-political challenges, minor but key analytical tools (transversal, transformative, intersectional) and situated accounts of practice.

6.4. Situating ourselves: childcare and self-organization in Poble Sec (2017-20)

In this section I present some of the key characteristics of the social, political and economic context of the grupos de crianza compartida in Poble Sec (during 2017-20). This gives us an overview of some of the key actors, dynamics and numbers concerning childcare commoning in the neighborhood, as well as some of the major lines of local debate and reflection concerning collectively managed childcare. The role of mothers' networks and sympoietic commoning emerges as crucial to Poble Sec's lively social ecosystem, as do the labors of a midwives and the local public health centers these exist within. Again, we shall see how the political resides in -and commons emerge from- everyday gestures and labors in the spheres of care and reproduction. In outlining how economic and financial dynamics condition the grupos de crianza, we also begin to see the concrete difficulties, aporias and contradictions they face. We will find that the need for slow, organic social growth is characteristic of commoning, wherein relations and not just aims are at the center. I will be arguing that, with Tronto, we might develop more specifically care-based definitional criteria for commons: that they engage not just caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care-receiving, but also caring-with, as proper ecological assemblages. This section concludes with an autobiographic account that relays the ups and downs of inhabiting and initiating childcare groups.

‘The mother’s whatsapp group is better than calling 112 [the healthcare hotline]’ (Local saying amongst parents in Poble Sec)

6.4.1. Who looks after children in Poble Sec?

Poble Sec is a neighborhood situated in central Barcelona,¹⁶ with 40.358 inhabitants (all figures 2017), out of which approximately 1200¹⁷ are children 0-3 years old. Who looks after these children?

- At least half, some 600 children, are taken care of by their parents or in informal care arrangements
- 20% go to local public nurseries. There are about 209 places in 3 local, publicly run nurseries of the municipality and autonomous community, 20% being the legally prescribed quota¹⁸
- some 20-30 children more go to public nurseries in adjacent neighborhoods
- about 18% go to private nurseries
- and about 100 children (about 8% of the total population) are part of *grupos de crianza compartida*

The self-organized childcare projects –*grupos de crianza compartida*– thus account for a considerable proportion of early-age childcare in Poble Sec. The number of places that are available each year varies, since projects come and go, but on average they account for up to 10% of local childcare provision.

These groups mostly emerge out of mothers’ networks and post-partum groups, in the case of Poble Sec from the groups of midwife Pepi Domínguez at the local health center, in particular. They become very powerful platforms of mutual support and communication, and make up the primary vector of childcare commoning in the neighborhood, meaning that women who attend (the majority of local pregnant women do) build non-biological mutual networks around their children from an early

¹⁶ More precisely, in the Sants-Montjuïc district, couched between the port, the Montjuïc hill and the neighborhoods of the Raval, Sant Antoni, the Eixample and Sants. It is a neighborhood with historically high numbers of migrants (initially mostly internal, now mainly foreign, mainly from Pakistan, Italy and the Philippines) and a traditionally lower-income population (76% of the median income in Barcelona in 2016) See the website of Barcelona’s statistics department for demographic tables and comparisons: <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/catala/index.htm>, accessed 3/3/2020.

¹⁷ This is a rounded off number between the number 1034, cited by Lucia Zandigiacomi at the Comunes y Crianza Colloquium, and the number 1372, cited by the Catalan Department d’ Estadística for 2018. More broadly, of the population of Poble Sec 12.4% are aged between 0-15 years, some 44,2% are women, and 30.7% are of non-Spanish origin. We are dealing with a neighborhood whose population is ageing and shrinking slightly, as well as featuring more non-nationals, in line with the general demographic development in the city. See the website of Barcelona’s statistics department for demographic tables and comparisons: <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/catala/index.htm>, accessed 3/3/2020.

¹⁸ This corresponds to the mandatory 20% of public childcare provision required by the Generalitat of Catalunya and to the approximately 19.5% of public places held by children aged 0-2 in the city of Barcelona (Sindic 2015). At the level of the city, for ages 0-2, an additional 20-22% of children are in private daycare (Sindic 2015).

age onwards, rather than only at the time children enter nursery or school. Starting from this strong support around birth and baby-care, many post-partum mothers soon invent minor dispositifs of childcare-sharing, giving rise to a desire to create more intimate and flexible options of continuous early-age childcare.

These groups, forming a shared vision and defining needs, usually find a trained educator to accompany them ('acompañante' is the name given to this person), then find a space (for rent usually), they constitute an association and they begin a (initially always experimental) routine of daily childcare. A key element in their success is the collective that starts them, as well as the time and economic horizon within which projects emerge. The more organically, carefully and slowly –the less similar to the market– they can constitute themselves, the more likely they are to build good collective process, to debate and clarify doubts and tensions, to get information and take legal and administrative steps in time, to get the children used to the educators, to find and equip a decent space, and to reach out to the neighborhood so as to fill places and gather support. Their ethos is that parents, teachers and children are in constant feedback, and constitute a strong care network or 'tribú'¹⁹ -recognizing that modern urban parenting is a very individualizing and precarious matter that requires the invention of new support structures. The groups thus formed are called 'grupos de crianza compartida' because they combine childrearing [crianza] and childcare [cuidados], and because there is sharing [compartir] of the care and organizational work (though the care work is also handed to educators, to a varying degree).

The grupos de crianza in Poble Sec are part and parcel of the boost in self-organization that came with the 15M movement in 2011. In a context of economic crisis, high unemployment meant people had more time to organize, care and experiment. Meanwhile, harsh austerity measures affected the quality of public nurseries. In 2019, the number of available places continues to be low: less than a quarter of children can enter the public system. Austerity and precarity thus produced an increasing demand, capacity and desire for self-run projects of childcare that could provide alternative support networks and forms of education. Crisis opens up new possibilities whilst closing other ones, prompting experimentation with new models. Poble Sec went from a couple of such projects in 2007 to 5 in 2011, 7 in 2016, 5-6 in 2019. The groups I researched in this study are the following (dates are approximate):

- Babàlia. 2011/12-16. (Interview) <http://bcncomuns.net/es/cpt/Babàlia/>
- La Rimaïeta. 2015/16-18. (Interview and observation) <http://labase.info/places-lliures-a-la-rimaieta-grup-de-crianca-del-poble-sec/>
- El Petit Molinet. 2013-ongoing. (Interview and observation) <http://petitmolinet.blogspot.com/>
- El Monstre de Paper. 2010-ongoing. (Observation)

¹⁹ This term came into very frequent use thanks to the 2013 book of (Carolina del Olmo, *Dónde está mi tribú?* [Where is my tribe], which speaks about mother's and family's loneliness in times of economic precarity and individualization (Del Olmo 2013).

<https://elmonstredepaper.com/quienes-somos/>

- El Tatán. 2012- ongoing (Observation and informal interview)
- Baldufa. 2017. (Participant observation)
- La Rauxeta. 2018 (Participant observation)
- Les Ocellets (formerly CoMaLeCu).²⁰ 2008-ongoing (Interview and observation)
- Somniatruites. 2016-ongoing (Observation)

6.4.2. The PEPI platform of childcare groups

In 2017, the majority of these projects form the PEPI network together, for mutual support and more political leverage:

The PEPI is a heterogeneous group...that ripened in two moments I think: on the one hand, there had already been previous meetings between the educators/companions [acompañantes] of the grupos de crianza compartida. In 2014-15, they met several times to speak about issues and we were also lucky, in this case because of Carolina [local councilor of Barcelona en Comú] who started to talk to us all, and one of the first things she told us – and that was also a bit in the air – was that instead of talking to us one by one we should try have a ‘voice,’ a platform with which we can start negotiating with the city council in order to see what opportunities were opening up in Poble Sec. That was towards the end of 2016. It’s very important to note that at PEPI we go slow, very slow, extremely slow, and so it’s hard for us to have a meeting every month and a half. ...We’re more or less 6 or 7 organizations there. We did a first count of families and came to some 100-110 families in 2017 (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

This group, the ‘Platform for Education and Participation of Infants,’ was, as you might suspect, named after Pepi the midwife. Her role as ‘meta-mother’ and enabler of childcare and mothers’ commons is widely recognized in the neighborhood (and beyond; her fame is considerable). At the 2016 fiesta major of Poble Sec (local celebrations held across the neighborhood in the summer months), Pepi Domínguez had the honorary role of giving the opening *pregó*, a speech that is conferred upon highly valued actors in society.²¹

²⁰ This is not a grupo de crianza compartida as much as a small group (of 2-4 children) taken care of by a ‘madre de día,’ Afra Herreu, who is very engaged in the neighborhood. There are many other madres de día in Poble Sec (Petits Planetes, Niu de Llum, Agua de Vida, Saludo al Sol, ...), who however pertain more properly to the intimate private sphere, and are largely invisible, mostly transit between homes and parks, and largely lack collective organizational or democratic structures. The group of Afra is a mixed model of sorts, with a monthly parents’ assembly and an active and visible engagement in the neighborhood.

²¹ See this video also to get an impression of the community and its affective tone: ‘Pepi Domínguez, llevadora pregonera de La Festa Major de Poble Sec 2016,’ video uploaded by Rafael Mochón in July 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqE-47vYYvw>



Inauguration of the PEPI platform in 2017.

The origin of commons-based nursery alternatives also lies thus in the public system, to the extent that public health centers provide a space of encounter and collective interest formation. Relations between public and commons are complex, creative and recursive in the Poble Sec and Barcelona of the 2010s. The scarce provision of public places is widely perceived as a failing and a problem amongst families in Poble Sec. Broadly speaking, approaches to this problem go mainly three ways: demanding more public places and kindergartens (the public approach), promoting the creation and sustainability of small self-organized childcare groups (the commons approach), and making people cope with paying for childcare themselves (the neoliberal approach). The first two are most dominant in the neighborhood fabric of Poble Sec, as in many parts of Barcelona, particularly thanks to the 15M and municipalist movements, which set out from a strong critique of neoliberal governance. There are many overlaps, continuities and tensions across the public and commons approaches, as well as a feminist reclaiming of the ‘private’ sphere as a space for commoning and politics in Poble Sec. Among these *grupos de crianza compartida* and their environments, there is broad consensus regarding the importance of *both* public and commons-based models, and the need to undo the contraposition of those in the modality of *either-or* narratives, valuing rather the ways in which these two models enrich one another.

6.4.3. Economic and real estate impacts on childcare groups

There were brute cuts to the municipal-run public daycare centers after 2012, as the Generalitat of Catalunya reduced their funding contribution to half, from 1800€ to 875€ per child and year. This was a decision that would later rebound, as the

municipal diputaciones (councils) that compensated for the cuts sued the Generalitat, which got successive sentences to repay tens of millions of Euros to municipalities (Ibañez García 2018), yet still leaves public daycare centers far from recuperating the 1800€ per child and year (Tomàs & Rodríguez 2018). In many cases, apart from a drastic reduction in the quality of care and conditions of workers, it was the (income-based) fees of parents that compensated for the lack of budget in municipal centers. As the crisis wore on, public institutions remained underfunded, and the demand for self-run creches persisted, thus, even as this study is made. Between 2017-20, there is still a consistent emergence of self-run projects, the tendency of which is however to become more expensive, as the demographic of the neighborhood slowly changes with gentrification.

With the municipal government of the Barcelona en Comú, public creches began to receive compensation as court orders continued to come in. The city government pressured the Generalitat to return to a tripartite division of costs for 0-3 year old's education (one third of costs being covered by the Generalitat, the municipalities and families respectively, as was the case before the cuts).²² The Bressol creches are however still far from being able to cover local demand (they can only offer places to about 20% of children, as is required by law), and far from the quality of care provided in commons-creches. The latter have an average ratio of 3-6 children per carer, while municipal and regional creches come with class sizes of up to 19 children, with as little as one permanent carer to 12 children in 2017-19 (for numbers, see Diputació de Barcelona 2019).

During the years that my research here covers, generations of children have been cared for and grown up in Poble Sec, in a series of different ways and arrangements. Babies have been born and self-organized childcare initiatives have emerged and imploded, but not in a vacuum: economic and political dynamics have shaped the lives of people. In a period that sits between the economic crises of 2008 and 2020, rents went up and up and with them, many families had to leave the neighborhood, being replaced by those with higher incomes. This is a very important economic dynamic. The rental and property market is also influencing the activity of self-organized creches. Barcelona has seen a boom in rental rates and property prices since 2016, with prices per m² increasing by up to 56% (Department de Estadístiques 2020a) between 2013-19 and rents rising accordingly (by about 32% at a city level, between 2013-19, see Department de Estadístiques 2020b). Touristification and speculation led to the buying up of entire buildings for tourist flats, hotels and housing. This, together with a shortening of the obligatory duration of rental contracts (from 5 to 3 years) that came into place in 2015, led to a harsh dynamic of displacement in Poble Sec, as well as to a powerful struggle against evictions and real estate speculation via the neighborhood union [sindicat e barri], the PAH, and the renters union [sindicat de

²² The municipality also increased its budget for early-childhood education (0-3 years) slightly during the 2015-20 mandate of Barcelona en Comú. See this graphic on municipal spending on education: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/estrategiaifinances/pressupostobert/es/politicas/32/educacion#view=funcional&year=2019>, accessed 3/3/2020.

llogaters]. As many families were forced to move to more peripheral zones, the social fabric in the neighborhood was under strain, yet at the same time strong local mobilization and resistance sprang up to resist displacement and commercialization.

This dynamic impacted on grupos de crianza in various ways. First and foremost, it made it very hard for them to find and afford appropriate spaces (shopfronts for rent). Second, it led to a greater influx of families with more disposable income into the grupos de crianza, which in turn affords the projects more financial stability and fairer educators pay through charging higher fees, but it also renders them tendentially more homogeneous and shifts them from a community-based to a more private model. This depends on the interplay between the work situation, the cultural-educational orientation of the constituent families and their economic situation.

In Poble Sec, it is often parents working in the public, non-profit and care-related sectors (academics, educators, cultural and social workers, psychologists, yoga teachers, etc.) who send their kids to grupos de crianza, and as my pathways through Poble Sec's groups and networks have shown, many of them are also socially and politically engaged at the local and other levels. This is unsurprising, given that participation in grupos de crianza requires relatively high levels of engagement, and that information about them flows particularly well across networks of cooperation and activism. In childcare groups where parents work mostly in high income professions in the private sector (more accustomed to working with a profit-based ethic), disposable income rather than available time tends to determine how families relate to the grupo de crianza, with volunteering being more anecdotal. In my experience across different groups, community engagement needs to be continually reasserted by some, or it stands as a matter of necessity, if disposable income is low and participation is the only way to get things done. I witnessed this in a strong way in my engagements with another childcare group in a more gentrified neighborhood in Barcelona (not formally part of this study), which had evolved over twelve years from a self-run grupo de crianza (or indeed Kinderladen, as this was a semi-German nursery) into an increasingly expensive and professionally managed organization.

There clearly is a moment, perhaps a tipping point, when the balance between the logics of commoning and of market relations can become problematic and indeed critical in one way or another. This is always conditioned by a myriad of factors that should not be simplified: from financial to labor issues, personal factors and disputes, pedagogical disagreements, rent and infrastructural factors, generational shifts in the composition of groups and families, a key person leaving, etc. When the delicate balance between commons and market forces of a childcare group is upset, this often leads to splits in groups. Some groups might reinvent themselves in new commons-based ways, others may shift from an associational legal form to a company form. When groups collapse in social and economic environments like the one of Poble Sec, often families take this as an occasion to shift their children into the public system. The older the child, the more likely this is to happen. Most see this as the ultimate

educational destiny of their children: with the two splits I experienced during my research, this was clearly the case.

6.4.4. The community sustaining childcare commons: mothers' networks in Poble Sec

There is one dimension that connects and underpins all the childcare-related organizing in Poble Sec, the more or less informal networks of mothers, and, to a very limited extent, fathers.²³ These networks emerge through different encounters and shared spaces: pre- and post-partum classes, nurseries, everyday encounters on playgrounds and in the neighborhood generally, as well as events and workshops. They appear in more detail at this point in my text not because they are secondary, additional or an aftereffect, but rather because they are key to the recursive nature of childcare commons. Grupos de crianza compartida and other related projects emerge and disappear –failing, merging-transforming or coming to a generational close– and in this movement of coming-and-going, or getting-organized and disarticulating, they always remain tied to the lively sociality and living relations of the mothers' networks. This sociality has its nodal points in playgrounds, on streets and squares, in childcare centers (public, common, private) and in Whatsapp groups.

The mothers' networks are spaces of commoning that subvert the dichotomy between public and private. They create lively links between public institutions/spaces (health centers, playgrounds, nurseries) and the private spaces so pivotal to childcare (the home, the family). These networks, though informal and noncommittal, often end up being stronger spaces of reference than both public and family systems. Women trust and seek each other for advice and help, before going to a doctor or asking their own parents. Digital communication technologies like Whatsapp make this mutual support very instant and immediate.

To describe and analyze mothers' networks, we must start with the pre/post-partum classes at the local public health center,²⁴ since these are in many ways where the grupos de crianza compartida originate. The first such local group, the Monstre de Paper, was set up by a mother who went to the classes and connected with others there. All the later groups, too, either emerged from or strongly drew on the pre/post-partum spaces. The weekly classes in Poble Sec, as well as elsewhere, are spaces of initiation into motherhood and parenthood, into the entangled and complex worlds of everyday urban life with children and the challenges these pose not just on a practical but also on a social level. Explicitly, these are spaces to combat loneliness, isolation, to build lasting ties and to share childrearing practices. The grupos de crianza compartida and the informal mothers' networks flow into one another dynamically on a daily basis:

²³ In the Whatsapp group of 86 members, there is one male member who has, in the course of two years, sent about three messages; all other correspondence is between mothers.

²⁴ Most relevant to this study are CAP Hortes in Poble Sec, led by the midwife and public health educator Pepi Domínguez with a port-side catchment area, and CAP Manso in the nearby Sant Antoni, led by Sònia Garcia Ibàñez, with the western part of the neighborhood as catchment area. Pre/postpartum classes are generally open to anyone, making the geographic mix more diverse, however.

The current rise of the *grupos de crianza compartida* [the author refers to all kinds of mothers' groups], created and self-managed by women, is a response to the loneliness that many urban mothers suffer from, but also to the model of society and city that liberal capitalism imposes. Those groups that health centers or associations of different kinds promote, are conceived in order to give support to women around the first months of a baby. Yet the tie [vínculo] between the participating mothers is so intense that it comes to transcend this period, and establishes itself as a support for childrearing, with the spirit of what we ancestrally could have identified as tribe [tribú] (Puerto 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Across Spain, a movement of the *rearguard* or *retaguardia* (Malo & León 2016) is stirring –perhaps what with Asef Bayat we might call a ‘social nonmovement’ (Bayat 2010)– of childcare commoning, driven by mothers. This emerges as a response to female precarization, the loneliness of nuclear family and solo parenting, and the neoliberal fragmentation of care, space and time (Del Olmo 2013). Silent and invisible to the public eye, like most movements of reproductive commoning and of care, this new wave of childcare commoning is however well aware of itself and the predicaments it struggles to overcome. Debates on Poble Sec mothers’ networks are often overtly political, and always feminist. From economic, material, social and subjective phenomena to the shortcomings of second wave feminism’s orientation towards wages and labor market integration, this mothers’ movement wants to build different relations and scenarios of reproduction.

How do we make the revolution starting from the rearguard? The mothers alone. Crisscrossed by the crisis, by the generalized looting of all that’s public, but also by a social awakening that’s more pressing each time (Malo & León 2016; my translation from Spanish).

The starting points for these practices tend to be public institutions and spaces. In the case of mothers’ groups, pre/post-partum birth preparation classes are a key space of encounter. Since healthcare is organized locally in Barcelona, most women in Poble Sec pass through the birth-preparation classes of Pepi Domínguez (or Sònia Garcia Ibàñez, who works with similar methods in an adjacent barrio), they are accompanied by Pepi as a midwife right after birth (she does home visits), and then they join her groups for post-partum follow-up. Generally, child-bearing women join pre-partum classes some 4-3 months before birth and stay in post-partum classes for about 4-9 months, so they frequent the classes for 6-12 months in total. They are often accompanied by their partners in some pre-partum classes, as well as first post-partum sessions, but partners (mostly but not exclusively men) then soon disappear while mothers’ networks strengthen.

Pepi’s classes are very well attended and they also attract people from other neighborhoods. They are open to anyone. Thanks to her many years of dedicated work in Poble Sec, Pepi has a considerable level of fame and a definite following. It’s not by chance that the network of childcare groups named itself ‘PEPI’ -the name is a

direct reference to her powers of making association happen. The public institution – of healthcare in this case, but similar dynamics exist around the public nurseries– is a crucial space of encounter for families and particularly mothers, who end up forming networks of mutual support and activity that last for years. These spaces are neither simply ascribable to the public system nor a matter of private networks. They are veritable spaces of commoning knowledges and experiences, as Pepi’s methodology insists on mutual teaching, with a ball always being passed around and a physical part with mutual massages, birth or baby handling techniques, etc.

An email list is set up for each cycle of classes, where links, objects and invitations are shared. Mothers’ groups set up Whatsapp groups and/or email lists at Pepi’s classes and usually maintain these groups as central channels of communication, with a myriad of spinoffs. As a mother, I have been following the whatsapp group emerging in winter 2016/17. While initially very active with up to 200 messages a day, this group continues in 2019 with at least 5 messages daily and a steady number of around 80 participants. The group is a key source of information about events and processes in the neighborhood, as well as for mutual support, advice, exchange and debate. As Pepi Dominguez told me in an interview, with a laugh:

One mother said that the mother’s whatsapp group is better than calling 112 [the healthcare hotline] because at any hour you’ll get an immediate reply, a lot of support and expertise (Dominguez 2018; my translation from Spanish).

The kind of role that Pepi exercises within ecologies of commoning care is akin to that of facilitator or catalyst –a very soft and relational kind of ‘leadership’ if this term applies at all (see *Report 1. The Political*, section 1.19). Perhaps this can be seen as the reproductive and invisible underside to ‘feminized’ leadership (Roth & Shea Baird 2017a; 2017b), a term so fashionable in the Barcelona of new municipalisms. These leadership labors of hundreds of women in Poble Sec, acting to articulate and hold things together in local social ecologies and their families, have received somewhat more recognition, yet they are far from being recognized as vital social-political agents.

For about a year in the life of (becoming) mothers, the healthcare center and its classes are a key site of sociality, mutual support and the building of networks and ties. This is the base for much of the commoning that follows. It is not just a significant timespan in terms of duration but also in terms of its intensity. Pregnancy, birth and early childrearing are amongst the most transformative and challenging experiences women undergo, and they are times when the creation of ties and support networks play a very particular role. Pepi Dominguez insists much on the importance of creating ‘vínculos’ in this time, a conviction she bases not just in life circumstances but also in the hormonal disposition of young mothers. Pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding are moments where the hormones oxytocin, prolactin and relaxin powerfully kick in and inform a woman’s disposition towards others (Pepi Dominguez 2018). Beyond the usual individualist metaphors of nesting and protecting, the time surrounding childbirth is indeed a time of creating ties, making

mothers particularly predisposed to building community and commoning. The hormonal angle Dominguez points out matches the insistence of Silvia Federici (2004; 2012; 2013) on the predominant role of women in the building of commons. Federici's argument points to women's subaltern position in patriarchy and capitalism and the way this makes them depend more on mutual support and commons.

Whatever way one analyzes it, mothers' commoning works. A look at the neighborhood's family trajectories reveals, and Pepi herself reports, that there are children who grow up with these networks as if they were family (Pepi Dominguez 2018). This is not necessarily an idyllic matter. Family trajectories are crisscrossed by breakups, rent raises, moves, job loss and search, illnesses, moments of depression, and so forth; the ties they build fluctuate, vary, weaken. It is not exactly that extended families are built out of nuclear ones, though in the case of the Babàlia and Rimaieta groups, strong and continuous co-madràzgos²⁵ have emerged, or that multi-family house-shares are initiated (this is also due to small flat sizes), but there is a continuity of ties across public spaces, events and communications platforms. The emergence and continuities of ties, groups and networks of childcare tell us a lot about cycles, *generational processes* and handovers of commons, a dimension much overlooked in commons research. Those could also be analyzed using Pascal Michon's concept of the 'rhythms of the political,' looking at the ways in which bodily, seasonal, economic, political, and many other kinds of rhythms intersect (Michon 2007). The mothers' networks, for instance, renew every half year or so, with generations overlapping:

Every half year more or less there's a new whatsapp group; summer and Christmas holidays are natural moments of generational change, though there is always a continuity of people and some groups even keep meeting during the holidays without me (Pepi Dominguez 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Despite the lively transmission of knowledge in the neighborhood, members of grupos de crianza compartida lament the fact that every new group needs to 'reinvent the wheel:' to find, rent and renovate/equip a new space, set up an association, figure out numbers, ratios and employment modalities, set up platforms of representation and invent modes of self-promotion and recruitment, figure out internal organizational modalities, build channels of communication with related neighborhood entities, etc. The Rimaieta childcare space, for instance, space closed its doors in 2018 -but not its collective ties, as members insist. Many of the children went on to inhabit the Petit Molinet group together -due to a rent raise and generational tipping point, as at 3 years many children enter the public P3 preschools. They were left with a desire to give account of the experience and modes of self-organization, to pass on knowledge across different generations of groups. This is a challenging task with short educational cycles.

²⁵ Co-madràzgo or the co-madrato have been discussed in Spanish social movement feminisms in the recent decade, as a practice of sharing care and making each other's children grow up in a sibling-like proximity.

Taking my own experience as an example, the pre/post-partum groups of 2016/17 remain my key point of reference for parenting in Poble Sec. A Whatsapp group of some 80 participants was started in 2016 and continues to this day in 2019, with some people having exited and others joined, in an increasingly intergenerational mix of newer and older mothers, newer and older neighbors. Initially, the first year after birth, there were often 200 messages a day, now there are about 5-20 a day. Social media chats become a way of facilitating not just information and debate but also intersections in real space –meetings are organized, flyers and links to events are shared readily. Chats, thus, act like a digital background or murmur that nourishes and sustains everyday encounters and lives. The kinds of catalysts in Poble Sec's childcare commoning are thus diverse –spatial, social and technological –from figures like Pepi and the many engaged mothers and some fathers, to the healthcare centers and playgrounds, to chat groups of different sorts. These are 'social technical assemblages' (Puig della Bellacasa 2017: 14).

This 'reproductive networking' –a kind of networking functioning on premises well opposed to those of the neoliberal job market– leads us mothers to exchange advice, objects, arrange meetings, joint walks, playdates, talks and workshops, baby blocs and campaigns, to circulate information as well as discuss all sorts of matters from medical to political to personal. This is reproductive commoning par excellence: diffuse, multilayered and multitasking cooperation and collective care. Reproductive commoning is relational and thrives on addressing multiple and changing needs, rather than centering on a single resource or task. While the mothers' networks primary function is not the sharing of childcare work as such, these networks do provide collective emotional support that is crucial for many shared projects and lasting relations. They collectivize childrearing as a broad multilayered matter, centering more on mutual support, advice and sociality than on sharing everyday labors of care. As Núria Verges tells:

With the mothers' groups I decided that I find the 'post-Pepi' most assumable generally for myself, those that I liked best. And [yet] I have to say that they didn't provide me with autonomy because we didn't say 'take her for three hours and I'll go to X.' That they didn't do, but an emotional support, yes. They made me feel happy, I rediscovered myself, my relation to my daughter and they also gave me moments, because we were together and sometimes it's the others looking after your child while you tell them about this or that crazy story that happened to you (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

In Nuria's post-partum generation (which I share), a small 'Monday's group' formed through Pepi's classes, where mothers took turns looking after each other's children sometimes. This strengthened ties but did not lead into sustained care-work sharing. Other years have seen this early pooling of care turn into grupos de crianza compartida. The 'Bressol Encreuat' was one such group in 2015, a large one with 15-20 members, involving the entirety of the post-partum class, from which the Rimaieta grupo de crianza compartida arose. And Babàlia, too, emerged out of 5 families doing

rotas and sharing a babysitter. The parent-run grupos de crianza compartida in Poble Sec all have their origins in this early pooling of childcare.

Those are the ‘grupos de crianza compartida’ in their originary meaning, where childcare itself is shared. In Babàlia and Rimaieta there were paid educators, but parents also participated in the childcare, on a rotational basis. We can differentiate those ‘parent-run and -initiated’ groups from the more ‘educator-run and -initiated’ groups where organization and coordination are shared, but childcare as such is not. In the strict sense, the former are where we may most properly speak of reproductive commoning, since it is *care labor* – as *care-giving* in the sense of Tronto’s 5 phases of care (*caring about*; *taking care of*; *care-giving*; *care-receiving*; *caring-with*) that is at stake (Tronto 1994; 2009). The pooling of organization around care –as *caring about* and *taking care of*– is however also a valuable contribution in a world where care generally –and *care-giving* most specifically– is invisibilized, relegated to women and subaltern, and undervalued. In whatever way one might debate the critical matter of *what* and *how* care is shared or socialized, it appears useful to remember what big steps and efforts *any* sharing of acts and labors of care represent in contemporary societies that privilege individualism, nuclear families and the outsourcing of care (via value-extraction chains). As Christel Keller Garganté argued during our 2018 colloquium on Childcare Commons in Barcelona:²⁶

The ‘grupos de crianza compartida’ are indeed useful for socially valuing care, which in this sense is a claim that many different feminisms have made, about the visibilization of care work and so on. The *grupos de crianza* indeed *do* work when it comes to making this a common cause [ponerlo en común] and therefore to give it [care] a central space in social life, which is also to do with their given capacity of creating communitarian webs [hacer tejido comunitario] (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

The matter of sharing and socializing care is however neither principally nor uniquely the task of the grupos de crianza compartida. It is an entangled and multilayered matter that requires a whole ecosystem to take place. It requires many different ways of ‘staying with the trouble,’ as we may say with Donna Haraway (2016). Interdependence and commoning are not prone to ideological strictness or clear-cut divisions, they are not based on sovereign individuals and independent political subjects. They require, indeed, an ecological approach that can see interlinking environments, creatures and critters, needs, abilities, spaces and systems. Care and commoning are transformative not just of relations but also of spaces, they re-make meanings and configurations of the neighborhood, urban tissues, public spaces, private zones, and so forth. The grupos de crianza importantly also engage Tronto’s 5th phase of care, *caring-with*, meaning solidarity with others around them, primarily in the neighborhood but also in the wider world. This might be an important care-

²⁶ Known as ‘care chains’ (Hochschild 2003, Lutz 2011, Zechner 2013a). Value-extracting relations are not absent from the grupos de crianza compartida mostly, since the educators are largely subaltern and precarious, but active efforts are made to reduce these forces of (real) abstraction.

based definitional criterion for commons: that they engage not just caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care-receiving, but also caring-with, as proper ecological assemblages.

6.4.5. Self-organized childcare between empowerment and failure: an auto-ethnographic account

Since 2017, I have been a mother in Poble Sec, joining a lively community of families, neighbors and activists. These categories mostly overlap with the persons cited here, many of whom are also engaged in research, cultural work and politics. This happened in a moment of lively experimentations around community-based childcare. A researcher, activist, cultural worker and parent myself, familiar with the neighborhood since 2014, I fitted rather well with the overall dynamics and demographics of Poble Sec, a place with a strong working class history and a strong fabric of neighborhood association, co-inhabited by engaged elderly people as much as a young and active precariat. After giving birth to my daughter, I soon embarked upon a double journey of re/search: looking for a nursery and investigating the (recent) local past and present of community childcare. Often hard to disentangle, in a dynamic where lines between subject and object blur and give way to situated, embodied and troubled knowledges (Haraway 1988; 2016; see also my notes on methodology in this report), in my militant participant research I tried to make my academic research useful to the childcare community and at the same time to navigate this field intelligently with my daughter.

On the research side I succeeded, gathering and circulating information in ways that not only lacked the alienation and awkwardness so typical of academic research on living social processes, but also managed to make a humble contribution to this field. In October 2018, after a careful process of collective preparation with fellow parent-researcher-activists, I (co-)organized a colloquium on childcare commons, in the local community center, a moment of encounter and exchange that proved very rich and that this present document also draws on.

On the practical side I failed, but as is known to researchers and commoners alike, there is nothing like failure to produce critical, complex and in-depth knowledge. After deciding –with much scruple– not to take up a place in public nursery due to its very low ratio (one carer to 13 babies in this case, except at lunchtime), I ventured to join a new and promising collective childcare project with my daughter. Three-four rotating staff from different pedagogical and creative professions, a beautiful, though unfinished and quite dark space, a monthly assembly and some working commissions, a network of quite like-minded families and some flexibility at the hour of ‘adaptación,’ starting one’s baby off in childcare.

At the public nursery we were offered three days to get our kid used to the place in our presence, at a rhythm of being present with the child for one hour on day one, then leaving the child there after 30 minutes presence on day 2, and after 10 minutes presence on day 3. For anyone unfamiliar with such processes, this is an extremely

steep curve for babies, and it implies lots of tears and stress for all parties involved, especially when carers have over ten such unhappy babies to try attend to. To be sure, children emerge from public nurseries healthy and happy, and those early experiences indeed soon disappear from conscious memory, so the distress does not necessarily imply trauma. It is experienced as a form of violence by most however, reserved particularly for the working poor, whose only choice is submitting their baby into a public institution from 4 months of age for full-time care. The stress this implies even just in terms of breastfeeding, for a mother and baby, is considerable: mastitis and tears. In the self-run childcare group we could take a month or even two for adaptation if needed, and we could be present for any amount of time we wished. Since we could afford a slower process in terms of time and money, we went for it. They were not cheap, but they offered a part-time rate of 220€ a month, which was perfect for us and our 9-month-old baby.

The beginning was promising, but soon some strange chaotic elements emerged, such as signs of dis-coordination between the educators, who were largely responsible for the running of the project, though parents also took an active role, and a mysterious slowness and reluctance about putting glass into the then-still empty window frames. As October passed, slightly desperately, we gathered some willing families and put glass into the windows, an alarming necessity for a place that has babies crawling around on the floor, which itself was quite cold due to being below ground level. But once the work was done –which we were OK to do, but under conditions of more support and transparency– the monthly assembly yielded bad news. The educators had gotten into an unresolvable fight over past weeks and decided to stop working together. It turned out some other families knew, but no one informed us because we were new. The project would run another month, after that no continuity was guaranteed.

Slowly, but surely educators began to vow for families in different subtle or explicit ways, wanting to continue the project and keep the space. A huge struggle over the space ensued, which was also the rented home of one of the educators, who had gotten into debt for the project. Lack of transparency was near complete, as families struggled to gain clarity, to try mediate and at the same time to find new childcare. The ambience in the space was tense and messy in this last, disarticulated month. It soon emerged that we would not get our deposit back, either, because the educators, particularly the one who had lent his home to the project, were all in debt, struggling financially (one of them was a single mother). More than half of the staff, who had worked without a proper contract so far, were migrants from Latin America (Chile, Uruguay) with little to no local support networks.

I need not describe the emotions, frustrations, anxieties and mistrust that we went through in the three months during which we were part of this project. We had spent months to get our baby used to the educators, going through daily tears, consolations, long hours of playing there, etc. We had not just lost time but an important bond we were trying to build. This is one reason why when one of the educators insisted on

setting up a new project, many parents followed. It's simply too stressful –and costly, in time and money terms– to go through this 'adaptation' process again, for the children as well as parents. I joined the initial meetings to set this up, but eventually decided that my trust had been broken and that I wanted to try set up a small childcare arrangement myself, with our neighbor's daughter. Some 6 families went ahead though and constituted a new project, for which they rented and completely rehabilitated a new space, since for reasons that seem to have mostly to do with revenge, they were not allowed to keep using the previous space, which they had spent half a year renovating bit by bit. A perilous decision on the part of the other educators, who ended up having to give up the space anyways because they could not pay the rent.

Speak of a rough start, we had it. But this was not to be the last slightly devastating experience. I tried to set up a small project with a 'madre de dia,' a single childminder who has 3-4 children at her charge, two of whom we had already secured -my daughter and our neighbor's. After one of the past group's educators cancelled on us (on the 24th of December) after having confirmed that she wanted to be in our project, I set out to find a pedagogue, placing an ad online. We found a lovely young Chilean yoga-teacher and educator who was eager to set up a project with us, and we began the process of adaptation. In parallel, I identified a space for use: the small shopfront of a cinema collective who were struggling to pay the rent and were happy to have us use the place in the mornings. It just needed some work. We invested a considerable sum into putting in new floorboards. Halfway through the works, the new educator cancelled on us. She realized that she was too unexperienced and could only really take on two children at the same time, not 3-4. She was also overwhelmed by the fact that our neighbor's daughter was raised in an often quite brutal way by her poor, migrant family, and decided this was irreconcilable with her pedagogical principles. A contradiction I had to accept, though this difference was the very reason I had wanted this family to be involved. For most educators, it takes many years of experience to be able to confront such situations, and indeed the public system is much more of a school for such matters than the grupos de crianza with their heavily protected children. Be that as it may, after scrambling for alternatives for a couple of weeks, I gave up. We could not face trying to find another educator and going through another adaptation process with our child, since during all this time we were seriously short for childcare, having to pay babysitters on many afternoons to cover the time we lost on adaptación and the organization of the project. After all, I had a job, I needed to research and write the pages you are currently reading. By the end of January, I was defeated and exhausted, and we joined the spin-off project of our previous nursery group.

But soon tensions emerged there, too. This time because of a lack of transparency about accessibility of shade for the children in summer, a seemingly banal issue that however opened onto other difficult dynamics and bad communication. Another strange process of assemblies and negotiations ensued. We were considering leaving, and after some pressure from educators and some parents, we decided to go. Soon it

became clear that beyond this conflict, there had been an ongoing problem amongst the two educators again, and, by the time it was March, they had announced that they would stop working together. They would go on until the end of May, but one of them stopped showing up. They said they could not be in the space together anymore, so deep was the conflict. The parents thought they were living a bad nightmare. They had lost another huge amount of time and money, investing several thousands of Euros into the space, and their children would again have to get used to a new place and set of people. Again, they were suddenly left without childcare. Most families eventually joined the long-standing project Petit Molinet at the start of autumn term in 2017. We also ended up joining a long-standing self-organized project, but in a nearby neighborhood, because we couldn't get a spot in any of the groups in Poble Sec. In a way, we were relieved to get out of these specific neighborhood entrails by then, and thus I continued my research without the strong vital investment of also having my child in a local group.

This autoethnographic soap opera tells a particularly unfortunate story, no doubt, but also yields a lot of insight into self-organized childcare groups. It speaks of the precarity and fragility of these groups, as they have a very vulnerable age group at their heart and tend to be initiated by educators –in many cases transcontinental migrants– who face very precarious living conditions. The pressure that these projects face is great, not just because parents care very much about their children and pay monthly fees that are often quite elevated for their standards, but also because it is the parents' time that is at stake. Childcare is supposed to buy or, ideally, to grant free of charge parents' time, so that they can work and organize their lives. In self-organized childcare groups, the balance between give and take can at times be challenging.

In more activist-driven childcare groups, such as Babàlia and the Rimaïeta, monthly fees are very low because parents take on part of the pedagogical as well as all the organizational work -weekly assembly, cooking and acting as co-educator once a fortnight. This is a time-intensive, but transparent and truly self-driven process that largely leaves families satisfied. Tatanet runs on a similar model, but the childcare is done only by educators. Other projects are more oriented towards offering parents the time to work –with slightly less implication, like a monthly assembly and being part of a working commission, and in exchange for fees that are a bit higher (around 300-450€ in the cases of Petit Molinet, Ocellets). This more educator-driven model also works well in the mentioned cases.

There are, thus, different kinds and configurations of self-organized childcare, all of which can function well and continue across generations. A key element in their success is the collective that starts them, as well as the time and economic horizon within which projects emerge. The more organically, carefully and slowly –the less similar to the market– they can constitute themselves, the more likely they are to build good collective process, to debate and clarify doubts and tensions, to get information and take legal and administrative steps in time, to get the children used to the educators, to find and equip a decent space, and to reach out to the neighborhood to

fill places and gather support. This need for slow, organic social growth is characteristic of commoning, wherein relations and not just aims are at the center.

We will now enter debates on care and reproductive commons via political and feminist theories, to understand the eminently political nature of care and childcare, and the bearings it has on commons theories and practices. Outlining some of the basic debates and stakes around childcare and its relation to the reproduction of societies, communities and families, we will see the childcare commoning in Poble Sec through different contexts: from new Spanish feminisms to Latin American community-based commoning, via German histories of childcare commoning, and through autonomist demands and feminist revindications. This will equip us with some necessary tools to begin analyzing the grupos de crianza compartida in Poble Sec, and will lead us into the question of how such commons practices may relate to the public system in general, and the municipal administration in particular.

6.5. Childcare Commons: definitions, contexts, approaches

6.5.1. Childcare commons – between self-organization and a claim to universality

Within the debates and analytical frameworks on commons, including Elinor Ostrom, Silvia Federici (2004; 2014), George Caffentzis, Massimo De Angelis (2017), Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval and many more, there are –as Isabelle Stengers and Sergej Gutwirth (2016) point out– two main fields to be distinguished. One concerns the protection and accessibility of the *res communes*, the basic material and immaterial resources that should be at the disposal of all beings on earth:²⁷ air, water, light, wind, world commons such as the Antarctic, the moon, stars and great ocean’s depths, as well as the material and immaterial heritage of humanity (including the digital, immaterial commons in their indefinitely reproducible dimension).

The other concerns, as in the studies of Eleanor Ostrom, what we may call the commons of self-organization and self-government, meaning specific instances of collective use and management of resources and infrastructures, such as plots of land, fields, community gardens, play areas, social centers, communal housing, or specifically adapted systems (of irrigation, processing, milling, etc.). Those commons, requiring a collective effort of care, maintenance and governance –a group of users who inter-depend, both positively and negatively, on one another for this resource– cannot be subject to the same claims of open access or state management that the grand open im/material *res communes* are. They have a limited and particular character, rather than a free or universal one, they are not a ‘free-for-all’ but managed and collectively sustained (see also *Report 2. The Common*). Of course, resource-based commons, too, can be appropriated, polluted, privatized in particular ways.

²⁷ Indeed, as they argue, we should not focus exclusively on humanity here but embrace an ecological, non-anthropocentric perspective.

They are not just natural in some intangible abstract way, but they are indeed also material and situated.

In this study of childcare commons, we are concerned with commons of the second, self-organizational type: collectively created and run kindergartens and play spaces. Nonetheless, a broader question about the character of care also presents itself to us. To what extent is it possible to overcome the particularizing enclosures of care in the domestic sphere which are associated with women's bodies, by positing a more radically open and democratic notion of care, as a universal right? *Attention* and the *capacity to care* are at everyone's disposal, yet they are very unevenly allocated and distributed across the planet, across spaces, spheres and bodies. To democratize care, do we, maybe, need to politicize attention (Citton 2017) and claim that beyond ethical and tactical moments, the right and responsibility to care also need to be inscribed in more universal platforms, from law to economics?

Feminist economics and care ethics hint at these possibilities. Notably, these would entail radical redefinitions of the subject of politics and democracy, beyond the white, well-off male subject at the center of liberal as well as ancient thought, law and institutions. Crucially, care commons imply a *practice* of sharing care and reproductive work across gender, racial and class divides in collective projects of all kinds. It takes both redefinitions (of politics) and redistributions (of reproductive labor) in practices of commoning, which means going beyond historical notions and contemporary practices of democracy. The latter still majorly limit the participation of the poor, less educated, women, racialized and disabled people in processes of decision-making. The grassroots formulas and forms of commoning politics seem more apt and equipped to base themselves (rather than just 'include') in other political subjects, as well as in political difference proper.

6.5.2. Feminist thought on care and commons

Feminists have been battling for decades with this question, in one way or another, negotiating the tensions between the invariably intimate, particular and indeed private aspects of care and the need for publicly accessible and socially distributed provision of care (see Multitudes 2009, Zechner 2013a, Perez-Orozco 2014). Invariably intimate and time-consuming, care requires attention and time at levels that cannot be merely prescribed, measured or compressed into efficient regimes, making its transference to third parties a delicate matter. The commons come (back) in as a modality for the organization of care that makes sense, allowing for these dimensions to be bridged and indeed also subverted. Starting from an ethics and politics of care we may see subjects, practices and institutions emerge that differ from the liberal political and economic paradigms. I will argue that care is thus a key starting point for commons that want to properly transcend the liberal democratic order.

What if our current predicament, of an individualist anthropocentrism centered only on economic imperatives, on extractivisms of all kinds that lead to social, political and ecological catastrophe, is indeed strongly conditioned by the fact that we do not

understand care as being part of the great universal, inexhaustible, infinitely reproducible resources of our human cultures and our planet's regenerating systems? Attempts have been made to set out a philosophical groundwork for an ethics of care (Tronto 1994; 2009b), to analyze how care is inscribed into regimes of value production as that undervalued, unpaid and invisible activity so crucial for the functioning of capitalism (Federici 2004, Gibson-Graham 2003, Perez-Orozco 2014, etc.). The importance of care sustaining life and societies has been widely analyzed through the lens of women's work (Dalla Costa & James 1975, Torrebadella, Tejero & Lemkow 2001).

One way of looking at the dilemma with care today is to lament that it is either debated as a matter of public or private, but not as a matter of the common, commons and commoning. Each of these three latter terms have different inflections and consequences for a politics of care commons. To argue for care in terms of 'commons' means to look at initiatives, dispositifs and infrastructures that make it possible to give and receive care in common, to organize care between many of us. To look at care from the angle of 'commoning' implies dwelling on the myriad practices of sharing, complicity, collaboration, networking, value-creating and reproducing that care implies (looking, thus, at care both in terms of reproduction and labor, and as reproductive labor). And, as we have hinted at, to argue for care in terms of 'the common' may be to suggest it is part of a dimension of matters –as are air, water, etc.– that condition the basic survival of living beings. No critter, human or otherwise, can survive without some degree of care. Humans all the more so, being born too young to survive on their own. Childcare is not an optional, vocational or cultural matter: it is a condition for the survival of *all* human beings, everywhere. It is as basic a need as food, water and air.

And, as such, it requires commoning. It is the stuff of attention, dedication and care, held in common by people and communities. Only with patriarchy does care come to be enclosed in the home, rendered as the opposite of politics and democratic life. Only with industrialization and the nuclear family does care come to be individualized into the figure of the housewife, detached slowly from larger extended family structures. Only with precarious neoliberal mobility regimes does care come to be further unsettled not just from extended families and communities but also from place itself, giving way to care chains and urban parental loneliness. There have been many moments of enclosure around the care of children, elders, the sick and others in the family and community. Silvia Federici is one of the most prolific authors addressing this, yet not the only one (see also Hansen & Zechner 2019, Gonik 2019, Del Olmo 2014). No matter from which angle we look at care and commoning –indeed in this text I will speak to all three aspects, interweaving them continuously– one thing is clear: the private and public are insufficient for fully grasping and articulating care, because, even if care links private and public life, it also largely exceeds them.

6.5.3. Reproductive commons and (child)care

As concerns commons, particularly social reproduction feminisms have pointed to the importance of what we may call reproductive commons or reproduction commons. They point to the way capitalism is reproduced via the unpaid labor of women in the home (Federici 2004, Barbagallo 2016b), service industries (Lutz 2011) and informal economies (Miranda 2011), as well as via the displacement and exploitation of indigenous people from their land and means of subsistence in order to give rise to extractivism (Federici & Caffentzis 2014). The destruction of local reproductive commons is part of the destruction of planetary ecological commons, with every moment of eviction and extraction reducing the planet's capacity to reproduce its environmental balance. These viewpoints have insisted on the need for systemic perspectives on commons, steeped in analyses and practices that look to transversally address commoning and enclosures at the level of spaces, communities, practices, ecologies, institutions (see also Barbagallo, Beuret & Harvie 2019). The interplay between the terms 'reproduction' and 'care' is a particular strength –not to be misread as an unreflected ambivalence or lack of precision– we can draw from bringing reproduction feminisms together with different theories and ethics of care. 'Reproduction' designates the systemic aspect of life-sustaining in both individual and collective life, while 'care' points to the more intimate, relational and ethical dimensions of such life-sustaining.

The notions of caring economies or economies of care emerge in resonance with the Marxist feminist analyses of domestic labor, feminized work, and colonial and extractivist exploitation. They are part of a feminist redefinition of economy (Perez-Orozco 2014, Knittler & Haidinger 2016, etc.) and of the formulation of a politics of care (Tronto 1994, Multitudes 2009) and as such start from a political subject that is vulnerable and interdependent, rather than the male ideal of independence. These debates and analyses powerfully nourish contemporary feminist movements, as they are articulated with critiques of patriarchal violence (Ni una menos, Womens Strike, #metoo; see Liz Mason-Deese 2018).

The ethics of care are pivotal to my analysis here, not only because of the critical intersectional perspectives they offer, but also in the specific definitions of care they allow for. Tronto's five phases of care allow us to get to the heart of what we may mean by 'care,' and may be summarized as follows:

1. 'caring about' as the dimension of attention, worry and concern (in terms of childcare, often also referred to as 'the mental load')
2. 'taking care of' as the dimension of caring gestures and tasks
3. 'care-giving' as the continuous, dedicated and laborious activity of looking after someone
4. 'care-receiving' as the being on the receiving end, a role largely mystified as exceptional and 'weak' yet crucial and inevitable to all life

5. and finally, as Tronto added later on, ‘caring-with,’ which is more akin to solidarity and indeed probably also with commoning care (Tronto 2009a).

In my analysis of care commons, I will be pointing to many different activities, tasks and functions that correspond to one or another of these phases of care. As Tronto points out, ideally, they flow into one another, yet in our contemporary societies they tend to be increasingly segregated. Care-giving is allocated not just to women as mothers, wives or grandmothers, but it is also outsourced to women as maids, au pairs, carers. Taking-care-of is stylized and visibilized in game-like displays of virtue on social media (see Zechner & Hansen 2020) as well as in everyday life (Tronto 1994). Care-receiving is devalued and rendered as taboo or shameful, based in a notion of vulnerability and precarity as exception (we might suggest a feminist argument not unlike that of Neilson & Rossiter 2008). Finally, caring-with is made ever more difficult due to distances, relationships alienated from everyday care, and lack of collective spaces, infrastructures, times and, also, legal models (on the latter, as relating to the possibility of inscribing urban commons in law, see *Report 4. Case Studies in Italy*).

In a similar vein, which however has to be thoroughly acknowledged by social reproduction feminism as yet, technofeminists and critical feminist scholars in Science and Technology Studies (Maria Piug della Bellacasa, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, Anja Kanngieser et al.) have taken up ecology to broaden their insights towards the situation of ecosystems and the planet (see also Bärtsch et al.. 2017). These currents point towards broader epistemological, philosophical and political consequences of taking ecologies of care seriously in confronting the dilemmas of our time, often in relation to the technofeminisms of some decades ago, imagining new techno-eco-feminisms at the service of the common good on the planet (Sollfrank 2018).

In this report, I will attempt to engage with the contributions of all these currents of feminisms, in trying to develop the thinking around childcare commons, specifically. The question of care as a great worldly commons, as well as a material, embodied and affective field of struggle is thus introduced, if not yet resolved, but in the process of being translated and transduced in practice. The examples of self-organized childcare I here describe are part of a strongly situated, local and embodied practice, wherein matters of organization, politics, care, time, value, education, knowledges, pedagogy and institutionality intersect and point toward a broader political-ecological horizon of care. This has broad consequences for definitions of the political subject and the economy, of the relation between the public and the community, of democratic space and urban policy, etc. As we start with definitional and theoretical implications of care and feminist epistemologies on the commons, towards the end of this chapter we will arrive at some of the implications of childcare commoning on policy and urban space.

As relating to existing theories of the commons, my endeavor here reflects the now decade-old critique that feminists have presented to theory that skirts the questions of the reproduction of everyday life. As Federici says,

This, however is true of the discourse on the commons as a whole, which has generally focused on the formal preconditions for their existence but much less on the possibilities provided by existing commons, and their potential to create forms of reproduction enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations (Federici 2012 : 142).

This is why, in my research and analysis here, I move back and forth between looking at formal aspects of childcare groups and the living neighborhood and networks that underpin and feed them.

The childcare commons analyzed here are ‘resurgent’ in the sense of Stengers and Gutwirth (2016). They emerge, transform, collapse, reemerge, compose, articulate –in and out of the everyday flows of life and relation that exist in the lively political microcosm that is Poble Sec. They are driven by a force of invention and articulation that is collective, shared, carried through time by multiple agents –these more or less visible or graspable flows are as important as the concrete forms and processes that commoning activities take. From a feminist viewpoint, it is important not to reduce commons to a set of criteria, functions or relations, but rather to see them as part of a dynamic of life that is all encompassing, transformative and resurgent –and necessarily collective in its intelligence, as the many reverberating voices and narratives throughout this text and research process testify.

In the words of Pepi Dominguez, the midwife and educator pivotal to the emergence of the childcare microcosm in Poble Sec, we can say that the childcare projects here can be said to proceed via ‘vínculos,’ ties and links, always being made and unmade. Reproductive commons are commons of linkage, ties, articulation. In a properly feminist and ecological perspective –that allows for longer times of analysis, taking into account many layers of composition, agency and effect– there cannot be a question of evaluating these experimental commons as successes or failures. Rather we must look towards the multiple effects and ties they produce and sustain.

6.5.4. Needs in common: the relation between commons and community

The relation between the commons and community has been the subject of many discussions and works in recent years (Federici & Caffentzis 2014, Mies 2014, De Angelis 2017) and, indeed, it is also relevant to this study of childcare commons as reproductive commons. Ecofeminist and feminist-Marxist positions insist that ‘there is no commons without a community’ (Mies 2014), and that ‘commons require community’ (Federici & Caffentzis 2014), in the sense that

This community should not be selected on the basis of any privileged identity but on the basis of the care-work done to reproduce the commons and regenerate what is taken from them.... Thus, when we say ‘No Commons without Community’ we think of how a specific community is created in the

production of the relations by which a specific common is brought into existence and sustained (Federici & Caffentzis 2014: 102).

This reflection is particularly relevant to us since we are speaking about care-based commons here, and we are trying to define some specificities of reproductive commons. These are self-organizational by nature, building on relations rather than resources (more on this further below). Care commons emerge from shared need and from the subsequent creation of relations, not from the initial availability of a specific resource (space, money, etc.).

This positioning of *needs* as central is common to feminist theories of care and economics, which see societies and organization as driven by needs and push for a visibilization and valorization of needs and interdependencies, to show that everyone has needs, and as such everyone is vulnerable, not just children, ill people, disabled people, the elderly, poor people...(Tronto 1994). To politicize needs is to break with the politics of pity and false autonomy inherent in patriarchy and capitalism. Thus, in thinking commons, we must also think of needs and the relations and organizations they spur. These always build communities –not as non-conflictual, homogeneous wholes, but as diverse and metastable assemblages. In this sense, neither communities nor needs are pure or absolute, rather, they are in an interplay akin to how Gilbert Simondon describes the moment of the collective invention of solutions:

...the accumulation of people blocked by a rock, one after the other, progressively constitutes a simultaneity of expectations [attentes] and needs, and so a tension towards a simultaneity of departures when the obstacle will be removed ; the virtual simultaneity of imagined departures returns to the simultaneity of efforts, where the solution lies. Anticipation and prevision are not enough, because each traveler is perfectly capable of imagining by themselves how they would continue walking if the rock were displaced ; this anticipation still has to return towards the present, in modifying the structure and conditions of the current operation; in the given case, it is the collective anticipation that modifies every one of the individual actions in building the system of synergies (Simondon 2008; my translation from French).

Commoning, and particularly the creation of commons as dispositifs, is such an act of collective imagination and invention in my understanding. Yet, while we might affirm the interconnectedness of community and commons, how exactly do we think of their relation? With care commons we may say that the commons and community are often co-emergent, rather than one coming first. What tends to come first is bodily needs, as shared needs that thus become a social matter. When we speak of social reproduction commoning (Barbagallo, Harvie & Beuret 2019, Gutiérrez-Sánchez 2017), we refer to activities and projects that address our basic needs: for shelter, food, water, care, etc. In this context, needs are starting points for reproduction commoning as a way of building community not on the basis of identity or status but of shared material and

life conditions -and indeed also, but not primarily, of desires.²⁸ We may visualize different ways of thinking the relation between community and commons as follows:

resource commons:²⁹ resource → organization

organizational commons:³⁰ organization → resource

care/reproductive commons:³¹ needs → organization/composition

In this third perspective on commons, it is relations and practices that are central, as modalities of *commoning* (De Angelis 2017) rather than capital-C Commons. Though practices of care commoning also inhabit and build infrastructures and different forms of collective wealth that may come to be considered at resources, from shared spaces - the post-partum classes as temporary zones of shared interdependency at the public healthcare center, the shopfronts and backyards of the self-run nurseries, etc.- to networks like the PEPI and organizations like the grupos de crianza compartida, all the way to the equalization of time resources between women and men (theoretically, at least; more on this below).

The self-organization of care and reproduction via commons is, however, all but obvious in our contemporary western contexts. Since care commoning –via larger communities and extended families alike– has been nearly eradicated in the course of centuries of patriarchal and capitalist enclosure, we must start from basic questions again:

What happens when what we call care is a commons and takes place in more collective contexts? What happens when care is a commons and is done in common? What dilemmas and difficulties do those who share it face? What's its relation to other environments and dynamics? (Vega Solis, Martínez Buján & Paredes Chauca 2018: 17).

These questions stem from a book on *Care, communities and commons* edited by feminist scholar-activists across Latin America and Spain recently (Vega Solís, Martínez Buján & Paredes Chauca 2018). Taking a historical and geographical look at practices of care commoning, they analyze the relation between the neoliberal 'plot' or 'weave' ('trama neoliberal', see Gentili & Sader 2003), communitarian-popular horizons ('horizontes comunitario-populares,' see Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017b) and the politics of the commons as concerning the organization and provision of care, across these geographical and grassroots-social ['popular'] contexts. The editors argue that bringing together the tradition and analyses of *comunitarismo*, which differs from the meaning and history of the Anglo-Saxon notion of 'communitarianism,' and *commons*

²⁸ On the relation between need and desire, see the reading group on 'Social Reproduction between Need and Desire' that I co-facilitated with Bue Ruebner Hansen and Paula Cobo-Guevara in 2015 <https://murmurae.wordpress.com/proyectos/social-reproduction-between-need-and-desire-reading-group/>, accessed 24/7/2020.

²⁹ Also known as common pool resources, as theorized by Ostrom (1990).

³⁰ As based in collective practices of social movements, groups, cooperatives, organisations (Stengers & Gutwirth 2016).

³¹ As conceptualized by (Vega Solis, Martínez Buján & Paredes Chauca 2018) or Federici (2013).

with recent theories and movements around care is an important undertaking. In particular, because this allows us to broaden our analyses around the reproduction and sustainability of life towards fields of practice such as those concerning food, health, water, land, life-space and socialization. They seek, thus, to broaden and intertwine existing analyses of care, reproduction and commons:

To analyze the communitarian side of things [el polo comunitario] allows us to think the potential it has to build arrangements that are not controlled by social and spatial privatization in the nuclear family, by the exclusive and individual assignation to women, by the recourse to precarious women, or by the economic resources of each one. *Appropriating* the capacity to care is a form of valuing collective and embodied life that displaces capitalist profit and atomization by creating communities for whom attention is not a minor question, but something that ties together life in common (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan & Paredes Chauca 2018: 17; my translation from Spanish).

They point out that the genealogies of what we may call *cuidado comunitario* (which I will translate as community-based or communal care, to avoid confusion with Anglo-Saxon communitarian traditions) vary in different places and that rather than melt them into a unitary theory or concept, it is useful to explore their specificities and ways in which they learn from one another. Moreover,

the *comunitario* organizes itself in hybrid processes where there is ‘touch’ with public instances, monetary economies or relations of parenthood. What matters is that the realization and the design of care is in the hands of a collectivity that creates its own conditions of execution and benefits (Vega Solis, Martínez Bujan & Paredes Chauca 2018: 24).

In *Cuidados, comunidad y común* there is an affirmation of fluidity between the public and the commons. The case studies the book presents illustrate the ways in which communitarian care often cuts across these spheres, from community use of institutions to policy that claims to be based on community. This fluidity is based in care commons being organizational commons that are driven by social needs. Javier Rodrigo, an activist and parent in Poble Sec and the PEPI network, points out the possible tensions between ‘crianza comunitaria’ and commons:

Community-based management [gestión comunitaria] is a figure that exists as the political project of various organizations and installations of very different nature (could be a circus, a neighborhood center, or even an urban garden); they defend the idea of direct democracy, not sovereignty over resources, and say: the communities demand that, before a city infrastructure is put out via a public tender to a third agent [...] they [the communities] can govern them directly, the might have the knowledge and capacity and moreover be able to do this in a way that’s much more sustainable, ecological and efficient. So what has been called ‘economy of commons goods’ (a referent here is Elinor Ostrom who came to see the fishermen of Valencia, Vigo etc.) came to ‘demonstrate’ that a

local community, with a local resource, and a model of governance, with a protocol of how we manage and organize ourselves, was much more efficient with these resources in the long run than the wholesale exploitation of a company. This is easy to understand when we speak of a mountain, of mountains, of fishers cooperatives etc., but the big question is: what happens when we do this with a *grupo de crianza*? Can one really make an economy of common goods in relation to the *grupos de crianza*? (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

The possible contradiction that Rodrigo points out between ‘economies of the common good’ and community-based childcare projects can be partly resolved through the differentiations that Stengers and Gutwirth (2016) propose regarding commons. Do not conflate those commons centered around a resource (or ‘a good’) with those that are centered more around organization (and thus time, relations, bodies). To what extent does the governance of care-based commons differ from that of more resource-based ones? Surely there are many singular arrangements and overlaps. Yet, one key characteristic of care-based commons is the fact that they revolve around one or several living beings, and as life evolves and changes permanently, the primacy of relations – as the shifting centers of commoning – is stronger than in commoning that revolves around more or less stable resources. Most *grupos de crianza*, however, aspire to establish resources themselves, to build infrastructures that can last and become proto-institutions or institutions of the commons (see below my report on the micropolitics of municipalism, as well as Radio Reina Sofia 2011 and Sguigla 2004).

The language that people use to speak about collective childcare projects in Poble Sec also reflects a fluidity and openness, which sometimes also expresses itself as ambivalence, between the ‘comunitario’ and the ‘común.’ In speaking of more collective, self-organized forms of childcare, Spanish and Catalan words such as ‘*crianza compartida*,’ ‘*crianza en común*’ or ‘*crianza comunitaria*’ are often used interchangeably. This happens particularly in everyday language –one local activist, mother and cooperativist mentions the words ‘*co-crianza*’ and ‘*comaternidad*’ (Alba 2018), another local activist, mother and urbanist Lucia, speaks of ‘*criar en comunidad*’ (Zandigiacomi 2018) –but also in news articles (Botwin 2016, García 2016, Nave del bebé 2014). What all those names have in common is a focus on the collective aspect of childcare and childrearing, be it as sharing, commoning or socializing. These dimensions and nuances are inextricably linked, yet for the purpose of this study we shall define particularly three of them: ‘*grupos de crianza [compartida]*’ as self-run childcare groups; ‘*crianza en común*,’ which refers to the commons aspect of childcare; and ‘*crianza comunitaria*,’ which refers to community-based traditions and practices.

The most common denominator of the self-run childcare groups is ‘***grupos de crianza [compartida]***,’ with the adjective sometimes varying. The main studies of collective and community-based childcare in Barcelona (Puig & Segura 2015, Keller

Garganté 2017, Ezquerro & Mansilla 2017) go by a technical definition of such groups, differentiating roughly between those that revolve around a self-organization of *childcare* as a specific activity and labor, and those that revolve around more diffuse mutualism and collectivity in *childrearing* (as the global process of bringing up a child). This study is mostly concerned with the former, yet it will make reference to many of the latter, too, as what is at stake here is understanding an ecosystem of care. I will mostly stick with the above academic-technical terminology for the sake of clarity and continuity, yet it is important to note that the different functions of these two kinds of groups blur into one another in many ways, and indeed in both kinds there is a ‘sharing’ [compartir] of care. Many of my quotes here show this: in everyday language most people skip the adjective ‘compartida’ even if they are familiar with the definitions.

Another term that is often used is ‘**crianza comunitaria**,’ which literally means ‘community-based childrearing’ but has a broader history that is relevant to this research in several ways here. In speaking of ‘crianza comunitaria,’ many parents, educators and/as activists refer to the tradition of community organization rooted in Latin America particularly as a response to stark neoliberalism in the 1990s and onwards (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017b). These histories and practices were not just important referents for the Spanish anti-austerity movements of the 2010-years, but they also informed the municipalism of Barcelona en Comú, resonating with the cooperativist revindications of the 20th century in Catalunya.

In the context of Barcelona and Spain, instead of the liberal notions of ‘communitarianism’ that exist in Anglophone contexts,³² anarchist and libertarian communitarianisms are a more likely reference. These relate to the powerful experiences and practices of self-organization and neighborhood struggle in the civil war that continue to be alive and present today in neighborhoods such as Poble Sec. This communitarianism is anti-hierarchical and confederalist, as in the thought of Murray Bookchin whose libertarian ideas of municipalism are also an important inspiration for the municipalism of Barcelona en Comú. Taking this mixed lineage into account, we see that both the community and the commune are present in the term ‘comunitario.’ And, indeed, the relevance of ‘crianza comunitaria’ -perhaps best rendered as ‘community-based childrearing’- in the current moment in Poble Sec is

³² I refer to these terms in Spanish because these Latin and Anglophone traditions differ considerably when it comes to speaking about community and the communitarian or ‘comunitario.’ In English, the notion of ‘communitarianism’ goes back to anglophone debates in the 20th century, concerning the relation between the individual, community and society, in opposition to an emergent liberalism. It has its principal advocates in Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer and Alasdair MacIntyre, and it is concerned about the destruction of family and community fabric through the institutionalization of care and individualist rights-based models. It is, as such, a conservative tradition that affirms the value of the family and the community along more or less traditional lines, and opposes state intervention in matters considered private, of which childcare would be a paradigmatic example. Moreover, the English ‘Communitarianism’ is a philosophical-political notion with very different contextual roots and context than the word ‘comunitario’ in Spanish, which stems from grassroots-popular culture [cultura popular]. It is important to note that when speaking of ‘crianza comunitaria,’ neither parents, activists nor academics in Poble Sec are referring to this tradition, particularly not in its anglophone roots.

proportional to the relevance of communitarian municipalism in the city government, as we shall see below.

In this sense, the ‘comunitario’ and the ‘común’ are enmeshed, and it would be awkward to try separate them. Rather, the problem at hand requires us to see that what is at stake is a new way of articulating the family, the home and the community of belief (not merely religious) with the broader local community, the neighborhood, the city and its institutions. In this sense, we might use ‘crianza comunitaria’ and ‘childcare commons’ interchangeably. But there is also a historically and theoretically specificity to the commons that is relevant to us here.

‘Crianza en común’ refers to the commons and a history and tradition linked to land and natural resources that belong to everyone. One specificity of the commons is that they start from legal frameworks –the English legal term ‘common land,’ the Magna Carta, etc., and thus bear a specific relation to the state (existing within and beyond it) (see *Report 4. Case Studies in Italy* and *Report 2. The Common*, section 2.4.4). With the rise of modern capitalism, enclosures of the commons arose through British aristocratic and colonial rule, leading to many kinds of commoners’ struggles. With industrial and digital capitalism, enclosures and the struggles against them expanded into new domains. The current of contemporary commons theory most relevant to the present case study, broadly speaking, draws on communist and autonomist traditions and seeks to historicize and re-politicize struggles across the centuries and different places.

In Anglo-Saxon and Italian-influenced thought of the past 40 years, the analyses of Linebaugh, Federici, Caffentzis, Negri, De Angelis and others may be seen in this light, as they point to the dimension of social reproduction. These theorizations and practices of the commons extend from the material into the domain of immaterial commons (and back again) and encompass self-organizational processes as commoning. As such, they propose a political way of talking about the use, inhabitation and creation of spaces, infrastructures, even proto-institutions, as relating to social and political struggles (see the introduction to this fieldwork report). In contemporary Spain, and particularly in the municipalist Barcelona of this report, the aforementioned currents of commons theory have been widely received, discussed and adapted to different forms and levels of political practice.

6.5.5. Feminisms that center around life, feminist spaces for childcare

In relation to childcare, it is mostly feminist-autonomist debates and feminist theories of care that have addressed how care work and childcare institutions function in economic, social and political terms –ranging from a critical analysis of the home and the family to kindergartens and schools. In Spanish feminist-autonomist-inspired movements, the problem of childcare has been addressed through courses such as ‘El ADN de la Vida’ (Nociones Comunes 2013) or ‘Como coño se sostiene esto?’ (Nociones Comunes 2014) which have addressed the intersections between the politics of parenting, maternity, childcare, activism and institutions, as well as the

affirmation of a politics of the ‘Retaguardia’ in the ‘Otros Vinculos’ (2016) project or ‘Trincheras Permanentes’ (León 2017) and best-selling *Dónde está mi tribú* books (Del Olmo 2013). These debates also influence the municipalist politics of Barcelona en Comú, which starts from a claim to making politics of the commons possible at a municipal level. The latter part of this study is dedicated to this aspect.

Thus, globally speaking, a lot of traditions, definitions, struggles and practices come into play in this research project on childcare and childrearing commons. In the experimentations and struggles around collective childcare at stake here, in Poble Sec Barcelona 2017-20, we find intersections of libertarian, autonomist and, also, conservative notions of community and care. The projects this chapter focuses on – *grupos de crianza compartida*– do not aim to abolish or directly attack the home and nuclear family but seek ways to extend and support different kinds of family and household. They propose egalitarian and feminist forms of organization while accepting that certain traditional divisions of labor persist. They aim to create an alternative to public institutions without denying the importance of the latter. They work closely within the neighborhood communities whilst allowing for different levels of participation (see also *Report 1. The Political*). They aim to expand and render their community-based model more accessible without, however, focusing all their attention on this level.

By putting children and their wellbeing at the center, these projects navigate complex familial, social and political constellations, in slow and careful ways. Indeed, navigating complexity, openness and contingency with care and a slow but steady pace is a characteristic of most reproduction commons. The strength and resilience of the Poble Sec childcare commons feeds off the centrality of care, making their slowness and openness (and sometimes even indefinición) emerge as strengths. This is based in a conscious practice that embraces contingency. It is not rare to hear someone say, perhaps with self-irony, ‘vamos lentos pero vamos lejos’ (‘we move slow but we go far,’ a Zapatista-inspired saying) at the end of an assembly where only half the agenda came to be addressed, or when trying to walk a group of toddlers to the park. This slowness constitutes a politics of care –making sure everyone can follow, avoiding certain modes of pragmatism and efficiency as a matter of pedagogy and politics– that is being taken increasingly seriously in Spanish movements and politics since a powerful new feminist wave (Gil 2011) emerged around the time of the 15M movement in 2011. It is articulated around a politics of care whose main claim is about ‘putting life at the center’ (Orozco 2014).

It is crucial to see these commons in the context of neoliberalism. As Carolina del Olmo (2013) notes in her book *Dónde está mi tribú*, the present generations of women who grew up in neoliberalism are well aware of the triple burden (housework, waged work, childcare) and of their slim chances of gaining stable employment in today’s economies of precarity, particularly as women and mothers. In Spain in June 2019, only 10% of contracts are permanent³³ and extremely precarious short-term contracts

³³ See these statistics of the Spanish government,

are on the rise (Olías & Sánchez 2019). They embrace motherhood and childrearing as a political act that also reflects a refusal of precarious labor and triple exploitation, rather preferring to invent and defend other ways of caring and living. Del Olmo has to some extent pioneered this discourse of ‘new maternities’ [nuevas maternidades], which questions the narrative that waged labor means empowerment whilst staying at home to care is regressive:

Some go home to care, others choose professions of less prestige and less salary that leave them more free time. The usual way to analyze this is in terms of patriarchy and this, to be honest, angers me a bit: for sure one has to ask why these ones do this and the others that, but it’s not enough to pose that question whilst taking for granted that these ones win and these ones lose, that these ones are being submissive whilst the other ones choose (Del Olmo 2014; my translation from Spanish).

This approach to reproductive and waged labor shares much affinity with some theories and economies of the commons, privileging the creation of autonomous –or rather, interdependent– circuits of value generation over the integration into existing job or financial markets. It advocates that women’s inclusion in the labor market is not necessarily the prime way to overhaul capitalist and gendered forms of labor, opting for more horizontal and collective ways of articulating life and work. The question of ‘choice’ is acutely political here as in many feminist debates. *Dónde está mi tribú* has been very widely read in Spain (2018 saw its 8th edition), and it is one of the reasons many grupos de crianza compartida speak of themselves as ‘tribús.’ The approach to motherhood and work is a differentiated one, characteristic of a new wave of feminism and a new politicization of motherhood that draws on social movements, queer politics and feminist commons (Del Olmo 2013; 2014, León 2017, Llopis 2015, Merino 2017, Vivas 2019). This ‘fourth wave’ of feminism in the Spanish state insists upon care, interdependence, vulnerability, feminist economics and commoning as bases for another politics, not as a matter of equality or labor market integration but as a redefinition of political subjects and practices. The political focus shifts, thus, from work to life, from integrating women into existing systems to redefining those systems altogether.



‘This space supports the Feminist Strike.’ March 2019 Facebook Screenshot from Petit Molinet Group.

The shift from work to life also comes with its contradictions and pitfalls, however. Whilst the participants in Poble Sec’s grupos de crianza compartida generally do not embrace the idea of stay-at-home mothering or Christian values, and are mostly overtly feminist, in practice the groups do reproduce many of the traditional gender roles that feminists seek to abolish, since women take on a disproportionately large amount of their work. Everyone is acutely aware of this problem, which is quick to come up in a discussion of the groups, raised by members themselves. There is an awareness that this gendered division of labor is the effect of a rejection of neoliberal precarity and the triple burden³⁴ by women, where, however, they cannot count on a wide-ranging emancipation of men and are thus left to politicize care from a women’s standpoint largely.

6.5.6. Some historical precedents in self-organized childcare

It is useful to ground our analyses in some historical analyses, particularly as we may note parallels to self-organized childcare that emerged as part of second-wave feminism and the social-political transformations of 1968. Collective experiments in childcare reflect different moments and positions within women’s movements as well as social movements more broadly. On the one hand, it is clear that more radical projects emerge from moments of great social mobilization –1968 with the Kinderländen in Germany (Binger 2018, Sander 2008), the 1970s women’s movements in the UK (Bargbagallo forthcoming) and 2011 with the 15M movement in Spain (Keller Garganté 2015, Nociones Comunes 2013, León 2017, del Olmo 2013

³⁴ This term of feminist sociological analysis refers to women’s key role in reproductive work, productive work as well as community care.

and 2014)– and that, with time, these projects tend to follow social and political shifts that occur at a broader level, often in the sense of normalization, deradicalization.

As parent-activist Lothar Binger (2018) writes in his account of the early Berlin ‘Kinderläden’ that emerged from the ‘68 movements –self-run childcare groups that evolved in ways very similar to those that sprung up in Poble Sec after 2011– these groups were initially radically feminist and saw an active and relatively equal participation of men (though sometimes also an usurpation in theoretical and representational terms). The women’s movements and women’s central council (Zentralrat der Frauen) played an important role in these projects, politicizing and socializing care, in a way perhaps similar to the role that feminist movements, from sex- and domestic workers movements to the women’s strike, play for the grupos de crianza compartida. Binger recounts how, when he again becomes father in the late 70s and seeks out a Kinderladen for his kids, he finds these groups to be more depoliticized and operating on the basis of a more strongly gendered division of labor. An effect, there too perhaps, not just of social normalization but also of precarization and the triple burden.

The tension between affirming the choice between different forms and models of childcare, versus affirming a unitary public model of education accessible to all, is not new in feminist debates. Barbagallo, in her study on feminist demands around childcare since the 70s (focused on the UK), notes that

The tensions, both practical and ideological, between, on the one hand, demanding more childcare provision so that women could choose to work and, on the other, conceiving of childcare provision as necessary to transform the sexual division of labor by changing not only who provided care, but also how and why caring activities took place, exposed a fault-line that existed in the women’s movement. It was a fault-line that existed primarily along the divisions of class (Barbagallo 2016a: 12).

In contemporary Poble Sec, this fault-line certainly also exists, but the grupos de crianza do not uniquely set out from feminist demands. They embrace self-organized childcare also because of alternative pedagogies, reflecting a key demand and perspective of the post-68 anti-authoritarian education movements for instance, such as those around the Kinderläden in Germany (Binger 2018). The contemporary childcare groups are akin to the more anti-authoritarian experiments post-68 and the more feminist experiments that gathered force in the 70s in that they try out alternatives without, for the most part, focusing general critique on the public system. In this sense, they share an anti-capitalist consciousness. The contemporary style is less ideological, yet commons and the community still act as strong models and motors of conviction.

To grasp where some of these positions come from politically, and how they sit within a broader spectrum of childcare politics, I will now briefly outline some main approaches. Broadly speaking, we can identify four positions in relation to childcare,

as concerning its situatedness between the home, the community, the state and the market. Putting it simply, they tend to demand, sometimes exclusively or in articulation:

1) More home /**conservative and anti-systemic liberal values**. This is the domain of conservative family politics that seeks to maintain tradition, familial and often patriarchal authority, to keep economic and social life centered on the family, often as advocated by the church. Yet this domain harbors conservatives as well as (to a much lesser degree) anti-systemic liberals. Homeschooling, the building of alternative families and the transformation of the home into a place of extended families and egalitarian relations may also be part of this domain. The ‘attachment parenting’ current, advocating a very strong bond of care between mother and child particularly, is very popular today in progressive circles, yet it emerges from the evangelical thought of William Sears (Sears 1984, Sears & Sears 2001).

The attachment approach has been embraced by some Christians and ecofeminists whilst being frequently rejected by feminists who advocate for equality, particularly in Anglo-Saxon debates (Warner 2005, Badinter 2012). The ‘immersive mothering’ it encourages demands that women dedicate themselves exclusively to their children, and promotes an education that is very labor intensive, child-centered (largely ignoring the mother’s needs), expert-driven, emotionally absorbing and financially demanding. Feminist mother and scholar-activist Núria Verges describes this current as follows, in relation to Poble Sec:

There’s the feminists who are more radical, cultural, agrofeminist, who maintain that being a woman is beautiful. Life is at the center, there’s an elation of motherhood, of reproduction: ‘we’re goddesses, I’m the mother, I’m my own mother... women’s knowledges, me with my daughter I know everything and I’ll understand everything.’ There’s an interesting critique of obstetric violence there, but it falls into essentialism and into renaturalizing (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Catalan).

This debate touches on some of the core contradictions that the self-organized childcare groups face, who largely embrace a (more or less) attachment-based, labor-intensive, child-driven, emotionally and financially challenging approach. Indeed, some equality-feminist critiques ignore the fact that in countries like the United States but also Spain, where maternity leaves are very short (4 months in Spain) or virtually nonexistent (the US), mothers’ struggles to get more time to rest and be with their children is indeed a struggle of self-care and emancipation from work.

2) More community. This brings us to a second set of feminist influences on childcare commons: **community, anarchist and libertarian feminisms**. This is where most examples and references in this study are located, as they call for the strengthening of community and neighborhood ties, for an increased porosity between families and communities, as well as a community appropriation of institutionalities. ‘Comunitario’ refers to communalizing resources, work and institutions in the sense

of making them both community-run and commune-run. This current is particularly relevant in the context of a rising municipalism, giving rise to new city politics in places like Barcelona of Barcelona en Comú. It often goes hand in hand with communal and commons-based notions of economy and labor as well as politics. Where it tends towards the ‘more market’ argument at the same time, this approach touched partially upon the neocommunitarian current, which seeks to privatize care through voluntary community work (see Zechner 2013a, Hodgson 2004).

Here, it is the community and collective that is at the center of politics, as Núria Vergés puts it:

The state and market have to be as small as possible: self-management, collective responsibility, also with reproduction, with the body, the family... the kids within the community: ‘my daughter is also everybody else’s daughter, in a certain sense’... I’ve seen that this demands a lot of time and I didn’t have that much, because I had to go on with my job (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Catalan).

This too is a labor- and time-intensive option, but in the sense that it (ideally) involves everyone’s labor. To be sure, strictly state- or market-based provision of care indeed is equally time- and labor-intensive. It is impossible to rationalize time or effort in major ways when it comes to care, without stripping it of its key characteristics, which are time-based as they involve attention, sustaining, growth/development/healing (see Multitudes 2009). The difference with state- and market-based provision of care is that the work in these domains is naturally allocated to precarious, subaltern women, without much discussion about gendered divisions of labor, triple burdens or indeed class- and race-based exploitation.

3) More state. This is the domain of **socialist as well as some Marxist feminisms**, which sometimes join a call for a simultaneous strengthening of community ties and transformation of the state towards less centralized entities. It is the domain of claims for getting women out of the home, for enabling more equal gender relations through subsidies and leave. In many cases, these claims go hand in hand with a push for women towards the labor market and for the remuneration of care work, in a broad affirmation of wage labor and economies based thereon. This approach tends to be endorsed mostly by gender equality feminisms, who seek to decrease the difference between female and male roles in care. But gender equality is far from realized in this domain too, and as researcher and mother Christel Keller Garganté says:

the [public] Bressol daycare centers don’t have the capacity to put childrearing [crianza] at the center of social life, because in the end they’re still spaces that are closed to the community and the rest of the neighbors (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

4) More market. This tendency aims at the marketization of care in the broadest sense, meaning the privatization of domestic, auxiliary and care work, arguing it will greatly increase the volume of national economies and GDPs. **(Neo)liberal feminisms** have

promoted the so-called glass ceiling approach in this vein in order to get women onto the labor market, convinced that waged work will lead to women's liberation, and striving for women's access to male roles. This approach tends to be driven by feminisms of gender equality that seek to assimilate women to men. Similar, and sometimes, going hand in hand with the argument for more state involvement in care, this approach demands for economically accessible care to be available to all via subsidies/redistribution. Alternatively, it argues that the use of cheap (and mostly informal) migrant labor is legitimate for women's liberation and that this ultimately also benefits poor women at the center as well as at the end of global care chains.

We will now move on to analyzing the concrete position that the self-organized childcare projects take in relation to the state and the market, and how this is reflected in their modes of self-governance. We will see that these groups occupy a complex and intelligent position in relation to the public as well as the private sphere, opening onto new paradigms of (self-)governance and the political. They operate through a politics of ties (vínculos) and are sites of subjectivation and politicization of care and belonging as well as motherhood and masculinity. Going into depth and detail regarding Poble Sec's groups, this section draws on the 'Comúnes y Crianza: Hace falta un Poble Sec para criar?' [Commons and childrearing: does it take a Poble Sec village to raise a child?] workshop in autumn 2018, which I organized in conjunction with local mothers, activists, educators and policy makers in the context of this research project (see also the appendix for details). This section begins to render the social and political intelligence, cooperation and agonisms that exist between social movements and institutions in Barcelona, which my study on micropolitics and municipalism further develops.

6.6. Tensions between commons and the state in childcare

The greatest subsidy of capitalism is the free care of children by women, domestic work turned into love and servitude and the devaluation of the costs of women's care work, particularly [the care of] the women of the world's south for the women of the world's north. We are subsidizing power structures that impoverish us. There's no equality to be found here (Galindo 2019; my translation from Spanish).

The 'Crianza y Comunes' colloquium explored the possible local articulations of these three dimensions from various viewpoints: those of parents and particularly mothers, in the first instance; those of parents and 'acompañantes' (accompanying adults/pedagogues) in self-organized childcare groups and the PEPI network; those of parents and teachers in public kindergartens and schools; and, of course, in as much as possible those of children, via their presence and parents. Interestingly, the debate in Poble Sec is not polarized. It is characterized by an attitude of mutual respect, listening and the desire to build bridges. This is a sign of the culture of encounters, sharing and debate that characterizes the neighborhood, aided by the fact that the

municipal government of Barcelona en Comú tried to strengthen both the public system and commons-based neighborhood initiatives, avoiding pitting one against the other. This takes various forms, such as attempting to common the public in some instances, creating common-public cooperations, and politicizing the commons in relation to the public (see also the following chapter).

As Javier Rodrigo notes, reducing the debate around self-organized childcare to a polarity between private vs. public one loses out on a lot of effects and conditions: from the fact that these groups are spaces of democratic learning and experimentation, and that their ‘direct governance is very efficient, with commissions, democracy, it’s a school for mothers and fathers’ (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish) to the way in which the practices and knowledges produced in these groups spill and cross over with the public system. ‘This governance that one learns when it’s a school with democratic politics later has a lot of linkages, many influences and it’s difficult to reduce it to either the private or the public’ (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish). What parents and children learn in the grupos de crianza compartida, they then bring it with them into the public school system, enabling transformations therein.

Rodrigo affirms modulations between different kinds of systems, meaning that the commons and the public can coexist, one being publicly and the other autonomously organized. There can even be crossovers between public and commons daycare spaces, and, as Rodrigo puts it, there can be ‘intermediary spaces. The more biodiversity of childrearing, the better, I think. So, it’s not about this idea of competing over whether you’re private or public, which moreover seems a debate that’s of the 80s, with all due sympathy and respect’ (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish). The given social and political climate in Poble Sec makes it possible for the strong ambivalence that characterizes the relation between commons and state to take on a positive, productive dynamic, leading to experimentation and debate rather than polarization or a sense of disempowering contradiction. Different positions exist and indeed also shift, there is a shared and public debate.

Within the grupos de crianza compartida, there are different tendencies as regards demands to the city council and the question of whether it should grant free use of spaces or give funding. Marc Alcega Alcivill from the XELL (the network of free education in Catalunya) is one of the activists interviewed by the ‘Tribú en Arganzuela’ project in 2016 about the XELL’s ‘demands towards the administrations, such as that they grant use of spaces, give some kind of subsidy, etc.:’

There’s a debate about that. In our environment there are movements that absolutely want to do without the state and its mechanisms, and others that say ‘no, we’re part of society, the state also represents us.’ In this case, what can we ask of them [the state]? For now, we’ll get them to not persecute us, that they leave us in peace and help us with things that don’t cost them money. This is where licenses come into play: to find one that serves us for regularizing the spaces of our schools (Alcega & La Tribú en Arganzuela 2016).

For some however, there are problematic and possibly insurmountable contradictions when it comes to the relation between commons and state in childcare. Raquel Gallego, head of the IGOP policy research center in Barcelona and co-coordinator of various projects on care provision, institutional and non-institutional models of early childcare (0-3 year old), says of ‘innovative’ non-institutional models like the *grupos de crianza compartida*:

So, the problem is that if they don’t want to be regulated, how will they demand public spaces ...? That’s contradictory: you can’t demand to make use of public resources if you don’t accept to be regulated; it’s contradictory because if you’re not regulated then you’re outside... On the other hand, if the government –the local one for instance– regulates it [self-organized childcare], then it’s taking on responsibility, and we also don’t know if it wants to take that on. So, here’s there’s a certain difficult match on both sides....If the government regulates, it has to take on fiscal responsibilities, if you give them [the *grupos de crianza*] funding then that has to be audited, it [the government] has to make sure that the money is used for the thing it has to be used for, it has to have instruments of control, of follow-up, of inspection...of course, that’s extra work that it didn’t have so far (Gallego 2019; my translation from Spanish).

In the case of *Poble Sec* groups and the PEPI, the notion that childcare groups would not want in any way to be regulated is however questionable. The closeness of many activists and parents to the commons debates and policies (before, within and beyond Barcelona en Comú) means that there is a notion of openness regarding possibilities for municipal support and regulation. The ‘Urban Commons’ policies (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017b and 2017c) that ‘regulate’ spaces such as the Can Batlló community center show that public-commons agreements need not pass via total control and permanent audits. Spaces are being handed over rent-free to local communities (as associations) and new modalities of accompaniment and ongoing evaluation are being elaborated. Can Batlló, which was claimed by neighbors in 2011 in a powerful campaign after years of being left empty, is a proto-institution that belongs neither to the private nor to the public entirely. After years of negotiation, planning and probing with the city government of Barcelona en Comú –and years of legal and administrative labor and struggle on the part of the latter– the city has found a legal modality for conceding Can Batlló’s spaces for civic use. The spaces are granted to the *Associació Espai Comunitari y Veinal Autogestionat de Can Batlló* for 30 years (Redacció la Vanguardia 2019). Other similar examples exist, such as the *Ateneu Nou Barris* neighborhood center.

A similar model of granting a space for limited community use might well be imaginable in relation to the *grupos de crianza compartida*. Indeed, the city commissioned studies on those possibilities earlier on in the mandate, regarding commons-based care and childcare in specific (Ezquerro & Mandilla 2017, Keller-Garganté 2017). Due to reasons unknown, also to the author herself, the childcare-specific study remains unpublished. As we will see further on, debates and

negotiations around public-commons policies for childcare are complex and sometimes fraught.

6.6.1. Limited models: barriers to inclusivity in self-organized and institutional childcare

Raquel Gallego, cited above, was embarking on a big 3-year research project on institutional and non-institutional models of early childcare (0-3 years) when I interviewed her in 2018. This research project will yield a statistical picture of this field, asking why people choose one childcare model over another. Gallego has a troubling suspicion regarding the more innovative, non-institutional models:

It's very curious because with experiences like those of social innovation we realize that they don't help with the problematics of people who really suffered from the crisis. Rather, they answer to the aspirations of people who have a high educational level, that have a medium but sufficient socioeconomic level. As always, it's the population who suffers most from the impact of the crisis that doesn't in the least benefit from what we call an alternative economy. Not just that, I think it [alternative economies] isn't even known [to this most affected population]. And I doubt that if they knew it, they would choose it. I think that finally you end up seeing –I won't know for sure before we finish the research project but I have this feeling– that the social and solidarity economy is neither social nor solidary in the end. That's to say that in the end it doesn't come to resolving problems of the population that really suffers from the negative impact of the economic crisis. There's a vast sector of the population that doesn't benefit from the social and solidarity economy, I'm afraid I might say that even the term itself, of social and solidarity economy, is misleading, because it's not thought for the disadvantaged sectors of the population. This is a sad conclusion from my viewpoint, but it's what I seem to be seeing on the basis of my research... (Gallego 2019; my translation from Spanish).

For Gallego, who has followed a host of research projects on solidarity- and commons-based economies at the IGOP research center, this problem of the accessibility of self-run childcare projects reflects, thus, a broader problem with social and solidarity economies. This problem can indeed also be seen in the social, cultural and ethnic composition of Poble Sec's childcare projects. They are largely made up of white people with a relatively high level of education and lower-middle income. This is self-critically confirmed by Poble Sec based cooperativist and activist Xavier Latorre Tapis, speaking about his many years of working in the social and solidarity economy networks in Poble Sec:

We also have a self-critique... in our spaces the majority are whities... I have to admit this and in Cooperasec [local solidarity economy platform] we also have a self-critique, we always say that our networks are having trouble opening to more of the cultural diversity in the neighborhood. We're conscious that we're

not reaching all the diversity that exists in the neighborhood, we're mostly white folks (blanquitos)... (Latorre Tapis 2019; my translation from Spanish).

But, of course, there are many different kinds of initiatives in this broad spectrum of social and solidarity economies. A spectrum we may see to overlap largely with what we call 'commons' here, as it builds mainly on community-based practices: food coops (La Seca at la Base), self-organized nurseries (as those of the PEPI network), social centers (La Base and Ateneu Rebelde), cooperative cafés (La Raposa), but also exchange and gifting networks (Trocasesc and Poble Sec Regalos), anti-eviction and mutual support networks (el Sindicat de Barri), the domestic worker's cooperative 'Més que Cures', etc. While the more consumer- and service-oriented cooperatives cater mostly to people with median income and high educational status, who are willing to spend extra money on goods and services that come from community-based initiatives, the anti-eviction network, gifting and exchange platforms (two extremely active Whatsapp groups and regular exchange sessions) directly support people and families in dire economic circumstances. Hence, while the critique of Gallego applies, it is worthwhile differentiating initiatives and keeping in mind that diverse initiatives and participants makes the Poble Sec solidarity economies lively and indeed also resilient.

Gallego's main hunch is that people do not choose grupos de crianza for economic motives, but rather for social, personal or ideological ones. This is certainly true, yet, as Xavier Latorre points out, cooperativism also invites us to question notions of economy in themselves:

When we organized the Solidarity Economy fair, we also invited people to a space that made conflict visible, with a stand of the Sindicat de Barri, because we also understand that the Sindicat de Barri is an economic actor, based on our broad vision of community economy [economía comunitaria]. There was a bit of tension over that [chuckles] with the association of shopkeepers (or maybe with a sector of it)... it was an interesting debate to unfold the concept of what we understand by economic actors, based on the more traditional view, because all strands of mutual aid are about satisfying needs, that's generating another economy –but it's to generate another model of economy of what we call the communal base [base comunitaria]. The Sindicat de Barri is a network of mutual support that is really trying to satisfy needs as important as housing, and based on collective power they manage to renegotiate agreements [rental] and stop evictions. I mean they had some small victories, not in all cases but...many negotiations with owners finally led to less unfair agreements, when they saw that this person or family has a more broad collective force behind them, some owners accepted to not raise the rent. This is our vision of the solidarity economy...the network of barter and all the networks of exchange too, Trocasesc [local exchange platform], that's also about encouraging the capacity to exchange things that one maybe doesn't need anymore, but the other does...(Latorre Tapis 2019; my translation from Spanish).

Generally, and in many ways, social and solidarity economies do and can include those socially and economically most vulnerable. The ‘Sindicat de Barri’ in Poble Sec stops evictions, negotiates against rent raises, operates a food bank and runs campaigns against speculation. When Cooperativist activists mapped Poble Sec’s cooperative initiatives, showing some 15-18 projects and groups, the Sindicat de Barri was included as well as ‘the Petit Molinet and Monstre de Paper for now, set up on an associative rather than lucrative base’ (Latorre Tapis 2019; my translation from Spanish). They are looking to include more.

Returning to childcare commoning, we may thus ask the critical question of what to include in this category of commons. What level of lived, not just discursive egalitarianism must initiatives practice in order to deserve being called commoning? While there are plenty technical, legal and organizational definitions on the subject, very few take an intersectional approach to land this abstract debate in the muddy soil of real social composition and privilege. Here we encounter a blind spot of much commons theory and anthropology, which largely fails to address questions of race, class and gender. If commons are to be transformative social practices that lead not just to more democracy but also to more equality (making democracy accessible to all), then what basic requirements must they meet in terms of social inequalities? Is it enough for commons initiatives to practically, not just discursively, address one of the great axes of inequality –bringing justice in terms of class, gender, race, age or ability, for instance? And, furthermore, to what extent must commons initiatives engender successful egalitarian *practices* versus just having egalitarian *ideals*?

The commons are not a framework for evaluating and defining practices in detailed technical terms, that much is clear. They aim to describe a broad band of social practices that share an organizational horizon that brings us beyond the paradigms of the private and the public. Yet, when it comes to thinking policies of the commons, as is the case with the policies of Barcelona en Comú 2015-19, then specific and rigorous criteria must apply. The debate on these criteria within governments is quite new –with some partial referents in Ecuador and Bolivia (see the work of Alberto García Linera, for example). While there were many discursive advances within Barcelona en Comú’s 2015-19 mandate, the precise administrative, legal and technical modalities of commons-based municipal policy only had only just begun to be explored and tested. As we shall see below, a key line of tension within this debate is about the relation between the commons and the public. Broadly speaking, the tension between the public and the commons is the reflection of a contradiction between models of universality that want to include everyone and, as such, put social-organizational matters second, and models of self-organization that set out from collective innovation and seek to be broadly inclusive in a second step.

Looking at the dimensions of race, class, gender, ability and age, we can see that Barcelona en Comú has made vast progress in matters of gender, ability and age. To a considerable degree, it has addressed problems of class, and stalled largely with regards to race. This is a reflection of the broader political movements and tendencies

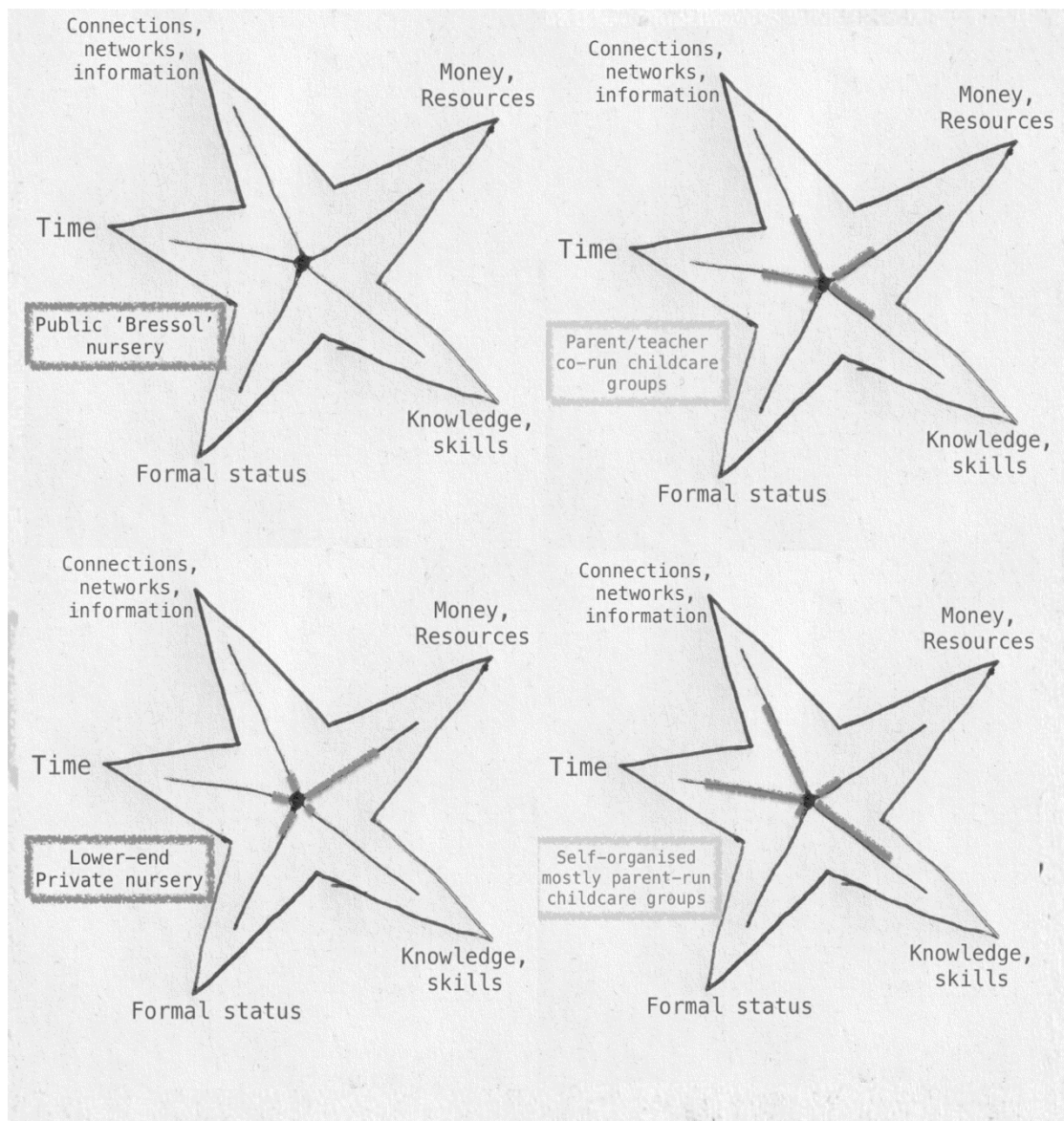
of the time, where calls for women's equality have become mainstream (the feminist strikes of 8th March 2016 and onwards, globally the #metoo movements, etc.), while anti-racism is only just beginning to make its way into institutions, in the US in particular, with figures like Alexandra Ocasio-Cortés and Ilhan Omar. At the same time, class remains an absolute taboo that can only be rendered as problems of social mobility, poverty or exclusion. The liberal political paradigm that dominates institutions across the Western world has taken on debates over inequality to the extent that they promote mainstreaming and quotas, yet it has largely failed to address underlying structural causes. In this matter, Barcelona en Comú has a broader vision, yet mostly succeeded in implementing real changes in some domains. A lot is left to be done. In the case of childcare commons, policies have been debated, rigorous assessments made (see sections below), but proposals have not come to mature during Bcomú's first mandate.

Here, too, the question of the public and the commons arises. What is the difference between a public and a commons-based approach to social justice? Since they are self-organized, most commons processes set out from a specific social base, either revolving around a community or a resource, yet always with a need and, thus, certain social parameters in common. This is their strength and limitation at once. It is impossible to get from the particular to the universal. But if commons are neither entirely one or the other, there must be other ways to think about inclusivity and accessibility within them. How might we critically look at these dimensions regarding the real composition of commoning projects, and develop a productive debate from there?

6.6.2. Limits and ambivalences between public, commons and private daycare options

In the following section I set out some basic tools with which we may analyze different axes of accessibility and inclusion with regards to commons initiatives. Whilst such analysis does not give a normative answer to the broader question of what should count as commons, what levels of rigor and inclusivity we should expect of commoning initiatives (questions that perhaps can only meaningfully find singular and situated answers), I believe it does provide a first step in the debate. It is mostly the commons movements themselves that provide the most rigorous and grounded analysis of dynamics of social composition within their practices. As my interviews show, activists and commoners in solidarity economies and childcare groups alike are the first to point to their own limitations, and they are struggling to find solutions to this. Below I adapt a visualization tool that has been used in militant research, to illustrate some key factors for accessing the different kinds of childcare.³⁵ These intuitive diagrams show different access criteria and how roughly they play out in different childcare models:

³⁵ These star diagrams have been adapted from the Serpica Naro and Carrot Workers Collectives, see Carrot Workers Collective/Precarious Worker's Brigade (2017): 33.



Access criteria in different childcare models.

Let's take a look at each of these models for a moment.

The **Public Bressol daycare centers** have been weakened with austerity (Rodriguez 2017), leading to worse teacher-child ratios and less general resources and, thus, both less quality as well as a failure to meet demand. Barcelona en Comú created 5 new Bressol centers with some 500 places during its 2015-19 mandate, but still only 20% of children can get a public place in many neighborhoods. Lower-income and migrant families are more represented in the public system than in any other childcare model because of a differential fee system and a points-based application system that prioritizes local, vulnerable and mono-parental families. While, in some respects, there are bureaucratic hurdles within the application process, these processes tend to be more transparent and regulated than those of self-run centers. Thanks to a strong public ethos however, Bressols are not stigmatized in Barcelona (Barcelona en Comú has helped improve their revindications and image in 2014-19) and classes are

diverse, mixing the autochthonous with migrants from near and far, as well as people from different backgrounds. These centers embody the diversity of the city and the neighborhood, yet they usually do not give rise to strong communities or ‘tribús.’ The relation of Bressols to the neighborhood is, thus, both more organic, more representative of its diverse population, linked with different social services, and more alienated. People from Bressols participate in neighborhood social life only in their own capacity and name; to that extent the public system is more individualizing.

The pros: more affordable, income-based, transversal and inclusive, transparent, stable, and spaces are more appropriate in some respects. All Bressols have outdoor spaces, but often it’s many kids to a room, and educational models are quite updated, within the limits of a very low ratio. The downsides: the ratios and lack of places. The public system’s claim to universality thus fails due to underfunding. Núria Vergés, a mother and feminist activist from Poble Sec says about her experience of a local Bressol:

...daycare centers like the Bressol NIC are not enough for everyone and there’s been the construction of a welfare state which in the end is poor and not very socialist. Moreover, you need to meet certain criteria, it’s done via a draw and you have to get lucky. What kinds of parents do they have in mind? For example, all of September there’s half-day care only. They’re thinking of a mother who works half the day, because moreover they always talk to me rather than the father. It’s interesting to think about what parents this model has in mind (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Vergés argues that private daycare centers have more realistic offers for working families, in fact. ‘A private nursery is the one that thinks most about both parents working: they have longer hours, summer activities, etc.’ (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Spanish) This is an interesting contrast to the widespread idea that the public system is for working people. Indeed, it best accommodates traditional family models with fathers in full time employment and mothers doing part-time work or housekeeping only. Yet, many full-time working biparental families still opt for the public system over private or semi-private nurseries, for two main reasons. On the one hand, low wages and high rents in the face of which even two salaries are not enough to pay for private daycare; and pride in public education, on the other hand.

The **grupos de crianza compartida** appeal particularly to families with high educational and, to some extent, also economic credentials. Their emphasis is on the ratio, the quality of care, the creation of flexible social support structures, and the lively collective participation in the neighborhood. Of course, Bressols are also support structures, they are just more rigid and limited. The grupos de crianza, on the other hand, are precarious in their inhabitation of space (rent contracts or agreements of use) and as such do not meet institutional safety standards in their spaces, which is why they cannot officially be registered as private daycare centers and get potential subsidies from the Catalan Generalitat. They compensate for this precarity and lack of

infrastructure, from child-sized toilets to kitchens, nappy changing areas, patios etc., with the presence of many carers who can improvise and avoid accidents.

The grupos de crianza compartida are very precarious in their organizational and financial balance, and they often encompass experiences of failure that, by virtue of their reproductive and intimate nature, can be quite distressing for everyone involved (see autoethnographic appendix). They form strong groups and networks, as well as strong links to the neighborhood, albeit mostly with a less diverse range of families than the Bressols.

It is useful to apply at least three layers of analysis to these groups, based on the perspectives of race, class and gender, and to question how the intersections between those occur. A key main problem with grupos de crianza compartida is their uniform social composition. A large majority of parents have high education levels and a middle income, they are white and liberal, with at least one parent working part time or flexible hours. Both in the case of educators and parents, it is mostly women doing the work in these childcare groups.

There is an open debate as to how much weight each of the factors outlined in the star diagram above has, and indeed depending on whether one looks at it from a decolonial, class-based or feminist angle, one might argue that one or the other kind of exclusion is more determinant. This dilemma is not new. Looking at the debates that marked the early ‘Kinderläden’ in Berlin after 1968 (Binger 2018: 108-109, 160-161), there was much disagreement about what was then called *primary* versus *secondary contradictions*, anti-authoritarian pedagogy versus education that involves the working classes, in this case. With Ezquerra and Padilla, we may say that these heavily ideological debates failed to see a ‘modulatory’ resolution whereby contradictions could be fluidly and openly navigated and articulated (Ezquerra & Padilla 2017). This is not the case with the childcare groups of Poble Sec, which set out from a social praxis that is less centered on ideology and identity and more on subjectivity and composition (cf. Guattari & Rolnik 2006), on commoning as fluid and embodied practice of transformation. It is not rigid principles or roles that underpin them, but situational ethics and ways of relating. In the contemporary context, it is clear that an intersectional analysis will not yield a clear hierarchy of oppressions. Rather, it invites us to try to understand singular trajectories and composite conditions in view of complex pathways of decision-making and becoming. These are shaped by biopolitical, biographical, social and coincidental factors alike.

Economic accessibility for instance, as relating to class, is often taken to be the key problem with these projects –see the analysis of Raquel Gallego above– and indeed it plays a big role. With monthly rates ranging from about 200-400€ for less than full-time care (usually from 8.30/9am until 3pm), these projects are expensive for the majority of inhabitants of Poble Sec, where the median income in 2016-17 was approximately 1100€ a month per person (Institut d’Estadística Catalunya 2018). Moreover, more so than in public nurseries, their hours require that there be a parent

available in the afternoons, as well as for assemblies and commissions. The economic aspect should not be overrated, as Christel Keller Garganté points out on the basis of her study of Barcelona's grupos de crianza compartida:

any option in childcare costs us this much money or more, but it's above all the family's availability of time for participating in the self-organization, and the belonging to these networks is what in the end is to do with the social mix, that's to say, if there are groups of white folks [blanquitas] that's because more racialized people aren't in contact with these networks, which end up being the ones that generate the projects (Zechner et al.. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

In this view, the main social composition of the grupos de crianza compartida is limited from the outset, being determined by cultural-educational background rather than by specific fees or hours necessarily. It is as much a cultural issue as an economic one –not in the sense of supposed minorities not being able to 'integrate' into the grupos de crianza compartida but rather in the sense of the subcultural networks that bring forth the grupos being somewhat self-enclosed and possibly also self-referential. This points to a real dilemma for thinking the inclusivity or diversity of commons initiatives, if we start out from the idea that commons always come with community, and as such always entail strong sociality and shared cultural codes. The key question here is, however, if commons always begin from shared cultural codes or if, in beginning from shared needs, they can sometimes also create new cultural codes between diverse actors. This could be a potential strength of both resource and reproductive commons, if they set out from given communities but they entail processes of composition –as Kioupkiolis (*Report 2. The Common*: 45-47) points out, commons and community need not refer to closed, self-referential entities (via ideas of nation, race, nature, and so on).

In applying a decolonial and class analysis of the grupos de crianza compartida, the forms of employment of educators also reflect mainstream racial and class-based inequalities. In Poble Sec's groups, many of the educators are Latin American, and often their roles are more adjunct and rotational than those of their Spanish or European colleagues due to problems with papers and precarity. More generally, however, most grupos de crianza compartida are not able to offer secure employment with workers' rights. Carers -almost exclusively women- either work informally or are contracted as self-employed workers, and wages range from being miserable, particularly as projects start up or when children drop out, to decent, in more stable projects and moments).

6.6.3. Feminist analyses of childcare commoning

Finally, from a gender perspective, as Keller-Garganté points out, we can 'question the capacity of the grupos de crianza compartida to redistribute the work of care' (Zechner et al. 2018), because the vast majority of work within them is done by women. From a feminist viewpoint, this can lead to different assessments. As

Ezquerria and Mansilla point out, 'We are living a moment of indetermination and transit between familialism, (neo)subservience, social handouts [asistencialismo] and precarized professionalization' (Vega Solis 2009: abstract), which makes multi-layered and open analyses necessary.

On the one hand, joining a grupo de crianza compartida can be seen as a step in the mutual empowerment of women, who reject being bound to the house and gather to socialize their work, in the sense that Federici describes in relation to many cases of women's commoning in Latin America and Africa:

historically and in our time, women have depended more than men on access to communal resources and have been most committed to their defense.... Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor both as a means to economize on the cost of reproduction and to protect each other from poverty, state violence and the violence of individual men (Federici 2013).

This analysis is also pertinent to the childcare groups in so far as they strive to enable temporalities and divisions of care that escape the brutality of the Spanish 4-month state maternity leaves. The irony in the grupos de crianza compartida is that while participant mothers can find this mutual support, the mostly female educators do not have any paid maternity leave at all if they work without contract, and thus they cannot access this support network in the same way.

An affirmation of women's collectivizing care, as in Federici, posits that the possibility of change lies in the production of other ties, linkages and common force. The 'vínculo' that Pepi Dominguez speaks about is part of a claim to subvert social structures at large, and to build collective power, rather than to dwell on achieving freedoms and privileges within the given heteropatriarchal and capitalist system. In order to overcome segregations along the lines of class, race and gender, what matters is collective strength and transversal struggle, in this view. Whether childcare groups are indeed emancipatory would thus depend on whether they pursue forms of connection and struggle that look outwards, beyond their immediate self-interest, to build solidarities. In this sense, in the terms of Joan Tronto, they also engage caring-with, the fifth dimension of care (Tronto 2009a). Some groups in Poble Sec do that more than others, but the claim is there in most.

On the other hand, from a perspective more akin to feminisms of equality, such women-driven childcare commons reproduce the divisions of labor that feminists have long sought to overcome. As long as men do not engage in them on an equal footing, they will fail to produce profound change of gender roles and subjectivities. This view remains idealistic and ideological in the sense that it fails to see and value the steps in a process of emancipation, rather projecting all-encompassing change, which, without a step-by-step transformation of relations and subjectivities, can however only be imposed vertically. As limited as they may be in this aspect, the grupos de crianza compartida do function as experimental sites for the involvement and re-subjection of men as carers, since they do constantly interpellate and

involve male subjects as equals. Fathers are part of the whatsapp groups, the cooking and cleaning commissions, the assemblies. They are not as active as the mothers, which is a problem, but they are learning: a set of skills, knowledges and sensitivities traditionally passed on to women. As the parent-activist Javier Rodrigo says (Zechner et al. 2018), the grupos de crianza compartida are ‘democratic schools for the parents.’ Particularly so for fathers.

6.6.4. Initial conclusions

By and large, we can say that the grupos de crianza compartida manage to effect real change in the forms of relation that permeate society, particularly when it comes to collective organization, democratic engagement, gender relations, local community—it is not just children who learn sharing and caring. These groups are pedagogical spaces in a very expanded sense. In this way, the potential of the grupos de crianza compartida lies in micropolitics. They transform (some) relations but they largely remain unable to subvert larger economic and political dynamics. They mostly do not overcome social and cultural segregations, rent prices, migration laws, social security regulations, wage hierarchies and so forth, hence these inequalities come to be reproduced.

Accepting this partial transformative power as a challenge rather than defeat means positing commons and commoning not as a utopian sphere or activity but rather as ongoing material-embodied struggles that require us to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway 2016). Silvia Federici points out that in a lot of cases, we mostly do not care as we would like to (Federici 2018). Indeed, there are some major fallacies when we speak about choice and childcare. Terms like ‘option,’ ‘decision’ and ‘choice’ allude to a level of autonomy and voluntarism that might not truthfully represent how people go about finding childcare, how they negotiate life and work. As Camille Barbagallo (2016b) points out in her study on the feminist and neoliberal constructions of discourses of ‘choice’ around childcare and childrearing, constraints and desires are tightly entangled in the search for viable options in childrearing and childcare, and for many parents the ‘ideal’ option never comes to materialize. Moreover, ‘while choice is central to feminist politics, it is via the discourse of choice that neoliberalism enters the domestic sphere and reorganises the practices and processes of reproduction and the subjectivity of motherhood’ (Barbagallo 2016b: 1).

The discourse of choice can alienate and produce culpability in women, narrowing the horizon of possibilities to some seemingly legitimate options, while disabling other affirmative pathways. The discourse of choice always makes reference to the market, in such a way that public nurseries are not seen as matters of choice. Commons-based initiatives in this sense can come to be seen and represented as spaces of hyper-choice. Javier Rodrigo: ‘Almost all of us who build the grupos de crianza compartida are middle class, white subjects (and we have to say that), we are the great convinced ones’ (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish). This relation between choice, privilege and public provision is a complex one, and it takes new policy paradigms to address them. This leads us to the commons-inspired politics of

Barcelona en Comú, which governed the city of Barcelona during the time of this study.

This section explores some of the affinities and politics of Barcelona en Comú with childcare as a social and economic phenomenon: an issue that in many ways lies at the core of the municipalist feminist politics and has been approached by it in a series of ways. In looking at the potentials and complications of progressive municipal policy on childcare commons, I narrate some of the dynamics between the grupos de crianza in Poble Sec and the organs of the municipality here. This leads us further towards the question of the micropolitics of municipalism, the subject of the second part of this report, where care and reproduction emerge as key vectors for thinking progressive politics and sustainable ways of inhabiting institutions. This chapter thus seeks to contribute towards an understanding of feminist politics of care within, around and beyond the institutions, pointing out some of the tensions and strategies that emerged around childcare and municipalism between 2017-20 in Barcelona.

6.7. Childcare commons in Barcelona en Comú's municipalist policy

6.7.1. Municipal support for childcare commons initiatives?

Where do we locate the grupos de crianza compartida, across the spectrum of public-commons-private? And how, if at all, should these initiatives feature in municipal policy? Carolina López, the local Barcelona en Comú councilor of Poble Sec, affirms that the commons-based route via the Solidarity Economy section (part of the municipal department of 'Economy, Competitiveness and Housing') of the city administration is the only viable way to include the *grupos de crianza compartida* in municipal policy-making, since the Education department is fiercely opposed to the groups being included and funded in its area. The struggle around policies of the commons as regarding childcare happens between three major areas of municipal politics: 'The ongoing debate is basically, as I already said, about a confrontation between Education and Economy, but then comes a moment where Feminisms also come into the debate' (Zechner et al.. 2018,; my translation from Spanish).

López recounts a certain tragedy of policy commons in the way the childcare groups end up being caught in a field of tension between different policy areas, narrating herself as defender of these groups who fought hard to have them included in the electoral program in 2014 and now finds herself very frustrated and blocked. She tells of a path that leads from the Education to the Economics and Feminisms departments:

When Education comes into play and tells us that they won't support, under no circumstances, the grupos de crianza compartida, ...we decide to talk to Economy because that's the cooperatives, it's the community economy [economía comunitaria], it's the economy of care, it's feminism and economic feminism. So we thought to take it from the viewpoint of furthering cooperatives, of promoting the associative culture [associacionismo] around this

issue, and we made a lot of headway because in Economy we are putting all our possible efforts into creating cooperatives and into creating community economies [economía comunitaria].... Feminisms also stop us and say that we can't do anything whatsoever until we have clarity about what can be done, something that again stalls the processes (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

For the education department, the grupos de crianza compartida are a threat to the public system, looking too much like private initiatives. For feminists they are too marked by traditional gendered divisions of labor, as in traditional patriarchal families, not to mention their problem of almost-exclusive 'whiteness.' The grupos de crianza compartida, despite collectivizing and socializing care, are associated with the private sphere and private initiatives, and as such treated with caution by public institutions and even Barcelona en Comú. Correspondingly, they end up in the 'economy' category. López sees the social and solidarity economies, and particularly the 'urban commons' policy pilots of the City of Barcelona as the most feasible way to recognize and support the grupos de crianza compartida, and emphasizes the importance of having a single interlocutor like the PEPI in order to liaise between the groups and the public institutions (notably the district).

Another one of the reasons for which we needed an interlocutor is that there is a whole series of programs, amongst them the subsidies of 'Impulsem', the program of 'Urban Commons', which precisely try to render this kind of community action [acción comunitaria] visible. We started with urban gardens, but people are thinking about other [projects] and this [crianza comunitaria] should be one of the issues that the Urban Commons completes. What happens when we can make an 'Urban Commons' or get some subsidies from the City? It can't then be about the tension between the public and the private. Out of all the private associations, how would I favor this particular one or this particular type? By creating a larger platform, creating a project that directly brings returns to the neighborhood (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Thus, towards the end of the first mandate of Barcelona en Comú, a broad conversation was started and first organizational steps as well as negotiations were on the way, but no concrete policy progress had been made regarding the grupos de crianza compartida. At the level of Poble Sec, negotiations between the PEPI and the district seemed to have collapsed, due to a series of problems and incompatibilities, at the symptomatic base of which is the difficult scheduling and re-scheduling of meetings with district councilors and staff. The PEPI finds itself somewhat frustrated by the negotiations with neighborhood and district councilors of Barcelona en Comú, the councilors in turn are frustrated by internal resistance within the party, etc. At the level of the city, a research paper on the grupos de crianza compartida had been commissioned –a key step for drawing up policy– but the paper remained yet unpublished by the end of the legislature in 2019. What happened and will happen

with this study remains unclear, as one of the authors (Christel Keller Garganté) mentions.

This already brings us deep into the micropolitics of municipalism, the subject of the sister study in my research for *Heteropolitics*. The tensions between different departments and priorities is obviously a strong marker of new institutional openings, as we shall see further on. Beyond the somewhat predictable levels of institutional tension, what is remarkable about this situation is that a local councilor refers back to an event at a social center (La Base) that hosted a radical feminist thinker (Silvia Federici) and led to a broad intersectional debate about the politics of care in the neighborhood. Councilor López remembers how a widely attended event with Silvia Federici in 2014 was key for spurring a critical debate on how the feminisms and care commons can escape being ‘white ghettos.’ López says this was also a key concern for her as regarding the *grupos de crianza compartida*. Hence, she initially proposed that the municipality offers funding for some families, an option that was however discarded.

That councilors, activists and families share the same reference points for political debate is characteristic of the 2015-19 mandate of *Barcelona en Comú*: it concerns another key aspect of the micropolitics of municipalism in this time and place. Indeed, this example shows not just the inextricable connections between movements, parties and institutions, but also those of theory and practice, in this kind of politics of the commons. Feminist thinkers and historians like Silvia Federici or Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar have been ongoing referents for social movements in Barcelona and Spain, being part of workshops and debates organized by activist groups, sharing examples and experiences of reproductive and care commons, and dialoguing on the local situation and challenges. The theoretical frameworks provided by these kinds of figures –whose ways of inhabiting and embodying critical thought, as well as carrying and translating experiences across contexts are in themselves radical practices– are key to the *grupos de crianza compartida* in that many families and carers are familiar with them and share their radical claims.

Similar kinds of figures –thinker-activists like Naomi Klein, Susan George, Raquel Rolnik, to mention but a few women– are key ‘acompañantes’ or companions of *Barcelona en Comú*. Unlike most political parties, they do not refer to male historical figures as stable and static referents, but to lively actors who are also interlocutors, and often women. Across the movements, neighborhoods, new municipalist platforms and institutional actors, the period in question saw an incessant, multifaceted and complex back and forth between practice and thought. The *grupos de crianza compartida* would not have developed the same way without it.

6.7.2. On the right to play in the city: *Barcelona en Comú* and childcare commons

One current that runs across and beyond the debate of tensions between the public and the commons, promoted by the city government of *Barcelona en Comú*, is the concept of the ‘playable city’ (*‘Ciutat Jugable’*) (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2018a) and of

increasing the rights of children to inhabit public space. Inspired by the ideas of Francesco Tonucci, influential pedagogue and thinker, this policy basically consists in valorizing the democratizing force of children in public space, and it promotes a vision of the city wherein all space must be safe and accessible, rather than just featuring fenced-off public spaces for children. This perspective combines urban planning and pedagogy, drawing on studies that show that the presence of children in public space strengthens neighborhood bonds, making people relate, communicate and rely on one another more. The ‘Ciutat Jugable’ policy transcends the commons/state binary by proposing public measures for enabling spaces of commoning (safe and accessible spaces for free play and association). As Tonucci put it in a colloquium on Children’s rights in Barcelona:

If we see children moving alone in a city, this means that the city is healthy. The children gift the city with security, a security that the city by itself cannot achieve, because in a neighborhood where kids move, the children oblige the adults that live there to take care [hacerse cargo] (Tonucci and Institut de la Infancia 2016, at approx at 3’20sec; my translation from Spanish).

Lucía Zandigiacomi from the Urban Planner’s Cooperative ‘Raons Públiques’ in Poble Sec has been involved in workshops that contributed to drafting the policy (Zandigiacomi 2018). She points to a possible policy shift from ‘public’ to ‘community’ spaces:

There are studies that say that if there are kids playing in the streets then neighborhoods are more thriving, the life and health of the community that lives in the neighborhood is better, the relations between neighbors are better. This is a bid to create unity in public space. I think on a first reflection we could exchange this idea of ‘making a public space/making a space public’ for ‘communitarian space,’ as a place of encounter (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

The notions of the public and the commons, or the public and the community-based, often flow somewhat into one another in the Spanish and Latin American context (Vega Solis, Martínez Buján and Paredes Chaua, 2018). Barcelona en Comú tries to contribute to making these spheres more interconnected and fluid, without however confounding them or making them interchangeable. As Laia Forné Aguirre, participation adviser at the city hall, puts it in 2019 just before the municipal elections:

One of the challenges of municipalism is to build a new form of public institution that is based on trust and commitment between the institution and citizens, for the development of a framework of *public-communitarian* collaboration. A collaboration that maintains and respects the autonomy of communities while at the same time guaranteeing the public function of resources via criteria of access, sustainability, social returns, territorial

rootedness and democratic governance of common goods (Forné Aguirre 2019; my translation from Catalan).

We can see how the new municipalist politics of Barcelona en Comú –perhaps more so than some theories on the subject imagine– practically, tactically and strategically articulates politics of the commons within public frameworks, in ways that do not merely promote islands of commoning but aim to broadly transform the city and its modes of relation and inhabitation. As city councilor Laia Ortiz put it in 2019, speaking of the ‘Playable city’ policy: ‘Playing is a fundamental right, as important for the development of children as the right to housing and the right to food –to prioritize play also makes the city more safe and calm’ (Ortiz 2019; my translation from Spanish)

Regarding childhood and commons, Barcelona en Comú seeks to avoid an adult-centric approach that sees children as objects of policy or education, rather positioning them –alongside youth– as key actors in the city. Ada Colau tasked 1300 children with redesigning the municipal Zoo (Redacción La Vanguardia 2019), routinely animates children to make their voice heard (Europapress 2019) and insisted in her 2019 electoral campaign that ‘...children are a great opportunity for our city, they are our great allies, they are agents of change...and they are the ones who literally have to be the protagonists of the future Barcelona’ (Colau 2019, at 18’; my translation from Spanish) These quotes and cases, amongst many others, illustrate that the commons-focused municipalism of Barcelona en Comú envisages redefinitions of agency and political subjecthood and an opening of the horizon of the commons, which does not merely defend minority interests, as conservative critics would often have it, referring to Colau’s and BComú’s background in activism, nor indeed counterpose itself to the public.

This political approach does not treat commons-based experiments as separate from the question of whether the (municipal, regional or central) state should invest more in public nurseries. Yet the question of whether –or in fact rather ‘how’ – the municipality should seek to include and fund self-organized childcare spaces as a commons-public offer, remains undecided in 2019. This requires an in-depth, transversal and situated debate to approach some key questions regarding the value and role of commons:

The question is: these childcare spaces that have communitarian values, in which families invest a lot of time, don’t they have the added value that they can also strengthen the neighborhood networks? How much should we strengthen the ‘Bressol’ schools [municipal kindergardens]? Can they [Bressol schools] take on this task? Does a Bressol school have the capacity to do community work [trabajo comunitario], to receive families in the way a smaller childcare group can? Would that be the adequate role for a Bressol school? (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

In raising these difficult questions, Lucia Zandigiacomi, as mother and urban planner in Poble Sec, asks ‘whether if we only foster what is public, then maybe we are losing out on some aspects of in which these networks of care can support and give returns to the neighborhoods’ (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish). The debate is open.³⁶ There are many concrete challenges for what we may see as municipal policies of the commons, or public-commons partnerships, since this is an incipient field that requires much experimentation, research, pilot alliances and so forth. It requires a strong neighborhood fabric of parents, neighbors and associations as well as an open and generous public administration that allows for permeability of public institutions. It also takes public workers like Pepi Dominguez who are up to the task of creating and sustaining community, and social movements that keep the debates and struggles around the commons alive. The conditions for such a collective effort of redefining what is public and common were largely given in Barcelona and Poble Sec at the time of this study, coinciding with the 2014-19 mandate of Barcelona en Comú.

This is no doubt a privileged historical moment from which many lessons and developments will continue to be drawn. In the case of childcare commons, it will take Bcomú’s second mandate to bring the above cited proposals and debates to full fruition, through the development of adequate methodologies and criteria. A continuous point of orientation for childcare commons are the policy pilots around of ‘urban commons and citizen heritage’ (Castro 2018, Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2017b and 2017c). Javier Rodrigo cannot see any reasons why these models should not be expanded towards childcare:

The city of Barcelona, to put it simply, promotes that there are long-term agreements with organizations to which it grants the use of an infrastructure. The *Ateneu Nou Barris* is the most well-known: 40 years of infrastructure as what they called a ‘factory of creativity/creation,’ with a budget of 1 million Euros and 26 people employed via an association....*Can Batlló* is [an example of] another kind of community-based management [gestión comunitaria], in this case as the infrastructure of factory halls with an assembly-based management, and the resources and support of two specialists of the municipality that help with their tricks [hacer chapuzillas]. The question is: Why can this model not be applied to a model of childcare when there are already these other models? The city of Barcelona has some 50 neighborhood community centers and play spaces, out of which 80% are managed by the citizens: it’s not such a rare thing. The problem is that when we talk about education, we’re very quick to generate a binary between the private and the public (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

It is the activists and parents themselves who are pushing for change and new policies concerning early childhood, and it is often them –still close enough to Barcelona en

³⁶ As a note towards the micropolitics of municipalism, we may say that these questions (which appear as contradictions and dilemmas sometimes) become concrete through the process of making practice and policy.

Comú after many of them have participated very actively in drawing up their electoral program in 2015– who expect a municipal government with a claim to the commons to innovate, and fast. There is sometimes a clash between the temporalities of human reproduction and care, those of neighborhood organizing and community formation, and those of institutions. Here again a rhythmic-temporal and generational gaze is crucial. A child goes through very different phases and needs in its first years of life; a rent contract runs between 3-5 years in Barcelona; a legislature lasts 4 years, etc. The families who pioneered radical collective childcare infrastructures after 2011 are now organizing around primary schools. The parents who forged and furthered the political-institutional debate during the 2014-19 mandate of Barcelona en Comú are now moving on into other phases. Many are forced to move out of Poble Sec due to rising rents etc. There is a challenge for the transgenerational transmission of childcare commons and their practical knowledges, which require structures like the PEPI as well as continuous spaces like those of the actual *grupos de crianza compartida*.

6.8. More provisory conclusions: learning with and from commons

A lot of work remains to be done on highlighting and analyzing the generational aspects of commons. This task will be largely up to feminists as well as facilitators, activists and scholars who concern themselves with micropolitics. David Vercauteren, together with Thierry Müller and Olivier Crabbé, published a book of micropolitical accounts, memories and concepts in 2007, in which they call for ‘a culture of precedents,’ asking:

What can have happened so that in our collectivities, the knowledges that could have constituted a culture of precedents, are so minimally present? ...what could happen if we nonetheless paid attention to the knowledges that make the successes, inventions and failures of groups? (Vercauteren, Mueller & Crabbé 2007: 7; my translation from French)

The importance of producing ‘cultures of precedents’ (Vercauteren, Mueller & Crabbé 2007), ‘common culture’ (Stengers & Gutwirth 2016 : 27), ‘écoliteracy’ (Capra & Mattei 2015) or ‘the stories we need to tell’ (Starhawk 2017) has been variously affirmed in relation to social movements and commons. The passing-on of organizational knowledges as well as stories happens through recursive processes, rather than in a linear way, and indeed, often in a subterranean, off-stage way. Regarding memory and consciousness, Stengers and Gutwirth point out a specificity in self-organizational commons:

But speaking of commons today means to also speak of an eradication that isn’t just juridical. ...And, so, the commons have to be protected not just against a milieu that will exploit any occasion to destroy them, but also in order to allow them to effectively learn what their existence in the long term requires (after the first enthusiasm) (Stengers & Gutwirth 2016: 23-24; my translation from French).

The problem of resurgence is to no minor degree a generational, relational and pedagogical problem. Childcare commons, as care commons, are particularly vulnerable because of the intense and rapid processes of becoming, needs and dependency they encompass. In the increasing absence of extended family and community networks, intergenerational knowledge transmission becomes complicated.

If we see childcare as both a resistant *and* a resurgent commons (see above), as both universal and singular, then *both* the public and commons-based provision for it must be defended, with view to their mutual influence and an ongoing public debate. The knowledges and practices as well as the ties and networks that stem from the *grupos de crianza compartida* must spill over into the public system –parents introducing assemblies to primary schools, for instance, as is the case in some experimental new primary schools in Barcelona. Conversely, the public model can provide a perspective from which to challenge and question the *grupos de crianza compartida* to democratize and render accessible their practices. Both the public and commons models are limited in what they can do. Bringing their singularity and universalism into play with one another, other modes of (self-)governance come to be invented.

The history of cooperativism in Catalunya is one place of memory that counts in this respect, even if it is from a long past historical and political moment. But, also, more recently, as Javier Rodrigo affirms,

In the 70s, Catalan society self-organized, made cooperatives of teaching/education [ensenyament], already went ahead of the state, made consumer and workers cooperatives....Historically I think one would have to very much refer to the idea that a lot of cooperatives of ensenyament continued, others became public and others lived other kinds of relations or future paths (Zechner et al. 2018; my translation from Spanish).

Again, the 1970s are a reference for experiments in childcare commoning and democratic education, this time primarily inscribed in cooperativist movements, yet partaking in the second wave of feminist liberation struggles. We begin to intuit waves of struggles around reproductive and care commons, which unsurprisingly coincide with different crises in the capitalist system. Whilst there is no scope for me to develop these historical parallels further, I want to point also to the international and transhistorical, recurrent character of struggles around childcare and education commons. Drawing these kinds of lessons and parallels is why I am writing these pages after all, in order to facilitate transversal and translocal learning from the experiences, dynamics, configurations and strategies described here.

What childcare commoning can teach us -like any commoning around care- is a powerful way of sustaining and transforming bodies, subjectivities and communities. The embodied and relational nature of care is something we cannot, and must not, ignore, as Joan Tronto shows us, for it is at this level that the strongest transformations in our ways of thinking, inhabiting and relating occur. Commoning is

thus not least a bodily and subjective process that resituates and repositions us in relation to other people, places and forms of life. Childcare commoning allows us to question and avert alienated modes of schooling, parenthood, local life and masculinity, amongst other things. Collective childcare groups are schools of interdependence, that enable us to value vulnerability and put a feminist politics of care into practice. This politics does not accept categorical divisions between small-p and capital-P politics. We see this in the strategies and struggles of Barcelona en Comú, characterized by an obstinate refusal to belittle care and to uphold traditional masculinist discourse. The new wave of feminism on which its municipalist policies of care are based sets out to shake and rebuild the foundations of societies ravaged by neoliberalism, where social ties have been widely alienated and care has been outsourced and privatized, once again on the back of women.

What does a politics of care at an organizational and institutional level look like, and what is the role of childcare therein? We have shown why childcare must not be considered as a realm that belongs to the private, but rather as a domain of commoning with strong ties to the public and powerful political potentials. We have seen that in order to properly accommodate care, not just as caring-about but also as care as labor and practice, commons need to have the capacity to go slow, to take into account bodies and rhythms that depart from the ideals of independence and productivity. And we have seen that not only do commons need care, but also that care benefits greatly from being thought through commons, since it often exceeds both the private and public in the ways in which it instantiates relations, trust and commitment.

This does not mean that access to care should not be a universal right: commons work best when everyone is equal, and public systems are their natural allies. Far from being neither left nor right, the fact that commons are neither state nor market means that they are a singular approach to building justice, equality and wellbeing for all. These principles do not underpin the capitalist economy, yet they do underpin democratic and welfare states. In this as well as in the following chapter, we find some inspiring articulations of commons with public institutions and municipal democratic structures. The micropolitics of commons are not in contradiction to the macropolitics of institutions and the public. We shall see that there if these domains of politics -at the levels of bodies and communities, and at the level of institutions and democracy- appear as separate or even opposed, this is an effect of centuries of bad precedents but not by any means a necessity. Feminist perspectives are crucial to undoing those separations, as they have long advocated different ways of articulating care across the levels of the state, community and home. Let us now turn to the micropolitics of municipalism -at the heart of which is the politics of care- during the 2015-20 mandate of Barcelona en Comú.

For detailed materials, See Appendix A.

