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# Sola no puedes... con amigas sí

Creating and resisting from an  
empowering vulnerable position

*To all the people supporting my body, my emotions and my  
mind during this process.*

*To Domi for helping me a lot and supporting my choices. To  
my Utrecht family, for being with me wherever we are.*

*To my house family, for feeding and taking care of this little rat. To  
the friends who participate in the workshops and the rest of  
my chosen family -the part that is in Madrid, but also the ones in Bilbo and  
Barcelona-, for being part of my life, for the super huge support and for sharing  
together struggles and laughs as a way of life.*

*To Culitron, for being my bed companion these months, for all the  
talks, advice and bichitos.*

*To la del Clot for her efforts trying to help me concentrating, but  
specially for being an inspiration and for her way of caring and loving.*

*And to all the people, places, and ways of understanding life, that  
are part of me in any different way.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Together with friends, activist, and theorist, inspired by different people, experiences, articles and projects, I decided to choose the topic of vulnerability as a place from where a political resistance is possible, a place from where we can share, take care of each other and create support and solidarity networks.

In this thesis, challenging an understanding of vulnerability connected with fear, weakness and defenselessness, I will present the empowering possibilities and community building processes that can grow from such vulnerabilities. Together with different authors I will approach vulnerability as an inherent characteristic of human lives. However, due to socially constructed discourses regarding vulnerability, there are human beings who appear to be more vulnerable than others. And it is in this point, when sharing vulnerabilities among people will create groups and collectives which will face these oppressive and repressive structures. Structures supported by discourses and privileged people who excludes and punish certain population.

Even though there are different empowering approaches to vulnerability that I could have focused upon, due to my personal situation, I decided to concentrate on the feminist and transfeminist sphere in order to connect, illustrate and present experiences of vulnerability as a creative and important element of political struggles. Moreover, in this thesis I will present and articulate the direct experiences from people who belong to the feminist and transfeminist activist sphere of Madrid.

This thesis has four chapters. The first one presents a methodological elaboration, which includes reflections about my research position and some other political choices. The second chapter will focus on a different understanding of vulnerability within a feminist- transfeminist theoretical and practical framework. Presenting ways in which vulnerability can be made into a possible place for political resistance, in the third chapter, I will engage with collective agency, intersectionality and the importance of establishing alliances among vulnerabilities. Finally, in chapter four I will approach different strategies and ways of facing repression at different levels from such a vulnerable position; I will show how the strengths of this position include communication and sharing processes, but also the creation of solidarity, support and care networks.

In the whole thesis I will interconnect the ideas of different authors and theorists from different contexts and fields, such as Donna Haraway, Judith Butler or Amaia Orozco, with the narratives of direct experiences of activists from Madrid and my own thoughts and reflections.

I do not aim at writing a thesis which moves at a complete theoretical level, instead I will present a work that engages seriously with daily experiences and struggles, experiences that can inspire, that can illustrate theories, and become a point of reference also for other people. I claim for a knowledge production from a feminist point of view, which puts experiences in the center.

I believe in the importance of producing feminist and transfeminist knowledges in different

spheres – such as academia, schools, social movements, self-organized projects, daily lives, etc... –, because those spheres are usually interconnected. With this in mind, in this thesis written to be delivered at the University of Utrecht, I will try my best to connect theories, experiences and examples from different places and positions, and I hope that this empowering understanding of vulnerability can be an inspiration for daily struggles of various subjects in different spaces and spheres.

## **CHAPTER 1: SITUATING THE RESEARCHER. AN APPROACH TO FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND OTHER INSPIRATIONS.**

Vulnerabilities can be seen as a weakness, as a lack of agency or capacity. However, in this thesis, I will engage with vulnerability as a place from which to share, to create a collective agency and to build support, care and solidarity networks that will be useful when facing repression and different oppressive structures. Even though I could focus on many spheres and locations when presenting this empowering part of vulnerability, I will try to illustrate and contextualize my work with experiences from different feminist and transfeminist activists from Madrid. Before getting into the analysis and presentation of the different parts of this project, it is necessary to outline the manner in which I have approached this research subject.

Accordingly, in this chapter I will present the methodological framework that informs this research. Here I will introduce not only the methodological tools that I will use in this thesis, but also the methods, paths and processes that I have followed and that lead me to writing these words and pages. In this way, this first chapter will first outline the reasons, decisions and chances which inspired me for this project, together with some political choices that I have made while getting involved with it.

Afterwards, in section 1.2, I will bring in and reflect upon different opinions regarding feminist knowledge production and the importance of producing different knowledges based on experiences, political and activist practices and knowledges which try not to reproduce power and oppressive structures. With a broader understanding of knowledge production from a feminist point of view, an elitist, individualist, white, upper-middle class source of knowledge such as the occidental academy, will be challenged. Then, I will engage with my own position as a researcher. Here I will wave in my own self-reflection with other voices who have reflected with me about it.

To end this first chapter, I will introduce the structure of the thesis, the way in which it is organized, the different voices that will be heard and presented and their importance. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the methodology and process that I have followed in creating *the workshop*. This workshop is possibly the most important source of knowledge for this thesis; therefore I find it extremely important to explain its aims and structures.

### **1.1 WHY? REFLECTIONS AND POLITICAL CHOICES**

There are decisions and there are coincidences, they could be in opposition, but, in fact, they could also be connected. Maybe it was this interrelations between decisions and coincidences that made me find myself in a room in Utrecht, in front of the computer, missing my chosen family and context, reading an article that some of my Facebook friends had shared, from an alternative newspaper, written by a group of feminists, inspired by a seminar that took place in Barcelona in September 2013.

The article's title was "How to make vulnerability turn into a political weapon"<sup>1</sup>, it was written in an alternative newspaper called Diagonal by the feminist activist Silvia Lopez Gil, published in December 2013. I read it, shared it and commented it with a friend from budapest; then I forgot about it, I remembered it again, and used it for a paper for a course and the university of utrecht. Eventually, the article's path, my own path, and our convergence became the inspiration for this project.

"How to make vulnerability turn into a political weapon" (Lopez Gil 2013:Diagonal) has a focus on the reasons to have vulnerability as a departure point for political change; its potential in opposition to a capitalist and individualist context in which dependencies are taken as signs of inferiority or are just not taken into account; a context in which there is an imposition and capitalization of self-sufficiency.

Taking as a starting point this article, which mentions the possible potential of vulnerability, I started to think about specific examples and situations that I have experienced, that my friends, specifically my feminist friends from madrid and barcelona, had experienced and were experiencing. In this way, through experiences and examples I started to see a strong relation between vulnerability, solidarity and repression. This connection will be present throughout the whole thesis in different occasions as well as it is present in our daily lives. Moreover, these connections also made me think more about the idea of practices, concepts and feelings that can empower and disempowered at the same time.

In this way, even though I would present the practical difficulties of an empowering understanding of vulnerability, my departure point to write this thesis would be the idea of vulnerability as a place from where people can resist repression, create solidarity networks; create alternatives to an individual, capitalist, racist, heterosexist and in general oppressive context. It would be possible to engage with the empowering understanding of vulnerability in different spheres of life; however in this thesis I will focus on the potential that vulnerability can have for social change and the creation of alternatives from an activist (trans)feminist point of view and environment.

During the time that I have spent at the university of utrecht (February 2013- June 2014), I have had time to reflect upon the relation between activism and academy, and even though I will go deeper in this relation when discussing my position as a researcher, I would like to point out that I find it necessary to write from an feminist activist point of view<sup>2</sup>. To approach vulnerability from a positive and empowering point of view and connecting it with different social struggles, alternatives and resistances can be a very important topic for our current social and political situation. In the spanish state, as in many other places, the financial crisis is continuously making more and more visible that the capitalist system is individualizing and destroying our lives and possibilities. In this context, solutions and alternatives coming from self-organized and collective struggles are a very important tool to survive: we need to take care of each other, to create and resist together. Thus, to think about this topic from daily life experiences

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<sup>1</sup> Originally in spanish: "*Como hacer de la vulnerabilidad un arma política*" (2013).

<sup>2</sup> When I argue for the importance that, for me, writing from a feminist activist point of view has, I mean that I do not approach the topic as an academic researcher; rather I am a feminist activist in my daily life, who is writing and creating in this specific case for the university.

combined with theories can be very useful from an activist but also academic point of view. Capitalism affects our daily lives, but solutions are created from those daily experiences and can be spread in different spheres.

Trying to write from an activist point of view for me is not only important in the content of the thesis, but also in term of the sources of knowledges I use the accessibility of the writing style and to put lived experiences at the centre of the project. To present knowledges from different spheres, I will combine information and analyses from different experiences of feminist friends, with academic authors, activist, etc. Moreover, trying to contribute to a plurality of feminist knowledge, I have tried to avoid sources from white-male-heterosexual authors. However, there will an exception that I make with the book *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992) by Carlos Martín Beristain and Francesc Riera. Their work speaks of collective knowledges and experiences from different people in latin américa; therefore, despite the characteristics of the authors, I have considered that it was important for this thesis to refer to *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992).

I believe in the importance of creating a local, shared, direct and experience-based knowledges, which can inspire other contexts, but which can mainly have an impact in their own context. Even though authors from other social or political contexts, such as Donna Haraway, Audre Lorde, Joan Scott and Judith Butler, are important sources in this thesis, their ideas will be connected to a specific location and time, in which I, and the project as a whole, will be contextualized: the spanish state, and more specifically madrid.

Since I come from a non bilingual context, the english language I use has its obvious limitations. This, combined with the fact that I believe in the importance of writing with a language and structure accessible for as many people as possible even in an academic context, will lead to my choice of writing this thesis in a language accessible not only to professional academic english speakers, but also to people outside the academia, and to non advanced english speakers. It is important to me that the people who have contributed to this project, and who are feminist a and transfeminist activists from madrid, can have as good as possible access to the material; and since I cannot write the whole thesis in english and in castellano, the quotes that I take from the workshop-discussion group will be left in the original language followed by a translation in english.

I have translated into english by myself the activist experiences and the words of authors who speak and write in castellano, therefore, it is not a professional translation. The translation I did stays as close to the original as possible; in doing this there is the danger of making it less understandable than if I would have asked a native speaker to translate it into a more accurate english. However, for me, to do it in this way is a political choice.

I do consider very important the information and experiences given by the participants of *the workshops*, in this way, I sometimes will present long quotes in which they explain and reflect on their own lives. I will comment on those experiences but I find important to give them the space they deserve.

As a political choice, in this thesis I will use the pronouns her-she instead of his-him-he when referring to a singular subject whose gender I do not know. I could use -as I had used before in other



contexts and projects- the neutral pronouns they-them-their , but since I am writing from a context in which our language (castellano) does need to have a female or male gender in adjectives, pronouns and other words, I have chosen to make visible the female pronouns.

Finally, the names of countries, cities and related adjectives will not be written in capital letters, in order not to reproduce the power structures that especially nations represent and exercise. This for me is a political choice that I deem important to reclaim in different spheres and related to different topics. I come from a place in which the name of the country wants to homogenize the state and there are different resistances in various territories in the spanish state (bask country, cataluña, galicia...) which have been struggling and repressed in the name of a common country and language. In this way, I feel it is important to take these struggles into account at least by not giving a special treatment to the nations (in this case the capital letters). Since I do also recognize the power oppressive structures usually reproduced by the institutional academic sphere, I will not use capital letter also for the names of university.

In this first chapter, and throughout the whole thesis, I will refer to this work not only as a thesis, but also as a project. This thesis is part of a process, a life project, my own and a shared one. In this thesis I bring knowledge that I have been using and creating for other papers during this master, and that I have experienced, shared and created in other spheres. Moreover, this thesis will also contain knowledges that have been collected from direct experiences, which are also part of our lives processes and activisms, and which are combined and mutually inspired by different authors, articles and conferences. Thus, the thesis becomes part of a broader process, not only a goal in itself; it becomes a part of a past, present, future, individual and shared knowledges which aim to have a social, transformative, empowering and creative impact in my/our daily context.

## **1 2 FEMINIST KNOWLEDGES PRODUCTION**

*“We need to be aware that feminist knowledge production is not innocent or value free(...), rather, as in other forms of knowledge construction, feminist knowledge is produced within the matrix of power” (Kim 2007:108).*

Inspired by this quote by Hyun Sook Kim, in this part of the chapter I will try to define the kind of knowledge I want to produce and reproduce in this thesis. To give a broader overview before the specific choices and ideas I have when thinking about knowledge production, I will start this part presenting different power structures and epistemic violences that take place within part of the academics who wants to write, teach and produce knowledges with a from a feminist point of view. While exposing the difficulties in an activist knowledge production, I will present some authors such as Stryker, and Haraway, who engage with alternative ways to produce feminist knowledge from within academia. These are authors who try to not reproduce power discourses, but to imagine and propose empowering ones which are also based on experiences.

When writing her essay “Can the subaltern speak” (1988), Gayatri Spivak, renowned post-colonial theorist, illustrates the idea of epistemic violence. This is a useful idea/practice when talking about power structures within the western academy. Epistemic violence, understood as a symbolic violence which universalizes certain representation of other subjects or groups of study, is mainly related to neo-colonial practices. Neo-colonial practices can be found in different contexts and spheres, but in what follows I will focus on the ones related to the academy and practices of knowledge production.

The approach to ‘the other’ – the one the researcher writes about, and whose voice is mainly made invisible – and the possibility for this ‘other’ to be represented within academia by researchers and intellectuals, takes place in different ways, and with various consequences. Epistemic violence as symbolic, and as part of a language, turns into material violence; and in turn, due to daily practices, violence, again, becomes symbolic. For example, the epistemic violence exercised from within academia, where both discourse and practices of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity are reinforced and reproduced, also affects and spreads from this sphere into others (mass media, state institutions, etc... and vice versa); in this manner, these processes of knowledge production have a direct impact on the daily lives of people.

In her speech “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009), nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie argues that if we only present different people, communities or countries as a single thing, there will be a single story about them, a stereotype that does not have to be untrue, but a stereotype that makes “the story” incomplete. Stories dependent on power make the definitive story of a group. Chimamanda argues that showing people as one thing over and over again will make them become that thing (Adichie 2009: Video conference). This is a clear example of epistemic violence which happens over and over in different spheres, but also in academia for being an important source of knowledge production. The definition – and sometimes the creation – of identities and of communities from a single and an outsider perspective perpetuates a colonial, elitist and violent understanding and representation of others without actually involving these others in the process.

The use of a concept, practice and/or identity as universal is also a way of epistemic violence. In this way, when referring to different black feminisms in the united states, for example, Kim (2007) presents different authors (such as: Mohanty 2005, and Oyewumi 2001) who raise the problems of cultural imperialism in knowledge production, and thus an important questions arises: “On what basis are feminist concepts, developed from western social categories, transferable or exportable to other cultures that display a different social organization and cultural knowledges?” (Kim 2007:7). Using as an example the representation of the category of third world women, as Anne McClintock points out, “Chandra Mohanty decries the appropriation of the struggles of women of color by hegemonic white women’s movements, specially through the production of the category ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular, monolithic and victimized subject” (McClintock 1997:120). There are different identities which use the category of women to present themselves, in different context. Speaking for ‘others’ without the voices of these ‘others’ can have the effect of universalizing categories; additionally “women themselves, in any real sense, seem to disappear from these discussions about them” (Loomba 1998:138). This absence can

also be seen as an example of the relation between colonialism and patriarchy, in the sense that from a colonialist perspective, a gender oppression is also reproduced. Universalizing the category of women from a western and neo-colonial academy, has an impact when speaking and making invisible 'the other', but also an impact regarding gender, because this academy will present women as a single category and therefore women's rights and voices who has access to academy as the only examples.

In this way, even though it is not possible to generalize, there is a tendency in some part of the western academy of – due to our history, different economical, political, cultural and social interests – approaching women's and feminist issues from a neo-colonial position, there are different discourses that reproduce a racist and elitist understanding of feminism itself. There is a danger when producing knowledge which does not take into account the specific situations, locations and contexts of the subjects and communities of study. The fact that a concept from western academia –such as women of Third World women– is used to point out people who do not represent themselves with that concept, make those people more vulnerable to different oppressions. A representation of women solidarity understanding women as a single category can turn into an invisibilization and reproduction of class and race oppression which become forgotten in order to create an illusion of women's solidarity which invisibilizes differences. Thus, talking for 'the other' instead of giving different groups or people voices and spaces, can turn into invisibility and the reproduction of power structures.

Beside struggling against universal categories, blindness to class difference and other (neo)colonial practices, "women of color have also had to challenge the color blindness of Euro-American feminism theory and movements" (Loomba 1998:139). As Anne McClintock points out, "[f]eminism is imperialist when it puts the interest and needs of privileged women in imperialist countries above the local needs of disempowered women and men, when it operates within the terms of imperial power, borrowing from patriarchal privilege" (McClintock 1991:120). This could be an example of the connection among gender oppression and neo-colonialism. And how women oppressed in a certain context can at the same time be the oppressor. Chimamanda Adichie (2009) proposes to take into account different stories, not a single story about a group-subject, but is that enough? The aim of trying to give voice to more people is important, and a step towards avoiding the reproduction of ethnocentric discourses. However, I consider the questioning of privileges to be also important and needed in the academy.

From a reflection due to my personal experience in the western academy in various places (the university of oslo, the university of utrecht and the universidad complutense de madrid), and as a consequence of endless conversations with different students and friends, I feel that there is a power position when being a researcher and making a research from western academy, because western academy in itself is elitist. Not only there are economical, social and political reason which makes it inaccessible to many, but also the institution itself has a power which enables–due to the language used, the relevance of the author, the ideology of the author– some of the discourses created there more influent and powerful, when creating and reproducing, some realities than others. There are discourses and voices that come from daily experiences and/or from non-western background, which do no have access to some

academic spheres, and which could be and empowering tool for solidarity, resistance, learning and sharing processes. However, this discourses become invisible in comparison to the ones that can be distributed from western academy.

In this way, when being a research, there is a privileged position that we already have to be aware of, and for me, it is important to keep it in mind all the time, and to make it visible. I will elaborate on this aspect later on in this thesis; nonetheless, it is important to point out one example of such power and privilege: the lack of translations of theories and books from and to certain languages and having english as the main language within the western academy, also contributes to reproduce what I have named epistemic violence. Thus, for me it is also important to consider this and hence, as I pointed out before, even though I cannot translate the whole thesis into castellano, I will report here the quotes in their original language.

As it has been already pointed out when approaching the concept of women-third world women, some feminist knowledge can exclude and oppress other feminist voices. I will use the text of Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated knowledges” (2006), in order to approach, through the example of transgender studies, the processes of exclusion and the power dynamics inside a certain dominant feminist discourse in academia and also in the activist sphere concerned with other gender-based oppressions (such as transphobia). Engaging with Stryker’s text is useful for me in order to point out the danger of feminist discourses which do not take into account not only other contexts and locations as it was illustrated with the black feminist voices, but also daily practices, activism and experiences of resistances.

In “(De) Subjugated Knowledges” (2006), Susan Stryker discusses the transgender phenomena and transgender studies. Regarding power structures when power production, Stryker presents how transgender studies and practices have been excluded from the feminist agenda and gender studies. As an example of the importance that a concept or definition has, the term transgender – and the connotations that some people have been giving to it – has legal, health, and social consequences in the lives of trans\*<sup>3</sup> people.

Stryker is inspired by Michael Foucault who presents two kinds of subjugated knowledges. The first one is defined as “the historical contents that have been masked or buried in functional coherences or formal systematizations” (Stryker 2006:12), “blocks of historical knowledge that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked, and the critique was able to reveal their existence by using the tools of scholarship” (Stryker 2006:12). The second kind of subjugated knowledges would be a “whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges, naive knowledges, hierarchical inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity” (Stryker 2006:13). These are, knowledges that are articulated and created from local experiences, local knowledges. According to Stryker, transgender studies –taking into account personal experiences, having political implications and acknowledging the previous history of regarding the transgender phenomena–

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<sup>3</sup> Using the world trans with and \*, does not only include transsexual people, but also transgender, gender queer

would be an example of “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Stryker 2006:12). Stryker explains how the transgender phenomenon has been present for a long time, and how there has been a transgender strong activist movement since the 1970s. However, it is when transgender studies become part of the academy that the de-subjugation takes place: “Transgender studies consider the embodied experiences of the speaking subject, who claims constative knowledge of the referent topic, to be a proper –indeed essential– component of the analysis of transgender phenomena; experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other, supposedly more “objective” forms of knowledge, and it is in fact necessary for understanding the political dynamics of the situation being analyzed” (Stryker 2006:12). In this way, an important knowledge becomes legitimized as objective knowledge and in this way is spread and shared from institutional spheres. Furthermore, pointing out how the idea of transgender is present and influences other spheres and power structures, Stryker argues that “Academic attention to transgender issues has shifted over the span of those ten years from the field of abnormal psychology, which imagined transgender phenomena as an expression of mental illness, and from the field of literary criticism, which was fascinated with representations of cross-dressing that it fancied to be merely symbolic, into fields that concern themselves with the day-to-day workings of the material world” (Stryker 2006:2). In this sense, other approaches to transgender issues are taken into account in academia and experiences and knowledges which had been marginalized before, become part of a kind of knowledge which can be a referent for other people.

Stryker presents the importance of knowledge production from academia, and the influence that this has in other spheres. In this way, even though she recognizes that the concept of transgender “is, without any doubt, a category of First World origin that is currently being exported for Third World consumption” (Stryker 2006: 14), Stryker does also present transgender as a term which includes different experiences and can and with a strong political impact: “Given the struggles that have attended the advent of “transgender” as a descriptive term for a heterogeneous class phenomena, merely to use the word is to take up a polemical and politicized position” (Stryker 2006: 2). In this way, while highlighting the importance of words and language, with the example of transgender studies, Stryker is presenting a practical possibility to challenge a dominant conception of knowledge. A challenge to a knowledge created by scientific experts that is meant to be universal. Furthermore, she is presenting a knowledge which is produced in close dialogue with activism and daily experiences, and hence it does not remain in an isolated academic sphere.

The importance of creating knowledge where the people who are directly involved becomes part of its production is pointed out by Stryker. This idea and approach is an inspiration and a political choice for my own research. Even though I have doubts about the fact that knowledge becomes de-subjugated when entering in academia, I understand the importance of bringing new knowledges from different direct experiences. I found especially relevant to keep a strong relationship between that knowledges created and reproduced in the academic sphere, and the daily practices and experiences which can change

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and other trans-identities.

and grow all the time.

To end with this part of the chapter, I will engage with Donna Haraway's text "Situated knowledges: The science question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988). She is an important influence in my work, especially regarding a feminist understanding of knowledges which are situated, located and contextualized. In "Situated knowledges: The science question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), Haraway argues for a feminist objectivity, and objective way of doing science but from a feminist perspective, regarding knowledge production. Criticizing a male-centered concept of objectivity, she tries to find an alternative to two feminist strands. The first one advocates for standpoint theory, where knowledges from subjugated positions will be preferred because "they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (Haraway 1988: 584). On the other hand stands the feminist approach to the question of objectivity made by social constructivists, which argues that "no inside perspective is privileged because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves toward truth" (Haraway 1988: 576). This last approach also argues that "official ideologies about objectivity and the scientific method are particularly bad guides to how scientific knowledge is actually made" (Haraway 1988: 576). The author wants to bring a proposal of feminist objectivity which will not give a main importance to subjugated knowledges, while also challenging an understanding of all kinds of objectivity in science as problematic. In this sense, Haraway is looking for a feminist version of objectivity which can have simultaneously "an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering and limited happiness" (Haraway 1988:579). In this way, she is arguing for a process which will take into account subjects of knowledge together with worldwide projects for justice since: "We need the power of modern critical theories of how meaning and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meaning and bodies that have a chance for life" (Haraway 1988:580). In this way Haraway wants to use objectivity, theories and science, but in a way that respects and supports people's lives and struggles.

Inspired by Haraway's ideas, in my own research project, I will try to use situated knowledges, based in experience, in combination with authors that, even though come from a different context, can complement the specific experiences of the *workshop's* participants. In this way, I am doing this project to give voice to particular practices and experiences and create a collective knowledge, but I do also believe that it can be useful to inspire other activists and groups from other locations.

Regarding the object of study Haraway argues that "situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of "objective" knowledge" (Haraway 1988: 592). In this way, the traditional distinction between a subject as active and universal and a passive object of study becomes contested. This will be very important when trying to

end with an power position which sees as strong division between a researcher with agency, capacity of choice and a higher level of knowledge in comparison with an object of study without voice and seen as a whole, as an immobile object without voice. In this sense, challenging this distinction will imply that the object of study becomes a subject, and active member and important part for knowledge production.

Throughout this project, and in the other projects that I have been working on, I decided to substitute the term “object of study” with “subject of study”. In this way, I recognize the importance of understanding the subject of study as active agents as Haraway suggests. Furthermore, I do also try to not perpetuate a traditional and dangerous research power position.

Haraway also argues that “bodies as objects of knowledge are material generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interactions” (Haraway 1988: 595). Hence, by situating the knowledge produced, one is not approaching isolated or disembodied knowledges, but instead communities, social relations and structures. Thus, in this thesis, this connection between subjects, objects and structures will be constantly presented and illustrated, especially because the idea of vulnerability in itself already represents the interconnections. These are Interconnections among people in order to support and take care of each other, but also interconnections of these people with their context.

In this second part of the chapter, I have engaged with the difficulties and dangers of a feminist knowledge produced from the western academy. I do believe that knowledges that come from different individual and/or collective experiences, from various locations, contexts, languages, spheres, etcetera do not need to be part of the academy to be shared, to inspire and empower other people. However, since I am writing from within a western institution, I find it important to be aware of my position, of its limitations when trying to avoid the reproduction power structures; but I also find it important to reflect on the possibilities and alternatives from which I can create a feminist knowledge which is trying to not perpetuate oppressions and exclusions. In this way, the work of the authors mentioned so far is of great help when pointing out the danger of speaking for the other, when highlighting the importance of located and contextualized knowledges, when presenting examples in order to be aware of the exclusions and violence that a certain feminist knowledge can have for other people. In conclusion, it do also help me to understand the feminist knowledge production as an sphere from where lots of voices and experiences can have space, but being those experiences influenced by the research and the institution itself, it can also be a dangerous sphere.

I believe that there is not a binary opposition among academy and activism, especially because academy is not a monolithic sphere and there are many different ways –in different context, in private or in public–, of doing activism. However, I still find important and a challenge to keep this two spheres connected, especially in academy. I agree with Rosi Braidotti (1984) when she presents for the importance of keeping a social responsibility and a sense of justice when doing feminism in academia. In this way, referring to the activism made from academia, she argues that “the challenge is how to put the active back into activism. In so far as this position entails accountability for other’s historical situation, it expresses not only a sense of social responsibility but also an affect” (13). Having an active role when doing feminist in every sphere is necessary to create a non ethnocentric knowledge, which does take into

account others with their own voices, and in which affects play a role. There is a metaphor written by the feminist author Adrienne Rich (1984) that has been an inspiration for me, and that can describe this necessity of connection between practice and theory, between academy and activism. It is a metaphor that tells about the coherence, and I believe also about the social responsibility of writing: "Theory – the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the tree– theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth" (Rich 1984: 370).

While in this part I have engaged with the risks and possibilities of feminist knowledge production, in more general terms, I will now focus on my own research position in this project, my own situatedness.

### **1.3. LOOKING FOR MY OWN RESEARCH POSITION**

When I arrived at the university of Utrecht I realized what I had not realized in previous university experiences, I was part of an academic institution. Maybe because of the different context, or maybe because of the kind of studies I was going to do, but I did not feel that sphere as part of me, as part of my previous experiences within academy, as part of what I wanted to be part of. I found it a constant challenge, a place where I had to learn how to relate to other people coming from other contexts, with different interests and ways of engaging with academy, a place that has made me acknowledge my position and which has made me reflect on my future relation with academy itself. It was then a place where I had always in mind the relationship between academy and activism.

I did not realize the strong division between academy and daily practices and activism until I arrived in Utrecht. In my previous university experience, gender and feminist studies were not very academically prestigious; they were very connected with activism and daily struggles. Furthermore, the professors of those classes were part of the people with whom we share spaces in demonstrations, squats and different seminars. In this way, the activism that was connected with the university was also connected to daily struggles and protests. When I arrived in Utrecht, after a period of frustration, I realized that there were a few professors who put some effort in doing activism in class, creating a different and more horizontal atmosphere where people with different points of view were encouraged to speak. Furthermore, not only mainstream feminist bibliography was part of the syllabus but personal experiences were also important when discussing in class. Thus, I realize that there was a different way to produce knowledge from academy, even within the strong and hierarchical structures of the Utrecht University.

However, in a class in which we were discussing about this relationship between activism and academy, at some point we were asked about how to include activism in our work as academics. At that moment, I realized that I did not want to bring activism to the academic institution, but bring the knowledges that can be useful from this experience that I am having in a privileged academic sphere to



our daily lives as feminist activist. In this way, I will not write from an academic position to bring activism into academy, but directly write from the position of an activist who wants to create in common knowledges connected with daily problems and struggles, and as a person who wants to take experiences and theories from the university –in order to inspire, create and share knowledges–to activist spheres and context.

Kathy Charmaz (2007), a sociologist professor, argues that, as feminist writers, “we appear in our texts as thinking, acting and feeling participants rather than as disembodied reporters of collected facts” (Charmaz 2007: 443). Along these lines, in this thesis I feel it is important to have a direct connection with the topic and the experiences in order to bring a situated and located knowledge. Furthermore it is as well important this close connection when bringing experiences of people with whom I can relate myself and in this way make smaller the distance between the subjects who voice their experiences and my own voice as the person who writes it. Thus, I decided to choose a topic which connects the lives of the people who participate, and my own. I decided to write about something that it can be useful in our daily and shared activism.

However, even though I am writing together with other people, and about a topic I share with those people, I do have a constant doubt about the meaning of bringing this shared knowledges and experiences combined with the ideas of different authors and activist, to academia. To what kind of knowledge production inside the institutional academic sphere am I contributing? What does it mean writing from a feminist activist position if the knowledge goes to the academy? In order to create a broader debate about these doubts and contradictions, and also in order to make share those thoughts with the people who are contributing to create the thesis, I did expose these questions and topic in daily conversations with friends in utrecht and in madrid, and the feedback was, is and it will be important for me when relating to academy. More specifically, I did expose this topic presenting all my doubts, arguing that the fact of sharing it was, at least for me, a way of being more sincere with them and with my position and my work. In this way, it was coherent for me to share my incoherencies. The first response was that it was a complicated and complex topic.

An important feedback that I received from the participants of *the workshops* that I organized in madrid this October, was a reflection about the difference of writing from the position of an outsider or an insider. In this way, a geopolitical point of view is important, but also the fact of being part of the projects and groups that I will write about. One the of the participants of *the workshops*, engaging with the topic argued that: “para mi es importante la posicion de la persona que esta visibilizando un tema, porque para mi, que venga una persona del norte de europa para ver lo que hacemos aqui en madrid, no me parece importante, se pierde totalmente el contexto, los referentes, y vas analizando desde un punto de vista jerárquico (...). En este trabajo, a nivel metodológico, para mi como punto positivo esta el hecho de que tu no estas hablando de algo que es ajeno a ti”/”for me it is important the position of the person who is giving visibility to a topic. Because for me it is not relevant if there is a person who comes from the north of europe to study what do we do here. I do not think that it is important, that would mean a loss of context and referents and a hierarchical analysis (...). In this project, regarding the

*methodological level, it is positives for me the fact that you are not writing about something from outside*” (Juli 2013. First workshop). Some other participants had similar opinions, thus the place from where I write became an important variable in order to create knowledge together with the participants and for it to be as horizontal as possible.

Regarding the idea of bringing this knowledge created by us in *the workshops* –and the thesis itself– to the academia, we had a debate about the aim of bringing the topic and our own experiences. Even though there was a general opinion in *the workshops* that suggested that there are different moments in the live to focus on different spheres, it seems that bringing our experiences to the academic sphere results into something positive. We cannot control what is going to happen with the knowledge afterwards, but as one of the participants pointed out “*la práctica política va desde abajo y no desde arriba y visibilizar eso me parece mazo de importante*”/ “*political practice comes from down to up, and make that visible seems very important to me*” (Carla 2013: First workshop), furthermore another participant will argue that “*lo que estamos hablando aqui es de estrategias de resistencia muy potentes que parten del feminismo, acciones ilegales que chocan directamente con aparatos represivos de poder ...siendo este el contenido, si a la academia le parece que son temas que tiene que fomentar, pues a mi me parece muy bien*”/ “*what we are discussing here are very powerfully strategies for resistance which come from feminisms, illegal actions which directly collide with repressive power apparatus...Being that the content of the topic, if from the academy they want to promote it, it is very good in my opinion*” (Seño 2013: First workshop).

There have been various comments regarding the importance of academic knowledge in our lives; for example, one participant argued that “*soy consciente de que aunque no todas hablamos desde la academia o habiendo pasado por ella, muchas si que lo hemos hecho, asique también hasta que punto en verdad estamos llevando a la academia cosas que nos interesan*”/ “*I am aware about the fact that even though not all of us talk from academy –or having been part of it–, many of us have done it. In this way we could actually bring to academy things that interest us*” (Juli 2013: First workshop). Another person will argue “*la academia esta ahí en nuestras vidas...pensar que te parece la academia es como si te preguntan,*” que te parece la familia nuclear? –Mal. Vas a cenar con tu madre en navidad? si...”/ “*Academy is there in our lives...thinking what it’s your opinion about academy is like if one is asked “what do you think about nuclear family? – Not good. Are you having dinner with your mom in Christmas? –yes...”*” (Eco 2013: First workshop). With these two quotes, I understand a relation between academia and activism that is not dichotomous. Furthermore, they interact and influence each other, in this way; it is difficult to try to avoid one or the other. When being part of the academy, your own experiences with activism will influence your work, and you can also chose to bring those activist experiences of different people into academia. At the same time, being an activist usually also means to engage with different theories and ideas that have been written and spread from academia.

As an example of this relationship between academia and activism, specially focusing on the importance of bringing lived and embodied experiences into academic knowledge, one participant argued that it is positive and necessary and that “*las mejores clases, las mejores profes, son gente que habla*

desde si misma, de sus experiencias concretas, trayendo conocimiento que se sale de lo teórico y lo abstracto”/”*my best classes, my best professors have been the ones who talk from themselves, from their own concrete experiences, bringing knowledge which overstep theories and abstractions*”(Juli 2013: First workshop). In this sense, Juli does argue for a connection among these two spheres which can bring positive consequences such as the creation of referents and activist engagement with the academy.

Accordingly, I can summarize this conversation by proposing that to bring personal experiences and daily struggles into academia is important, but its importance does mainly depend on the position of the person who brings it. Furthermore, the person who writes, and the other participants in the process cannot control what will happened with the knowledge once it arrives to the academic sphere. It was also pointed out that there is not a strong polarized division between academia and activism, but that they are interconnected. However, there are also opinions that point out the danger of bringing these knowledges to other contexts where feminist activism from the south of europe can turn into something exotic when being approached from other contexts.

With this knowledge from *the workshops*, besides pointing out the importance of location, contextualization, experiences and the idea of not speaking for the other that has been also illustrated with the previous authors that I have use in this part of the chapter, the idea of this thesis as a broader process has been also highlighted. When presenting this topic for discussion, besides using the information for this thesis, we did also share similar experiences that we had had with the coherences and incoherencies that bring a relationship with an academic institution. In this way, in *the workshops* there has been people sharing their own experiences with the topic and we have commented and reflected on it with each other, not only regarding this project-thesis, but also regarding our daily live struggles and projects.

#### **1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS AND WORKSHOPS**

In this part of the chapter I will present a brief overview of the structure of the thesis and I will explain in depth the central source of knowledge of the project: the discussion groups which turned into a couple of *workshops*. I will explain the procedure I followed when organizing *the workshops*, when introducing it to the participants, and my reflections after the workshops were done.

I organize this thesis as follows. First I have included a methodological section in which I have presented different doubts and reflections about knowledge production, my own position, personal reflections regarding the topic of the thesis, and in general a brain-storm of incoherencies, alternatives and good intentions. Next, in the second chapter, I will present different approaches to vulnerability. This will be followed by a third chapter where ideas and examples of collective agency and alliances are illustrated and explained. Finally, before the conclusion, there will be a chapter about support, care and solidarity networks and resistances to different ways of repression.

The four chapters will be connected to each other. The thoughts and reflections highlighted in

this methodological chapter will be present along the whole project. The order of the rest of the chapters is also important because the knowledge created in one will be present and connected with the ones that follow.

In each chapter, including the methodological one, there is knowledge from different scholars, together with knowledge that has been created, shared and presented in *the workshops*. In this way, I try to highlight that direct, created and located knowledge from daily experiences, making of it an inspiration when combining it with my own thoughts and different authors.

Before starting with the adventure of writing about this topic I had in mind many other possible topics, such as illegal sex-work in the netherlands and the body as a struggle place. Due to different internal incoherencies and political choices, I decided to approach a topic which I could be familiar with, with at least a shared context. In this way, the importance of location and contextualization that has been previously presented through authors such as Haraway or Mohanty was very important for me when thinking about my topic, I needed and wanted to bring in this thesis a local and experience-based knowledge connected to my own location, context and experiences in order to respect a feminist way of writing according to my political and ethical values.

However, after a while, I decided that this was not enough, I wanted a closer proximity with the topic, I wanted to talk about and with my people, my feminist activist family, the people with whom I share and have shared my live, my projects and my incoherencies. In this way, even though I had the opportunity to involve other feminist activists from madrid who are involve in different and very interesting projects, I decided to add another variant to that profile of people: friendship.

Taking into account that this thesis was only part of a broader project, I found that it could be useful not only to ask other people about their ideas, opinions and experiences, but also to share those experiences, to create a familiar atmosphere. An atmosphere in which, besides bringing out information and knowledge for the thesis, we could also see our own activist connections, bring shared experiences, and bring as well the experiences which have been share by some and could inspire others. In this way, the idea of doing a discussion group or individual interviews become substituted by two workshops, workshops in which we could share and discuss, workshops which will be useful now, but workshops that could also inspire future discussions, practices and projects in our daily and shared lives regarding vulnerability as a place for different resistances.

Haraway's approach to objectivity and feminist research methods have been already pointing out a different way of creating a feminist objectivity. Different methods are approached by feminist researchers in order to question traditional research methodologies, in this sense, the feminist professor Layana Aanand (2013) argues that "The choice of one method over another is not simply a technical decision, but an epistemological and theoretical one" (Aanand. 2013: 1). Understanding the methodology as a very relevant for the thesis itself, I decided to choose a method that would create as knowledge in as horizontal way as possible, and which could be combined with more theoretical approaches in order to illustrate them.

Through the preparation of two workshops, I put into practice the method of "Focus Group

Discussion”. A focus group could be defined as a discussion about a specific issue or topic with together with different selected individuals. In this way, I wanted to create a space in which knowledge could be created collectively, instead of using individual in-depth interviews. As Aanand argues, Focus group is a method indicated for community projects, furthermore, “ focus groups are useful in accessing the attitudes, feelings, and experiences of groups who have been marginalized or silenced within society”(Aanand 2013: 3). In this sense, I found this method the most adequate for the kind of research I want to do.

Aanand (2013) argues for the importance of reflection on the position of the moderator within focus groups discussion. In this sense, due to the kind of people I wanted to have in *the workshops*, and our personal connections, I had to reflect about which will be my own position during *the workshops*. When organizing and preparing its structures, I discussed with some other friends, they help me making the aim of the workshop clear for the participants and also gave me ideas. Thus, the preparation was already a collective process.

As I have previously pointed out, I use the focus groups method because for me it is very important to position the experiences of the participants of *the workshops* in the centre of this project. The feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis (1984), defines experience as the process “by which for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic and interpersonal–which are in fact social and in larger perspective, historical” (de Lauretis 1984: 159). In this way, experience is presented as part of the subject, but also as part of its social context. Experiences can tell many stories surrounded by feelings, other people and locations; the use of experiences in feminist research can be a way of presenting diverse voices, even the ones often invisibilized. However there is a danger on using experiences as universal and totalizing realities. In this sense, as the historian Scott (1993) points out “the absence of definition allows experience to resonate in many ways, but it also allows it to function as a universally understood category – the undefined word creates a sense of consensus by attributing to it an assumed, stable and shared meaning” (Scott 1993: 406). Taking into account the problematic use of experiences as universal truths, with the experiences presented in this thesis I aim at presenting examples, possible references of contextualized realities which do not intend to be universalized. Furthermore, the experiences narrated by the participants are located in a specific time and place, and therefore they can change over the time, there is not fixed experience.

When preparing *the workshops* I decided that I was not going to have a very active participation, but when presenting the different activities and topics, and since I was looking for personal experiences and examples, I was going to give also personal examples in order to make easier the start but also in order to expose myself as much as they will expose themselves when sharing personal experiences. Aanad (2013), arguing for feminist methodologies, presents the importance of giving information in the focus groups about the process of the project, in this way, the relationship between the researcher and the participants will be more horizontal. For me it was very important to make them actively part of the thesis projects t give them information about my intention with the thesis.

It took me a while to organize *the workshops*, but I was finally ready and I sent an email to 15 friends who already knew about my thesis writing process. I asked them to come to help me with this project divided in two groups, to be part of a workshop which was going to have the same structure and content in both cases, and I gave them some info about it. I told them that the topic was vulnerability as a place, situation, feeling from which we can create solidarity, common and shared projects and strategies to protect ourselves from state repression which takes place in demonstrations, in jails, court cases, etc. Furthermore I also wanted to discuss about feelings, experiences and contexts connected to vulnerability and that could bring us to those common and shared experiences of activism and/or political projects. I told them that it was not something very theoretical or deep but instead just a workshop to share experiences and examples that could be inspired by the topic itself.

The friends I asked to take part in the workshop are part of feminist and transfeminist struggles, projects and/or groups: activists in private and public spheres.

Before presenting an explanation of the workshop itself, as a contextualization, I find important to give a brief elaboration of what I mean when I refer to transfeminism. The transfeminist movement in the Spanish state started to emerge around the 2004, in different feminist meetings, when the necessity of opening the subject of feminism was felt as a strong necessity for different collectives. Groups from different cities brought queer theories ideas into discussion, the idea of a more fluid and performative conception of gender and identities was highlighted, but also the importance of joining struggles with other groups which were focused on issues of class, race, ableism, migration, veganism, etc. Even though the inputs from queer theory are important, these movement and collectives keep instead the idea of a transfeminism, a feminism that transcends the categories of women and men, but also the borders between different struggles such as anti-racist, the struggle to abolish prison systems, anti-capitalist, struggles regarding people with different abilities, etc. (medeak.blogspot.com.es). In this sense, I will present the participants as members of feminist and transfeminist struggles and projects, being the feminist one's more focused on women's issues and the transfeminist ones connected with a broader political subject such as trans\* or lesbian. I decided to mention both feminist and transfeminist terms because the participants of the workshop have participated and currently participate in both: projects which focus more on women's issues and those which work from a transfeminist point of view.

I will now present more how the workshop was set up. In the beginning of October 2013, with my feminist and transfeminist friends already organized to come in groups of 5 and 6 on two different days, *the workshops* were ready to start. The feminist-transfeminist activists who came to the workshop were female, gay or trans identify people, between 21 and 32 years old, middle-lower class, white and more than half of them are squatters.

The whole workshops were recorded with a recorder machine and I did transcribe some parts of it in order to use the direct words of the participants. The name of the participants that appears as a reference after each quote was firstly asked to each participant in case they wanted to use another name. In order to create an intimate and comfortable atmosphere, I did it in my own house, in my room, and I prepared a cake, tea and coffee. I had planned a three-hour appointment, to which the majority of my

friends was late, so we relax and chat a little until we were all together and ready to start.

*The workshop* was divided into 5 parts. I first introduced it and thanked everyone for their presence. Then, I reminded them that the information collected was going to be recorded and used for the thesis, but that it was not important to talk a lot, or to feel pressure for the formality of the project; instead I wanted to create a space in which we could create and bring knowledge for the thesis, but also a space to share, to feel comfortable, a space to remember and express ourselves as we are. Some people could have more to share, some people less, but the important fact was that we were all there. Since the information regarding different examples and personal experiences was most important for me, I also told them that every example would be good to share; it was not necessary to think about the most important and remarkable experience, but what they could think about at that moment. However, I also told them that every example, experience, information, material that they thought could be useful for the thesis, would have been welcomed also after *the workshops* themselves.

The first part of the workshop was a group dynamic to share a situation, action, demonstration or group activity which was important for them regarding their feminist/transfeminist activism. Afterwards, I did ask them to also share a location-context important also regarding their activism. I gave them a ball of wool, so they will be giving it to each other after sharing their example. With this dynamic, besides making an easy start, I aimed at contextualizing the whole topic of the thesis within a feminist/transfeminist activist sphere asking them about specific activist experiences. I was useful to listen to each other voices, and to make the participants relate to each other while sharing personal experiences that some of them did also shared or at least had hear about.

In the second part, I gave them paper and pencils and I ask them to think and write about the meaning that vulnerability, resistance and solidarity had for them. I was not necessary to write an actual description; inspiring words, images or quotes were also a possible tool for thinking and writing about the three concepts-ideas-practices. I gave them some time to think about it and then we shared them and discuss about it. Afterwards, I keep the pieces of paper with their ideas as a memory, because I was actually going to use the record.

The third part of the workshop was a discussion about two topics: the relation between feminisms and vulnerability, and the idea-concept-practice of collective agency. I did introduce the topics and gave some examples in order to make the discussion easier. I explained my own relation with feminism and vulnerability, and I did also give an example about how important had been for me to be a group when doing street actions.

The fourth part was the main part of the workshop. Even though examples and personal experiences related to the topic had been already pointed out, in this part of the workshop, using pieces of paper with words or sentences as an inspiration, I asked them to share and example of a situation where from a feeling of vulnerability. These words and sentences were: vulnerability as a political weapon, support networks, creation, chosen family, anti repressive strategies and active solidarity.

To end *the workshop*, I presented my own dilemmas regarding the different spheres of knowledge production, especially the academy, and the relation with it when producing these knowledges

based on activist experience.

In this way, the workshop ended up after some reflections regarding the topic of the thesis, but also after a process of sharing knowledges and experiences that goes further than the thesis itself. When capturing the experiences and information in the written thesis, I did not have a specific part for experiences, or definitions, but I combined it with different authors and my own ideas in the project following the structure of the table of content already decided. The structure of the thesis and the one of the workshop are connected but are not the same, they have influenced each other but have their own structure and coherence due to their differences. I did first have a table of content of the whole project, and I tried to touch upon all the topics in *the workshop*. I tried to create a comfortable atmosphere in a way that I started with easier dynamics such as writing and sharing definitions, then discussing about specific topics and finally giving a space for sharing experiences. Even though in this first methodological part is where I present the participant's opinion about knowledge production in academia, I only asked about this at the end of *the workshop* for not to focus too much in this topic and distract the attention from the main discussion issues.



## CHAPTER 2. VULNERABILITY AND FEMINISMS

### 2.1. DIFFERENT VOICES ON VULNERABILITY

In this second chapter I will engage with different approaches to vulnerability, mainly those coming from a feminist-transfeminist activist sphere. Through the ideas and voices of some authors and the participants of *the workshops* I organized, I will present the potential of taking vulnerability as a starting point for a political-personal struggle, and as a place from where to create tools for resistance, alliances and spaces for the creation of social and political alternatives. The first part will focus on the different definitions and feelings connected to vulnerability by the participants of the workshop. Using this as a departure point, different topics will be approached more in details together with authors such as Judith Butler, Amaia Orozco and Silvia Lopez Gil. The second part of the chapter focus on the idea of vulnerability as a characteristic deeply connected with our existence. Next, I will engage with the relationship between vulnerability and feminism. Finally, the potential and dangers of taking vulnerability as a departure point for thinking and practicing resistances and empowerment will be approached in the last part of the chapter.

First of all, I would like to highlight the importance of localization and contextualization already pointed out in the previous chapter. In this sense, it is important to remember that the participants of *the workshops* belong to a feminist and transfeminist sphere, in madrid, and their ages are in between 21 and 32 years old. Even though their opinions and experiences do not represent the whole sphere – it is not at all my intention to present a position or opinion that is generally representative of a group or community – for me it is important to take into account their location, and the fact that many of them have been part of the feminist-transfeminist movement –besides other social struggles– for a long time, taking part in different actions, belonging to various projects and collectives.

Together with the experiences of the participants of the workshop, I will present the ideas of two authors, Silva Lopez Gil and Amaia Orozco, who are also connected with knowledges that come from academia and activism in the same context-city, madrid. However, while always taking into account that I want t use as the main specific context and location the one of the feminist and transfeminist activist – which is also my own context–, I will use Butler’s book “*Frames of War. When is life grievable?*” (2009) in which she engages with precarity and vulnerability as part of our existence. Furthermore, I will also use a video-conference where Judith Butler engages with vulnerability in a way that can be useful in combination with the other sources already mentioned. The video was recorded at the university of alcala de henares in madrid on June 24<sup>th</sup> of 2014 during the “XV International Association of Women Philosophers Symposium”. This specific conference had the title of “*vulnerability/resistance*”, and I found it interesting to make us of it because it took place recently and I feel that I was thought as a conference which wanted to engage with the specific context of the spanish state. Furthermore, it has

been a conference that we have been discussing with friends and I found useful to use it for this project and connected with the experiences of the people from *the workshops*.

It is important to point out that I engage with a specific aspect of vulnerability –the one connected with social struggle and activism– in a specific context, Madrid, and that I focus on the possibilities of vulnerability as an empowering tool within the feminist-transfeminist activist sphere-practices. Accordingly, I recognize that this is not the only way to approach the topic and that there are other possible points of view from which one could engage with it, for example by connecting it with other spheres and experiences.

When trying to find a definition of vulnerability from their own experiences and using not only sentences, but also words or connections with other topics, the participants of *the workshops* came across different possibilities and understandings of vulnerability. There were differences, but also many similarities among the definitions they provided. Feelings and ideas that come across when thinking about vulnerability will be: weakness, pain, strength, ghost, feeling small, feeling human, fear, potential for alliances, lack of tools to face privileges, insecurity, cry, empowerment and impotence. Furthermore, a participant will see vulnerability as “Un lugar no dañino desde el que crear herramientas de los conflictos”/ “ *A non-harming place from which tools, that emerge due to conflicts, can be created*”(Eco 2013: Second workshop). Thus, vulnerability could bring weakness and fear, but it can also be seen as a possible potential for action or for recognizing that we are all vulnerable and we need from others. Following this argument, a participant will argue: “Desde un punto de vista visceral, entiendo la vulnerabilidad como ese momento en el que se te crea una fractura dentro que necesita de apoyo externo para ser afrontada con más facilidad, que necesita de tus redes de afectos, de tu gente, de todo lo físicamente externo a ti que a la vez también te completa.” / “*From a visceral point of view, I understand vulnerability as that moment when you get a breakage inside which needs external support to be faced easily, a breakage which needs from you affect networks, from your people, from everything physical external to you that completes you*” (Clau 2013: Second workshop).

In this variety of thoughts and feelings connected to vulnerability, I detect some common ideas and topics. On the one side, it appears that there is a relation between vulnerability and feelings of fear, insecurities, pain, weakness..., but on the other side, vulnerability seems to be also connected with feelings of empowerment, solidarity, and empathy. In this sense, vulnerability can be a good place where one can find empowering tools. Moreover, another participant will argue that vulnerability can imply “acción a pesar del miedo”/ “*action above fear*” (Seño 2013: First workshop). In this way, it can be transformed in collective responses against what make us feel vulnerable. There appear to be a strong connection between vulnerability, solidarity and support networks.

Namely, here is a sense that we can find a way to empower ourselves when starting from vulnerability, but that happens only when it goes together with a collective way of sharing, bounding and fighting. In the next two chapters, this relationship between a collective action that springs from vulnerability, and feelings and creation of solidarity will be approached in depth.

There is an important question pointed out by one participant: “¿eres vulnerable o te sientes vulnerable?” / “are you vulnerable or do you feel vulnerable?” (Seño 2013: First workshop). As I will argue through the ideas of Judith Butler (2009) Silvia Lopez Gil (2011) and Amaia Orozco (2014), we are already vulnerable in so far as we are, as we exist. We are in connection, in interrelations with others, with contexts, structures, locations...and that make us vulnerable. But, as some participants to *the workshops* pointed out arguing that vulnerability would be “consciencia, me lleva a tejer redes, apoyo, empatía” / “Awareness. Brings me to weave networks. Support. Empathy” (Su 2013: First workshop), vulnerability is also social and constructed, and that implies that there are some people who, due to the social-political-economical system that we live in, are more vulnerable than others. Furthermore this vulnerable population becomes even more vulnerable in specific situation due to socially privileged people.

## **2 2. VULNERABILITY AS A STATUS. THE IMPORTANCE OF CARE**

As it has been already pointed out with the question of vulnerability as a status or as a phase (Seño 2013), there are diverse arguments who highlight the fact that vulnerability is inherent to our own existence, independence from others –thinking that our capacity of action, creation, even movement is something that we do alone as subjects– is just an illusion, but an illusion that only the privileged ones can experience. In this way, I will present different arguments that support this idea of interdependence.

Butler (2009) engages with the idea of vulnerability, and she presents it as an inner human characteristic in itself due the importance of others, structures and institutions for every subject. In this sense, she argues that “the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable to others, vulnerable by definition. Its very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions, which means that in order to “be” in the sense of “persist”, it must rely on what is outside itself (...), as something that, by definition, yields to social crafting and force, the body is vulnerable” (Butler 2009: 33). Connected with the idea of vulnerability, Butler approaches precarity, also understood as an inner human characteristic socially constructed and that represent the interdependency of subjects. According to the author: “precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of other” (Butler 2009: 14). In this sense, Butler is presenting interdependency and vulnerability as unavoidable.

Following the same line, the feminist activist Silvia Lopez Gil (2011), argues that “la propia experiencia de la vida desarticula el armazón construido en torno al ideal de independencia” “*life’s own experience inarticulate the frame constructed around the ideal of interdependence*” (Lopez Gil 2011: 306). In this sense, she presents an ideal of independency connected with a personal situation based on youth, health, strength, a good social position, a personal situation in which it is not necessary to take care of anyone. Lopez Gil (2011) associates this situation with the western, white, heterosexual, middle class men.

Different feminist authors have engaged and challenged this universal model –male, heterosexual, middle class, white– from which lots of social norms and structures are build in different spheres. In her book “Nomadic Subjects”(1994), Rosi Braidotti argues that “the universalistic stance, with its conflation of the masculine to represent the human and the confinement of the feminine to a secondary position of devalued “otherness”, rests upon a classical system of dualistic oppositions, such as, for instance; nature/culture, active/passive, rational/irrational, masculine/feminine. Feminists argue that this dualistic mode of thinking creates binary differences only to ordain them in a hierarchical scale of power relations” (Braidotti. 1994: 155). In this way, the author recognizes the dangers and power relations exercised from such a binary universal ideal. Braidotti (1994) proposes a strategic non essentialist use of sexual difference – in which a there is “an assertion of the positivity of women’s cultural traditions and range of experiences” (Braidotti 1994: 144) – as a political project in order to challenge that male universal ideal. Amaia Orozco, Silvia Lopez Gil and Judith Butler, when presenting a different understanding of the subject – who is not an independent, male, white, middle class who does not takes care of anyone–, could be consider part of these feminist who are trying to carry on the political project of presenting certain characteristics –associated to women and weakness– such as vulnerability, as inner to all human life but also as a place full of possibilities.

Silvia Lopez Gil argues that ideal healthy, strong, white, western, middle class, heterosexual male, does not have a stable situation, and its independency can become contested by different circumstances: “dejamos de ser jóvenes, no gozamos de tal estatus social, nos sobreviene una enfermedad crónica o pasajera, decidimos tener hijos o cuidamos de otras personas. En este caso, se abre un abismo, un vacío que nos muestra la crudeza del mundo precarizado, sin colchón que nos respalde o con el mismo de siempre: la familia tradicional que viene a tapar agujeros, si es que puede, una y otra vez. Estas situaciones acentúan la contradicción entre una vida figurada según el ideal de independencia y la experiencia de la necesidad de otra lógica para la sostenibilidad real de la vida: necesitamos del apoyo, cuidado, afecto y ayuda de los otros. Las situaciones de quiebra nos colocan ante la certeza de que la potencia en la que se basa el ideal de independencia es una potencia falsa que sólo es capaz de articularse en lo abstracto: razón sin cuerpo, vida sin límites, existencia que ignora la finitud y la muerte” / “*we end the youth period, we do not have that social status anymore, we get a chronic of temporal illness, we decide to have children or take care of other people. In that case, an abyss opens, a gap that shows us the crudity from a precarious world, without any mattress which can support us or with the same than always: the traditional family which comes to pay you up, if they can, time after time. Those situations highlight the contradiction between a figurative life according to the independence ideal and the experience about the necessity of another logic in order to sustain the life: we need support, care, affect and help from others. Failure situations positions us facing the certainty of the power in which the ideal of interdependence is based on a false power that is only able to articulate itself in and abstract sphere: reason without body, life without limits, existence which ignores finitude and death*” (Lopez Gil. 2011: 306). From this quote, I find different ideas to reflect upon. The author describes the profile of the person who does not need to recognize and experience vulnerability until he risks of losing his privileged

positions. In this way, from that subject comes an idea that gives vulnerability a connotation of weakness, which can then turn into an understanding of vulnerability as something that only happens occasionally and to some kind of people, but that does not affect all of us. In other words the idea of an independent subject creates an illusory conception of vulnerability, where the subject who “suffers” that vulnerability is considered inferior and/or weaker.

However, my aim, as a feminist who is writing this project, is not to try to find ways to empower ourselves by becoming that privileged subject, instead I would like to propose a perspective and an imaginary from which vulnerability is accepted as an inherent characteristic, and in which the feeling and positions of vulnerability can have a positive, real and empowering connotation.

Silvia Lopez Gil also points out how the subjects who do not have a privileged position have a different understanding of life, one where there is a necessity to recognize that we need others, that we need care. Connected to this argument, Amaia Orozco (2014), an activist/scholar who writes about feminist economy, argues that having as a departure point that “la interdependencia no hay que construirla en si misma (sino que) la apuesta política es visibilizarla y construirla de otro modo”/ *“Interdependence does not need to be build in itself (on the contrary) the political commitment is to make it visible and construct it in a different way”* (Orozco 2014: 237), there is a necessity of taking into account the care work: “Los cuidados muestran que la vida es una realidad de interdependencia: La única manera de lidiar con la vulnerabilidad es junto a otrxs/ *“care show that life is an independent reality: the only way to deal with vulnerability is together with others”* (Orozco 2014: 209). In this sense, care work is indispensable in our lives, we need others, sometimes directly, other times indirectly, but we need them. Thus trying to find a horizontal and responsible way to share this care would be an important political task.

Giving importance to affect and care networks, Butler highlight its importance for human survivance: “precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world, responsiveness –and thus ultimately responsibility– is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world” (Butler 2009: 34). In this sense, there will be taking precarity, vulnerability and interdependency as an inner characteristic in human lives, there will be a social responsibility in order to preserve other’s life.

The connections between vulnerability and care that have been presented in this section will be useful when engaging with what will follow. In contrast to other social-political movements which will fight a social position that advocates for the denying and overcoming of vulnerability , there is an important (even though not all),feminist knowledge, experiences and activism connected with some feminisms of the difference, eco-feminisms and self-organize feminist collectives working on care work, alternative health care, support groups, and many others, that recognize, highlight and even centre their own aims in the vindication of care and feelings such as empathy . Accordingly, in this project, I will focus on feminist-transfeminist experiences and knowledges from which vulnerability can be seen as a possibility, and in which care and empathy play an important role.

### 2.3. FEMINISMS AND VULNERABILITY

In *the workshops*, there have been different voices who pointed out their experiences regarding the relationship between vulnerability and feminism. I will now discuss further the interconnections of these two through the voices of the participants of the workshop.

Various feminist voices, activists, movements and projects start from the understanding that the personal is political. In this way, using feminism as place for sharing and creating tools and alternatives to different oppression, there has been a vindication of making public what has been made invisible in the personal, intimate and individual sphere. Thus, the sharing of a feeling of vulnerability in a feminist space, in which the private becomes public, can be an example of the interrelation between feminist practice and vulnerability. One of the participants of *the workshops* illustrates this point with her own personal experience: “para mi un momento importante fue cuando entré en akelarre, que era un colectivo así para temas emocionales, pues para hacer de lo personal político un poco, y poner sobre la mesa, pues en vez de los típicos temas de que acciones vamos a hacer, a que manifestación vamos a ir, etc, pues temas que te atraviesan en tu cotidianidad y a mi me pareció super potente, porque fué la primera vez que noté que mi red me iba a ayudar en todos los aspectos de mi vida, tanto en la política por causas ajenas a mi, como con cosas con mi familia, los problemas con mi novia. (...) Y me ayudó también a crear lazos bastante más fuertes que en el colectivo de Alcorcón Antifascista de mi barrio...yo que se” /”*for me, an important moment was when I started in “akelarre”, which was a collective for emotional issues, to make political the personal a little, and to table –instead of the typical issues about which actions are we going to do, to which demo are we gonna go, ect–, topics which break through your everyday life. For me that was super powerful, because it was the first time that I felt that my network was going to help me in all the aspects of my life, both in politics due to external causes, and on things with my family, problems with my girlfriend(...).And I got very empowering answers that helped me a lot, and it also helped to create stronger connection than the ones I could have in the antifascist collective of my neighborhood Alcorcón..., I don’t know”* (Clau 2013: Second workshop). Through this example, the importance of bringing the private experience, what makes us feel vulnerable, into a collective space, is presented. Furthermore, in Clau’s words, it also becomes clear how the care of others is important with regards to vulnerability. How the feeling of being taking care for others can make us able to share and find solutions, alternatives or just being able to voice our vulnerabilities. There are different collectives in Madrid which consider themselves feminist-transfeminist, and which differ from other collectives, spaces and projects in so far as they take into account care and solidarity: they are built with care, through care. As another participant pointed out, from a feminist-transfeminist perspective, there is a different way of understanding the idea of common or collective: “desde lo colectivo se pueden hacer cosas guays y cuidarse, pero también se pueden hacer cosas horribles, y yo creo que ahí el punto del cuidado que da el feminismo es ese decir: en colectivo pero bonito, no un conjunto de individualidades que hacen algo, no!, un grupo de individualidades que se interrelacionan, que se cuidan y que tienen un fin común” /”*From*

*the collective, cool things and care for other can be put into practice, but also terrible things can be made from that collective idea. I think that then is when the issue of care that feminism brings becomes important: in common but beautiful, not a set of individuals who make something, no! A group of individuals who are interrelated among each other, who take care of each other, who have a common aim” (Seño 2013: First workshop).*

Another point of connection that the feminist-transfeminist participants of *the workshops* made between feminism and vulnerability is the possibility, through feminist practice and attitude, of making visible and being aware of our vulnerabilities. These two experiences exemplify this point: “para mi el feminismo ha sido un arma para afrontar todas esas vulnerabilidades y miedos, que además son socialmente contruidos, y que se asocian muy directamente a los sujetos contruidos/socializados como mujeres por no haber sido socializadas en el poder hacerlo todo, en el te vas a comer el mundo, sino que desde chiquitita hay ciertas cosas que tu no ves que tu no puedes hacer, nazcas en el contexto que nazcas y te hayan educado como te hayan educado.... Entonces como que el feminismo para mi ha sido una herramienta para poner en valor todos esos miedos y todas esas inseguridades y decir...bueno, qué parte de esto es real, y que no, y sobretodo el buscar herramientas que puedan de alguna manera combatirlo, o si ponemos en positivo la vulnerabilidad, quizas no haya que combartirlo...quizas el feminismo nos sirve para dar una connotación no negativa a la vulnerabilidad”/ *”feminism for me has been a weapon to face all those vulnerabilities and fears, which are socially constructed, and which are very directly associated to the subjects socialized as women, because they have not been socialized in the idea of being able to do everything, or you are gonna take on the world. Instead, since you are a little girl, you see what you cannot do, being born in any context and being educated within any kind of education...In this way, feminism for me has been a tool to give a value to all those fears, all those insecurities and to say...well, which part of it is real and which one not, and specially to look for tools which can face them in some way, or, if we take vulnerability in positive, maybe there is no need to face it...maybe feminism help us to not to give a negative connotation to vulnerability”* (Juli 2013: First workshop). Another participant adds:” ser conscientes que somos vulnerables en muchas situaciones, partiendo de que el lugar es contruido, sirve para empoderarse muchísimo pero además, a mi me pasa que estoy mal, me siento pequeña, pero me doy cuenta de que tengo un montón de gente a mi alrededor, una red que parte del feminismo claramente y te sacan de ahí(...). Creo que antes de ser feminista no era tan consciente de mi vulnerabilidad...es guay ser consciente y utilizarlo como una herramienta”/ *“to be aware that we are vulnerable in many situations, having as a departure point that the place is constructed, it helps to become very empowered but also, it happens to me that I am feeling bad, and small, but I realize that I have many people around me, a network that clearly comes from feminism and they take you out of the situation (...). I think that before being a feminist I wasn't as aware as now about my vulnerability, it is cool to be aware and use it as a tool”* (Sara 2013: First workshop) . In my reading, these two experiences point out the importance of feminism when being aware of vulnerability. Moreover, in community, together with others, and from feminism, we can look for empowering tools. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned before, the socially constructed idea of vulnerability is pointed out in a way that even though

we are all vulnerable and interdependent, the negative connotation of vulnerability affects more some subjects (in this case, socially constructed women) than others.

There is another participant who points out that vulnerability means “being aware”, in this way, she argues that “el ser consciente de todas las cosas que nos atacan por un lado o por otro y a la vez, gracias al feminismo dejarte sentir las, o saber que están ahí y trabajarlas desde otro punto, no negarlas, no machacarte más” / *“Being aware of all the things that attack us on the one side, and on the other side, at the same time, thanks to feminism, letting yourself feel them, or knowing that they are there, and work on them from another place, not denying them, not pushing yourself down”* (Su 2013: First workshop). In this sense, she proposes a way to turn vulnerability into resistance and collective creation, being aware, share them, respect you when feeling them and act from them in common.

This last experience connects with another characteristic that has been shared in the group during *the workshops* regarding the relationship between vulnerability and feminism. This concerns the way in which sharing our vulnerabilities in feminist spaces can liberate us, in the sense that can let us start to accept our own characteristics and vulnerabilities. Thus, another participant argued that “Yo he sido educada como una niña del árbol, como yo puedo hacerlo todo, estar en todos los lados, y como que cuando llega el feminismo a mi vida me doy cuenta de que quizás no, entonces...valorar cosas como pedir ayuda de una forma positiva, y desde ahí puedes construir mucho más y mucho mejor” / *“I have been educated as a tree-girl, like I can do everything, be everywhere, and when feminism arrives in my life, I realize that maybe not, and then appraised things as asking for help as a positive thing, and from there you can build much more and better”* (Juli 2013: First workshop). Furthermore, another participant adds that “también el ver que no estas loca, compartes miedos y rayadas y ves que no estás sola...y eso empodera un montón y el feminismo también me aporta mucho a la hora de respetarme...bueno, yo soy esto y tu eres esto....como que me ayuda a respetarme a mi y a respetar al resto” / *“also to realize that you are not crazy, you share fears and worries and you realize that you are not alone, and that is very empowering, and feminism also gives me a lot when respecting myself...like, I am that, you are that...like it helps me to respect myself and the others”* (Carla 2013: First workshop). Through this experience, the idea of using feminism as a way of respecting and loving yourself with all your vulnerabilities, it can be a way of finding similar references, or just a place from which to share and connect with others.

In summary, through the experiences shared in the workshop, there appears to be a strong connection between feminism and vulnerability. Furthermore, feminist and transfeminist groups and collectives give a space to share, to be aware, and to respect our own –and shared– vulnerability; additionally, these can also be places in which a different and positive connotation can be given to vulnerability. In this way, from this understanding of vulnerability, and taking into account the specific location of the discussion –within the feminist sphere, from experiences and in Madrid–, combined with the ideas and experiences of other Butler (2014), Lopez Gil (2011) and Orozco (2014), in the next part of the chapter I will engage with the idea of taking vulnerability as a place and tool for political-personal resistance. I intend to look into its empowering possibilities as well as its dangers.



## 2.4. VULNERABILITY AS A POLITICAL WEAPON

The inspiring article, “*How to make vulnerability turn into a political weapon*” (2013) which arose my interest for the topic-experience of vulnerability argues that “percibir la finitud del ser es la condición para no clausurar el sentido de la realidad, es lo que nos permite producir desplazamientos inesperados. Y es de esta forma que la vulnerabilidad se torna potencia, no como aquello que lo puede todo, sino como aquello que, sabiendo que no lo puede todo, es capaz de inventar nuevos sentidos de vida” /”*To perceive beings' finitude is the condition for not to close down the sense of reality, it is what let us produce unexpected movements. And it is in this way that vulnerability becomes power, not as something that can do everything, but as something that, being aware that I cannot do everything, is able to create new meanings of life*” (Lopez Gil 2013: Diagonal). In connection with this quote, I have found similarities in the opinions of other authors, and in the experiences shared in *the workshop*. Moreover, these sources do also highlight issues to have into account regarding a vindication of vulnerability as a positive place of creation which are important to have in mind.

Silvia Lopez Gil (2011) argues that “la enfermedad, la vejez, la fragilidad y la vulnerabilidad forman parte de la propia vida, de modo que la verdadera potencia no es la que las acumula o ignora, sino la que es capaz de pensar y actuar con ellas. No se trata de ser solo cuerpo, sino de no olvidarlo” /”*sickness, old age, fragility and vulnerability are part of life itself, in a way that the real power is not which accumulate or ignore them, but the one who is able to think and act together with them*” (Lopez Gil 2011: 306). Along the same line, Amaia Orozco (2014) argues that “reconocer la vulnerabilidad no es reconocer un mal, sino la potencia que encierra la posibilidad de sentir que lo que les ocurre al resto nos ocurre también a nosotrxs. Nadie empieza y acaba en si mismx, en un espacio totalmente definido y ajeno al de lxs otrxs o al planeta. Somos, existimos y habitamos como parte de un conjunto vivo amplio al que afectamos y por el que somos afectadxs. La apuesta es como aprovechar esa posibilidad de visualizar o, aún más, comprender la idea misma de lo común” /”*Recognizing vulnerability is not like recognizing a bad thing, but the power which contains the possibility of feeling that what happens to others does also happens to us. Nobody begins and ends in herself, in a completely definite space separated from others or from the planet. We are, exist and habit as part of an alive group to which we have an impact and which have an impact in us. The challenge is how to take advantage of that possibility of making visible, or even, understand the idea itself of the common*” (Orozco 2014: 238). These two authors, while making and approaching vulnerability as a place full of possibilities, also highlight the importance of being aware of our limits, including the limitations connected to our own bodies. Furthermore, they do also present the importance of creating and thinking in common, from a status of vulnerability that shows our interdependence with other people. They point out that the creations, resistance, and empowering tools that can grow from that vulnerability will also be related to others, they will be built together with others.

In her speech at the universidad de alcalá about vulnerability and resistance, Judith Butler (2014) argues “that vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of

political resistance as an embodied enactment” (Butler. 2014: video conference). In this way, Butler recognizes the political possibilities of vulnerability. However, bringing the importance of location and the place from which one can speak, she also points out the danger of a paternalistic power when pointing out and recognizing vulnerabilities when they concern women or minorities (Butler. 2014). In that cases, the state can take it as a sign of weakness, give solutions related to protection instead of assuming that everyone one can be vulnerable. Thus, people who show specific vulnerabilities will have them due to a social-political-economical system of oppression. In this way, Butler asks, in relation to the people whose vulnerabilities are more socially exposed and visible: “do we want to say that they overcome their vulnerability as such moments, which is to assume that vulnerability is negated when it converts into agency? Or is vulnerability still there, now assuming a different form?” (Butler. 2014: video conference). The idea of agency related to vulnerability will be dealt with in the next chapter, but what I take from the questions and ideas of Butler concerns the dangers of showing vulnerability in the public arena and of looking for solutions within an institutional sphere. This is a risky practice because the institutional space is not neutral, but affected by and part of social-political-economical oppressions related to, among others, capitalism, racism, sexism, classism, heteronormativity, and homophobia. Therefore, it becomes important to be aware of the dangers that presenting vulnerability connected to institutional discourses bring, and try to work locally and through experiences and referents from a vulnerability which is seen as a possibility instead of a weakness which needs an paternalistic support.

Butler (2014) also mentions that discourses of vulnerability can be appropriated by privilege political subjects in order to perpetuate their own power position. She gives different examples from different contexts, such as: “In California, when white people were losing their status as a majority, some of them claimed that they were a “vulnerable” population, Colonial states have lamented their “vulnerability” to attack by those they colonize, and sought general sympathy on the basis of that claim. Some men have complained that feminism has made them into a “vulnerable population” that they are now “targeted” for discrimination. Various European national identities now claim to be “under attack” by new and established migrant communities” (Butler. 2014: video conference).

Even though Butler mentions the dangers of showing vulnerability, she also points out its possibilities for resistance, which are very connected with a collective mobilization from that vulnerability. Even though she presents a resistance from vulnerability in both political and physic dimensions in which: “ the physic resistance to vulnerability wishes that it were never the case that discourse and power were imposed upon us in ways that we never chose, and so seeks to shore up a notion of individual sovereignty against the shaping forces of history on our embodied lives” (Butler 2014: video conference); there is also another point of view which departs from an understanding of vulnerability as part and practice of political resistance. Butler will illustrate that with the practice of public assembly: “one of the important features of public assembly that we have recently seek, confirm that political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability, and that plural or collective forms of resistance are structured very differently from the idea of a political subject that establishes its agency by vanquishing its vulnerability” (Butler. 2014: video conference). In this sense,

Butler will recognize the importance of vulnerability for political resistance, a vulnerability that is shared and impulses a collective mobilization.

In connection with the dangers that Judith Butler points out regarding the position of the person who makes visible a more positive and empowering approach to vulnerability, but also regarding the context and the importance of institutions, in *the workshops* it has been also mentioned another example of the danger related with the social- political position of the voice. In this way one participant will argue: "es muy peligroso ser vulnerable y tener privilegios, porque conviertes eso en un problema para el mundo. Pero cuando eres consciente de tu vulnerabilidad dentro de un grupo que no tiene privilegios, de ahí pueden salir herramientas super buenas para resolver conflictos, porque son herramientas que parten de una posición que tiene en cuenta la vulnerabilidad y no de una que quiere tapanla todo el rato.... Por ejemplo, cuando un grupo de personas tiene en cuenta la vulnerabilidad y parte de ahí para resolver un conflicto y crear herramientas ante un conflicto, muchas veces esas herramientas son menos dañinas, generan más cosas buenas...es un buen lugar desde la vulnerabilidad para crear harramientas"/ *"It is very dangerous to be vulnerable and to have privileges, because you can turn that out into a problem for the world. But when you are aware of your own vulnerability within a group who does not have privileges, from it can appear very good tools to solve conflicts, because there are tools that come from a position which takes into account vulnerability and not from a position which wants to cover it all the time... For example, when a group of people takes into account vulnerability and starts from it to solve a conflict and create tools to face a conflict, many times those tools are less harmful, they generate better things... Vulnerability is a good place from which to create tools"* (Eco 2013: Second workshop). In this experience, the positive possibilities of creating and looking for tools from a vulnerable position are presented. However, for this participant, it is important that the place of vulnerability is shared, and that there is not a privilege person or group who does not share vulnerabilities with others, and tries to give solutions in order to make invisible those vulnerabilities which are not their own ones. Furthermore, there is another danger connected with a sharing of vulnerabilities within a feminist-transfeminist sphere which is presented by the participants: there is a necessity to take also into account other vulnerabilities such the ones related with race, class, age, functional diversity...Otherwise the strategies and alternatives created can be counterproductive: "el hecho de que los espacios feministas estén formados por gente que en cierta manera comparte una vulnerabilidad específica, hacen que se genere una situación de confort que a veces se convierte como en una situación de privilegio y que no quieres añadir a otras personas dentro de eso, y esto pasa algunas veces con grupos que han sido feministas de tias, que de repente se plantean ser transfeministas y abrir el sujeto de opresión no solamente a ellas sino a más gente...que eso ha partido de una situación de vunerabilidad y de repente se ha convertido en una situación de semi-privilegio que no quieres abandonar y muchas veces no se trabaja en red por esto, porque tienes ahí tu confort y te victimizas"/ *"The fact that feminist spaces are formed by people that in a way share a specific vulnerability, makes that a comfort situation takes place, and it sometimes results in a privilege situation, and you do not want to include new people inside it. This happens sometimes in feminist groups for women in which suddenly arise the idea of being transfeminist, and open the subject of oppression not*

*only to them, but to more people...Thus their position comes from a situation of vulnerability and suddenly becomes a semi-privileged situation who they do not want to leave, and many times there is not a network for this, because you get your comfort there and present yourself as a victim”* (Eco 2013: Second workshop). Besides pointing out a problem that can emerge from shared situations of vulnerability in feminist spaces, this problem can be connected with what has been mentioned in the first chapter regarding feminist knowledge production. As it has been illustrated by Stryker (2006), there is a danger of creating a feminist knowledge –and in this case also spaces– which is centered in a single issue-oppression or which is connected to a specific political subject. The danger is that of the exclusion and oppression of other realities, subjectivities and possible alliances. In this sense, it is also important to reflect on the importance of alliances. In the next chapter I will engage with this topic in order to recognize the plurality of vulnerabilities and the possibilities of creating connections and alliances based on empathy and on reciprocal understanding along various vulnerabilities.

In this chapter, I have engaged with the importance of understanding vulnerability as a place from which different possibilities, alternatives, resistances and alliances can emerge. However, I also pointed out some of the dangers inherent to feminist spaces or from feminist subjects, when a vindication of vulnerability as a positive concept or experience takes place. Accordingly, it is not only important what connotation is given to vulnerability, but also who voices it and in which contexts, locations and spheres.

To conclude, I will present the experience of one of the participants of *the workshops* in order to illustrate the importance of taking vulnerability – and the existence of multiple and specific interconnected vulnerabilities – into account. However, this experience will also highlight the necessity of being aware of the necessity of positioning care, empathy and solidarity in the middle when we want to have and create a feminist-transfeminist space. Eco presents a situation that happened in a LGTB collective called “*acera del frente*” some years ago: “fue una situación que pasó que fue uno de los motivos por los que “*acera*” se disolvió, para mí, que fue que había una persona en el colectivo que quería tratar el tema del VIH -además esta persona tenía VIH y militaba en VHI crítico –un colectivo en el que se cuestionaba la idea del VIH y las formas de combatirlo– . Y fue super duro cuando esta persona propuso hablar de esto y que desde el colectivo se creara una actividad en la que esto se hablara, y había un montón de gente que no quería, porque decía que era super peligroso, y hubo un debate super poco respetuoso y super duro en contra de que se hablase sobre el VHI, no hubo un acuerdo sobre esto, y *acera* se disolvió...entonces eso fue un problema personal porque no hubo absolutamente nada de cuidado, nada de respeto a las posiciones de vulnerabilidad. Y yo me di cuenta de que yo no quería militar en un colectivo en el que lo personal no se tenía en cuenta, en el que no era un colectivo feminista porque había un montón de tios decidiendo....el colectivo no era un lugar donde hubiera empatía, las redes no servían de apoyo a nadie, no era un sitio donde se tuviese en cuenta la vulnerabilidad, ni la familia elegida ni nada...y se fué a la mierda...”/ *“It was a situation that took place, and was one of the reasons why “acera” was disbanded, for me. It was a person in the collective who wanted to engage with the topic of HIV– also this person had HIV and he was an activist in “VIH crítico” –a collective in which the idea of HIV and the ways to struggle against it was questioned–. And it was very hard when this person propose*

*to talk about it and there were a lot of people who did not want to, arguing that it was super dangerous. And it was a very disrespectful argument and very a harsh against talk about HIV, no agreement was reached, and “acera” was disbanded...Thus that was a personal problem because there was absolutely no care, no respect for the vulnerable positions. And I realized that I did not want to be part of a collective in which the personal was not taken into account, it was not a feminist collective because there were lots of men deciding everything...., the collective was a place without empathy, networks were not supporting anyone, it was not a place in which vulnerability was taken into account, not either the chosen family or anything...and it went to hell...” (Eco 2013: Second workshop) . Through this experience, eco will engage with the danger of not taking other vulnerabilities and oppressions into account, with how being centred in one oppression or vulnerability can create a space in which there is no place for other issues which are actually interconnected. Furthermore, without care and support network, and since for feminist and transfeminist collectives there is an aim of making the private also public, it becomes difficult to keep on doing a political activity which takes into account all the members of the collective and their necessities. In this sense, as the participant herself argues: “a veces no solo es que la vulnerabilidad sea un arma política sino que a veces, si no se tiene en cuenta, pues el proyecto o colectivo se acaba”/ “sometimes, it is not only that vulnerability is a political weapon but also that sometimes if it is not taken into account, the project or collective ends” (Eco 2013: Second workshop).*

In this chapter, I have tried to present vulnerability from different points of view, recognizing its inherent presence in our lives, acknowledging the dangers that can have to engage with it from paternalistic and institutional points of view, but also the danger of not taking other vulnerabilities into account if we are centred in our own. However, what I specially wanted to highlight is the potentiality that can have vulnerability as a place from which create political resistance.

Even though I want to position in the centre the participant’s experiences and complement them with other authors, in this chapter the connection among the ideas of Silvia Lopez Gil and Amaia Orozco with Butler –and her different background– becomes relevant. Even though they come from different locations and focus on different topics (feminist economy, care work, precarity and vulnerability in war contexts), they all write from a feminist activist sphere, and I found very interesting to present their similar points of view when approaching vulnerability as a inner human characteristic and socially constructed. Furthermore, the three authors do also have in common an empowering approach to vulnerability, due to its socially constructed roots, they argue for the possibility of resisting and creating alternatives from a vulnerable, interdependent and precarious position.

In the next chapter, I will continue in this line, engaging with vulnerability as a place for collective creation, source of care, solidarity and support networks, and as a place from which resist and struggle. I will approach the idea of collective agency which grows from vulnerability and from an understanding of an interdependent subject rather than and individual one. I will as well present the relevance of the concept and practice of intersectionality when approaching vulnerability as a resistance place. Finally, I will conclude the chapter the importance of alliances that grow from the interconnection of vulnerabilities.

## CHAPTER 3. COLLECTIVE AGENCY AND ALLIANCES

In this chapter, challenging an individualist, progressive and capitalist idea of agency, I will engage with interdependency and the possibility of a collective agency. Furthermore, I will present the concept of intersectionality, which will be useful when understanding the importance of taking into account experiences, referents and the context and locations of vulnerabilities. Finally, and taking as a departure point also the idea of intersectionality, I will present, with a specific example, the importance of alliances and how when there is an interconnection of oppressions, it is necessary a response which is aware of those connections. I will engage with the idea of agency and intersectionality in a broad manner, and below I will relate and contextualize these discussions with experiences and examples from feminist and transfeminist activist and projects in Madrid. These experiences will illustrate ways in which vulnerabilities, care, empathy and vulnerability as a starting point to create tools –such as solidarity networks–, to empower people, and to create alliances, will be in the centre.

### 3 1. INDIVIDUALISM VS COLLECTIVE

As it has been already presented in the previous chapter, there is a kind of privileged subject , (western, middle class, healthy, white, heterosexual, male) described by Silvia Lopez Gil (2011) and Amaia Orozco (2014) for whom there is the illusion –which social discourses support– of being independent and not vulnerable. Related to this privileged subject is a western, capitalist and individualistic idea of agency which undermines the collective and solidarity networks. When I refer to collective networks I do mean a ways of life in common, ways in which others are necessary for the one and the one is necessary for the others, and from this point of view there is a network created in common with others to care for and support each other. In a capitalistic society in which the personal and individual benefit is more important than a common welfare, a feminist vindication of the importance of care and support networks becomes relevant in order to emphasize the power of the collective.

Expanding this idea, Silvia Lopez Gil (2011) argues that: “el capitalismo ha conseguido penetrar en lo más profundo de la existencia (...). La exaltación del individualismo, de la diferencia indiferente, la destrucción del vínculo social, la atomización de la experiencia, la exigencia de forzar un destino propio en competencia con los demás, la creación de un yo autónomo empresario de si mismo, la eliminación de los otros de nuestro itinerario vital o la invitación general a la “separación”, son algunos de los enunciados de nuestro tiempo” / *“capitalism has manage to penetrate depth inside the existence(...)* *Exaltation of individualism, of indifferent difference, the destruction of social relations, the atomization of experience, the demand of forcing to have an destiny in competition with others, the creation of a self-sufficient being own of her-himself, the removal of others from our vital itinerary of the general invitation to “separation, are some of the statements of our time* (Lopez Gil 2011: 305). In this way, due to this

capitalist model and styles of life, everything is flexible, aleatory, and it changes all the time. As a consequence there is not time and space to let individuals construct strong social and support networks, in order to survive and live easily. Moreover, Silvia Lopez Gil also points out the weakness of relationships of affect within this context: “los núcleos afectivos básicos para el desarrollo de las personas son escasos y a veces están acompañados por sentimientos de culpa y frustraciones diversas ante la imposibilidad de mantenerlos, las relaciones se reducen al mundo de la pareja, impidiendo otras experiencias difusas de los afectos y del amor, y la soledad se convierte en una condición apenas evitable en la vivencia cotidiana del tumulto de las ciudades globales. Además de habitar una existencia indeterminada, se trata de habitarla sin red, sin respaldos, sin referentes colectivos, sin los otros” / *“the basic affective cores to develop people are scarce and sometimes come together with guilt feelings and various frustrations facing the impossibility to keep them. Relationships become reduced to the world of partnership, preventing other diffuse experiences of affect and love, and loneliness becomes an almost inevitable daily life condition in global cities’ tumult. Besides inhabiting and indeterminate existence, it is about inhabiting it without network, without support, without referents, without others”* (Lopez Gil. 2011: 305). In this way, Lopez Gil (2001) presents an ideal independent subject which is sustained by a capitalist ideology of production and efficiency which tries to make vulnerability invisible. Furthermore, the social relationships which emerge from this model are weak and casual. Facing this ideal, this capitalist and individualist model, from vulnerability itself can emerge a replication. A resistance which –having as a departure point constant interdependencies– will build stronger solidarity and support networks. Furthermore, from assumed interdependences, shared vulnerabilities and care networks, can also emerge another way for understanding love and affects, a way in which those feeling do not only appear within the partner and family sphere, but also are shared and created together with friends and other people around us.

In the same line, and challenging the ideal of independent individual, Butler (2009) present the idea that “the boundaries of who I am is the boundary of the body, but the boundaries of the body never fully belongs to me” (Butler 2009: 54). With this affirmation, the author is highlighting the importance of others when understanding our own individuality, which is actually interconnected with others and dependent on social structures and affects.

As Silvia Lopez Gil (2011) points out, “frente al ideal del capitalismo que propugna la independencia y la separación de los otros, la interdependencia nombra aquello sin lo que la vida no resulta posible” / *“opposite to the capitalist ideal which advocates for independence and separation from others, interdependence names what makes life possible”* (Lopez Gil. 2011: 306). In this sense, the author does claim for interdependence as a human condition and as a possibility. In the same line, she will explain interdependence as: “no algo bueno en si mismo porque no expresa un contenido determinado, sino la palanca interna para replantear los presupuestos sobre los que se construye la existencia humana contemporánea” / *“not something good in itself, because it does not express and determinate content, but the internal lever which enables us to rethink the presupposition above in which the contemporary human existence is built”* (Lopez Gil. 2011: 306). In her book Lopez Gil gives great importance to the care labour that women carry out to illustrate interdependence, being this care necessary to survive as well as

being invisibilized by the ideal of independent-privileged-subject. However, in this project, I will focus of interdependence as a inherent vulnerability from which to create and resist from a feminist and transfeminist activist position. More specifically, in this chapter I will focus on the idea, concept and practice of interdependence as a place from which we can create and be part of a collective – understood as opposed to the individual, independent and capitalist idea – kind of agency, which will be presented in the next part of this chapter.

Judith Butler (2009) approaches the relevance of the context, frame or location in which the body exist, connecting it with precarity and vulnerability. In this sense, she argues that: “how I am encountered and how I am sustained, depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which this body lives, how I am regarded and treated, and how that regard and treatment facilitates this life or fails in make it liveable” (Butler 2009: 53). Our existence and the possibilities that we can have in live will therefore depends not only in our body, but in the people, structures, discourses and institutions that make possible and support our body.

Later on, Judith Butler (2014), reflecting on the idea of interdependence, gives an example of the problems that come from thinking on the assistance to individual bodies, not having into account those interrelations with others, with location and with structures. She writes: “if we make the matter individual, we can say that every single body has the right to food and shelter, although we universalize in such statement “everybody” has this right, we also particularize understanding the body as discrete, as an individual matter (...) of course that seems quite obviously right, but consider that this idea of the individual bodily subject of right might fail to capture the sense of vulnerability, exposure, even dependency that is implied by the right itself and which correspond, I will suggest an alternative view of the body. In other words, if we accept that part of what a body is(...), is its dependency on other bodies and networks of support, then we are suggesting that is not all together right to conceive all individual bodies as completely distinct from one another or from the environments upon which they depend on” (Butler 2014: Video conference). Moreover, the feminist scholar also argues that “it is not just that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible (...) We cannot understand bodily vulnerability outside of this concept of relations” (Butler 2014: Video conference). In this way, the author is highlighting two important ideas. On the one hand, it is presented a conception of the body, of the person who has certain rights, which is individual. Besides not taking into account vulnerability as a shared and inherent condition, this conception created within a capitalist and individualist system, presents citizens as not dependent on others. In this way, their rights and state benefits will be based on that individual conception –which will let the capitalist and neo-liberal system, the state and other privileged citizens, elude their collective responsibilities–, having an impact and constructing life and people’s bodies themselves.

On the other hand, Butler is presenting and exemplifying the importance of location, others and structures, when understanding the individual body. An individual body which is in itself a vulnerable and interdependent being. Interdependent from others, but also from contexts and institutional systems.



Furthermore, even though we are all vulnerable just for the fact of being, as it is also suggested by Amaia Orozco (2014), there are certain moments when the privileged ideal subject realizes its vulnerable and interdependent condition. In this line, Butler will argue that since the subject is influenced and part of external relations, in situations of precarity, a privileged subject becomes aware of his vulnerable position: “the body is less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living. In this way, the dependency on human and other creatures on infrastructural support exposes a specific vulnerability that we have when we are unsupported, when those infrastructural conditions start to decompose, or when we find ourselves radically unsupported in conditions of precarity” (Butler. 2014: Video conference).

Together with the authors already mentioned so far, in the previous part I aimed to point out how there is an ideal about an independent subject created and sustained within a capitalist and individualist system. This ideal only works if one is in a privileged position and tries to make invisible vulnerability and the fact that the subject is built through relations with other subjects, objects and circumstances. In this way, I want to focus on the possibilities that are enabled when being aware of our inherent vulnerability, interdependence, and the necessity of care as key factors. The potential of this move is to create a different way to relate with each other. Focusing on the importance of the collective –a gathering process in order to support and care for each other which emerge from sharing vulnerabilities among each other, and from a necessity to act collectively assuming our interdependence– as a place for political action within the feminist-transfeminist sphere in Madrid, with the experiences of the participants of the workshop, I will now present some examples-ideas-feelings about that shared action.

One of the participants of *the workshops* referred to her way of understanding the importance, but also the choice, of living and facing oppressions collectively: “el ser consciente de que de manera colectiva las cosas son mucho más fáciles, evidentemente como que la parte individual hay que cuidarla para algunas cosas, pero si creo que una de las cosas que te hacen tirar de la gente y realmente crear redes, y te apoyas y estas ahí, parten de que te sientes vulnerable, porque sola no lo puedes hacer, y también llega un momento en el que por lo menos para mí, no es que no pueda, es que no quiero hacerlo sola”/ “*to be aware of the fact that collectively things are much easier, obviously one needs to take care of the individual part, but I do think that one of the things that makes you ask from people and create networks, and be supported and be there, come from feeling vulnerable. Because you cannot do it alone, and also it arrives a moment, and least for me, in which it not only that I do not want to do alone, but I don't want to*” (Sara 2013: First workshop). Furthermore, there is another participant who points out the importance of having networks in order to create and do personal and public politics: “como que muchas veces se te pasan mil ideas por la cabeza, pero que al final, si no existen esas redes de apoyo, la familia elegida, pues no las haces...”/ “*sometimes you have hundreds of ideas around you head, but at the end, if there are not such support network, the chosen family<sup>4</sup>, then you won't do them*” (Su 2013: First

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<sup>4</sup> In opposition to a family that we cannot choose and with whom the political and personal affinity can be limited, the idea of chosen family refers to the people you choose to have around, friends with whom to create love, care and support networks.

workshop). With these two experiences, it is clearly presented the importance of being part of a network, of having a chosen family when acting in private and public feminist and/ or transfeminist daily struggles and actions.

In the next part of this chapter, I will engage in depth with the idea of a kind of collective agency<sup>5</sup>, the necessity or choice of acting together, of being agents collectively. However, to end with this part, I would like to point out another experience of a participant who argues that “la colectividad de las acciones feministas va más allá del momento concreto de la acción”/“*the feeling of community in feminist actions goes further than the concrete moment of the action*”(Kani 2013: Second workshop) . With these words, they are illustrating a way of creating a collective way of acting in which the collective takes longer than the action, in which the strength of the collective will stay after a concrete moment of a public action. This way of action, created from vulnerability in feminist spaces or collectives, challenges the idea of sporadic social networks and encounters that Silvia Lopez Gil (Lopez Gil 2011: 305) was presenting as what a capitalist and individualist system promotes and creates.

### **3 2. SOLA NO PUEDES, CON AMIGAS SI! / YOU CANNOT DO IT ALONE, BUT YES WITH FRIENDS!**

In the previous part of the chapter, I engaged with a conception of the individual subject which becomes challenged when taking seriously into account our interdependence with other subjects, circumstances and contexts. Furthermore, I presented the possibility of resisting and creating alternatives and strong solidarity and support networks from the position of assuming a shared vulnerability with others. A resistance from an interdependent position from which it is possible to act and which can also be a choice. Connected with the illusory ideal of the independent subject, there is also a constructed idea of agency, an individual agency connected with a western idea of modernity, citizenship and progress. In this chapter, through the work of authors such as Joan Scott, David Valentine and Judith Butler, I will engage with the idea of agency, suggesting the possibility of a collective agency connected with our condition of interdependence. Moreover, I will contextualize this ideal of collective agency within the frame of political action, specifically within the feminist and transfeminist activist sphere.

Feminist historian Joan Scott (2009), presents the idea of individual agency, as being not only connected to capitalism and western ideas of progress and independence, but more specifically, as related to secularization<sup>6</sup>. She understands the process of secularism as one that is usually taken as “an idea, either timeless or evolving, that signifies a universal project of human emancipation, specifically

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<sup>5</sup> This is a specific terminology that I did not find in other authors. However I will support it using ideas and theorist which argue for the possibility of a different understanding of agency, in which the agent does not need to be the individual.

<sup>6</sup> Secularization is understood by Scott (2009) as “an idea, either timeless or evolving, that signifies a universal project of human emancipation, specifically including women”(Scott. 2009: 1), furthermore, according to the author, “secularization in the Christian lands of the west proceeds by defining religion as a matter of private

including women”(Scott 2009: 1). Furthermore, according to the author, “secularization in the Christian lands of the west proceeds by defining religion as a matter of private conscience, just as it privatizes matters familiar and sexual”(Scott 2009: 1). In this way, the author argues that the concept of agency will be related to this idea of secularization, a secularization based on the advocacy of individualism. Thus, secularization would be connected with a capitalist and individualist society based on nation-states, in which the agency is also individualized. It would thus be a western liberal concept which refers to “the free exercise of self-willed behaviour” (Scott. 2009: 9). In order to present other possible ways of understanding agency not related to secularism, Scott engages with different debates about Muslims in France. Using the example of Quaker women in the 18th century the historian of religion Phyllis Mack presents a different kind of agency, “a new kind of psychic energy; a spiritual agency in which liberal notions of free will and human rights were joined to religious notions of individual perfectibility, group discipline, and self-transcendence, and in which energy was focused not on individual’s interior state but on the condition of other deprived groups” (Scott 2009: 10). Following the same argument, Scott argues that “we need a conception of agency in which autonomy is less important than self-transcendence and which the energy to act in the world is generated and sustained by a prior act of personal surrender” (Scott 2009: 10). Thus, even though she is not specifically presenting a kind of collective agency, she is, in any case, arguing for a kind of agency in which autonomy and self-willed behavior are less important than acting for a common cause.

To present another approach to agency which inspires this idea of collective agency, David Valentine (2012) connects some discourses about transsexuality with agency. He argues that “transsexuality in particular has become a central trope for theorizing gender, sexuality, embodiment and (...) human agency” (Valentine 2012: 185). He argues against an understanding of transsexuality as an exercise of agency in contraposition to an understanding of not being transsexual which is considered normal instead of another choice or exercise of agency. In order to advocate for another understanding of choice and agency, Valentine first presents a dichotomized idea about structure and agency: “Most often (...) we think of “structure” as that which constrains. Terms such as “hegemony”, “false consciousness”, or even “culture” are used to explain (often with a morally negative implication) certain actions as the product of societal or other structural forces. In contrast, “agency” and “resistance” usually index a morally positive enabling of human action, a coming-to-clarity about those forces and action against or though them” (Valentine 2012: 192). However, the author points out the social construction dependent on context and different power structures. In this sense, he presents agency as structures as socially constructed, socially constructed and reproduced in educational, medical, juridical and other institutions. He argues that “assigning agency to certain kinds of persons and certain kinds of actions is not only a moral story, but also one bound up in the progressive timeline of modernity: as we become more modern, more developed, we are better at figuring out what kinds of agency are the “correct” ones” (Valentine. 2012: 193). Being agency a result of a particular agent conferring such agency, and taken into account the

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conscience, just as it privatizes matters familiar and sexual”(Scott. 2009: 1)

existence of moral and social discourses when constructing this idea of agency, Valentine indicates that there is a hidden and normative ideology when identifying agency and structure. He writes:

“Agency/structure can thus become realigned at different moments, so that the practice of identifying “structure” and identifying “agency” is itself agentic, ideological and moral claim”(Valentine 2012: 194). Through this affirmation, the author keeps on pointing out the socially constructed idea of agency and structure.

Even though Scott (2009) and Valentine (2012) approach agency through different examples and perspectives, both can illustrate a way of challenging an individualist, dominant and privileged way of understanding agency and present ideas which have inspired me when thinking about collective agency. Namely, Scott presents other understandings of agency, which will be community based, a kind of agency in which a common aim is more important than an individual one. Thus, this understanding does not come from a secular, progressive, capitalist model of agency; rather, it even challenges it. Valentine instead, through the example of transexuality, highlights the morally constructed idea of an agency understood as opposed to structure.

Inspired by these authors, I would now like to present the idea of collective agency, which will be understood as a way of acting within a community. Rich (1984) argues that a movement for change has its support on feelings, actions and words. Furthermore she states that “there is no liberation that only knows how to say ‘I’” (Rich 1984: 378). In this way, I am presenting a kind of agency created through a process of sharing vulnerabilities, but also assuming interdependence and building and acting from this shared assumption. It would be a kind of agency which challenges the division between agency and structure, because it will not be an individual agency but a common one. It would be a collective action process which will create a kind of structure, a kind of support and solidarity network which will have a higher impact than an individual action. Moreover, it would be a kind of agency more used to resist different oppressions and power structures, with more information and referents than an individual agent. A kind of agency from which to create other ways to relate, a kind of agency in which care, empathy, solidarity and support are in the centre.

Even though I could illustrate the idea of collective agency in different spheres and situations, I will specifically focus on its possibilities within a political activist sphere. Judith Butler (2014) argues that “the idea of a body both supported and agentic is at work implicitly or explicitly in any number of political movements, (...) mobilizations presuppose a body which requires support” (Butler. 2014: Video conference). Taking this framework as a starting point, and connecting it with part of the feminist and transfeminist activist sphere of Madrid, through the examples of the participants of the workshop, I will discuss how collective agency plays an important role when doing private and public politics.

In Madrid, there was a political public action (October 2013) against a new abortion law which was going to be implemented in the Spanish state, and which was going to dramatically reduce the possibility of having an abortion. One of *the workshops* participant who took part in the action, explains the importance that acting collectively had for her: “en una acción que hicimos de guerrilla abortista, como que de repente había un montón de gente que nos quería matar en medio de la mani esta pro-vida,

tanto la seguridad de la mani como los propios participantes, pero como que habíamos decidido que no nos íbamos a soltar por nada del mundo, y esto ocurrió...éramos 27 tias que no nos soltábamos y nos tuvieron que llevar como en volandas, pero sujetas al resto de la gente...Entonces, lo mismo, te da una fuerza esto y un empoderamiento que piensas...si yo estoy aquí sola, me matan, pero tengo a 27 personas a mi alrededor con las que he sido capaz de montarme este tinglado aquí, con el riesgo que supone y ya sabíamos que suponían este tipo de mani...’/ *“in a street action that we made with guerrilla abortista (a feminist action group against a new abortion law), suddenly there were hundreds of people who wanted to kill us in the middle of this pro-life demo, the security as well as the participants, but we have decided that we won’t loose from each other in any circumstance, and that happened...We were 27 people that we were not going to get loose, and they (the police) had to carry us in the air, but hooked with each other...Then, the same, it gives you a strength and a empowerment that you think: if I would be here alone they kill me, but I have 27 people around me with the ones I have been able to prepare this action, with the risk that implies and we knew that implied this kinds of demonstrations”* (Sara 2013: First workshop). In this way, Sara is exemplifying the power of doing a political action with a collective instead of alone, the feeling of solidarity and knowing that everything would be ok, than exposing yourself to a vulnerable situation alone is not the same than doing it with your activist friends.

Connecting the idea of collective agency with a personal understanding of feminism, but also with the choice of wanting to act collectively – through a support and care networks–, another participant argues that: “el feminismo nos da herramientas ya no solo para crear en colectivo, sino para poder generar agencia colectiva, esa red que hace que necesitemos el apoyo de otras personas. No que tu estes aportando simplemente para que algo crezca, sino que sin el apoyo de las otras personas eso no es funcional”/ *“feminism gives us tools not only to create in common, but to be able to generate collective agency, that network which makes us need the support of others. It is not only that you are contributing to make something grow, but that without the support of others, it does not have a function at all”* (Juli 2013: First workshop). In this way, from feminisms one can learn that sharing and acting in collective reduces the feeling of vulnerability, or turns it into an empowering one. However, Juli does also will argue that having a feminist collective network for action will be more useful than just being individuals gathering together to do something.

In this part of the chapter, I have introduced and illustrated the idea of collective agency, through academic texts, and then contextualized with the experiences of *the workshops* participants. In the previous parts of the thesis, I –together with other experiences and authors– highlighted the importance and power that sharing vulnerability can have when creating a network. Furthermore, it is through those connections that can be created a collective and empowering way of living, resisting and changing the world. In this sense, from now on, I will use the idea of collective agency to present this shared way of doing.

### 3.3. INTERSECTIONS, CONTEXT AND REFERENTS

In the previous chapter, I have argued that it is crucial to take into account location, context, empathy and the importance of experiences when approaching vulnerability and its possibilities. At this point I would like to bring into this discussion the concept and practice of intersectionality. After a necessary introduction to the concept and practice itself, I will contextualize it with located experiences, and I will use it to further highlight the importance of location, experiences, referents, and alliances when acting from an empowered vulnerable position.

I have learned the importance of making explicit the origins of concepts and being aware of their roots in order to avoid that through a concept traveling process, the original concept or practices loses its original aim and meaning. I find also important to specify the origins of a practice-concept<sup>7</sup> to do justice to voices and experiences of people who become forgotten when such practices or ideas are used in privileged places and spheres, such as the academy. This means that a concept travels, and can be used in a different ways, sometimes even in a counterproductive way for the original aim of the practice or concept. Thus I will contextualize the origins of the concept of intersectionality in order to present its derivations but also to relate it with this thesis-project.

In their article “Ain’t I A Woman? Revising Intersectionality” (2004), Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix engage with the concept-practice of intersectionality in an historical perspective. Using and taking the concept of intersectionality, implies a “recognition that “race”, social class and sexuality differentiated women’s experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category “woman” with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to “race”, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions” (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 82). In this way, the importance of differences among women are presented. It is emphasized the fact that focusing on gender differences have made invisible the relevance of race, class, and sexuality related differences.

According to the written information about the Women’s Rights Convention of 1851 in akron (ohio), Sojourner Truth was the person who campaigned for both slavery abolitionism, and women’s equal rights. Years later, in 1989-91, it was Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw who named and defined intersectionality “in the wider context of African American and other women of color activism and critical writing practice” (Lewis 2013: 871). Furthermore “feminist scholars have pointed to the precursors of intersectional thinking in the centuries long legacies of feminist anti-racist, and class-based activism” (Lewis 2013: 872). In “Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements” (2003), Gail Lewis also points out that “intersectionality welcomed the margins to the table of theory making by reconciling the split between theory and experience –or, more precisely, by suggesting that experience could be the ground of theory making” (Lewis 2013: 873). Along the same lines, Brah and Phoenix argue that a decentring of the normative subject of feminism occurs through intersectionality: “such decentring activities scaled new heights when fuelled by political energies

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<sup>7</sup> I will present intersectionality as a practice-concept in order to highlight its theoretical importance, but also to

generated by the social movements of the second half of the last century – anti-colonial movements for independence, Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements, the Peace movements, student protests and the Worker’s movements, The Women’s movement or the Gay and Lesbian Movement” (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 78). When considering this brief historical overview, it becomes clear that the connections between the concept-practice of intersectionality and activism and experiences are very important and part of the very origin of the concept.

In their article “I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess”(2012), Jasbir Puar points out how “intersectionality emerged from the struggles of second wave feminism as a crucial black feminist intervention challenging the hegemonic rubrics of race, class and gender within the predominantly white feminist frames” (Puar 2012: 51). The author also mentions Leslie McCall’s consideration of intersectionality as “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies in conjunction with other fields, has made so far” (Puar 2012: 49). However, Puar (2012) critically approaches the practice-concept of intersectionality according to some of its current uses. According to Puar (2012) Audre Lorde used the concept of difference and intersectionality as a “dynamic, affectively resonant postulation of inchoate and sometimes contradictory intersectional subjectivities” (Puar 2012: 52). However, when the practice-concept travels, some approaches will understand the differences which intersect has as *different from* each other, and in this way separated. Following the same idea, Puar (2012) also argues that intersectionality has currently been used as a “feminist intervention to disrupt whiteness and less so as a critical race intervention to disrupt masculine frames” (Puar 2012: 52). Thus, since differences are not the same for every person or group, in every situation and in every moment some of such differences are omitted. This means that a group presented as homogeneous is making invisible and therefore reproducing other oppression in order to keep the group itself. Furthermore, being accountable for one difference does not mean to acknowledge all the others. Not recognizing the connections between power structures such as patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, racism, classism, ableism etc., as well as the interactions between humans-non humans, spaces and contexts, can create new borders and exclusions. Audre Lorde (1984) will engage with this topic presenting the exclusion of Black women’s voices from a white middle class academic sphere. Furthermore, regarding transgender issues, Susan Stryker (2006) will also point of the exclusionary processes that transgender people and studies have been part of from feminist struggles and academia.

As it has been already mentioned, the practice-concept of intersectionality emerged as a consequence of daily lives and experiences, connected with activist and social feminist movements, especially from black women’s voices. Furthermore, it would be a concept-practice in which differences were seen as interconnect not separated. Puar (2012) mentions the dangers of concept traveling due to appropriations, institutionalization and the separation of the practice-concept from its roots, which are based on experiences and activism. In this way, trying to recognize the roots of the concept-practice of intersectionality that argued – among other things – for an interconnection of differences, recently have

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recognize its origins as being very connected to daily practices and struggles.

appeared new concepts-ideas. In order to give present the relevance of trying to connect an older concept with its root, but also to connect it with the current context, I will introduce the concept-practice of assemblage, which as well as intersectionality, will be very inspiring for my work. I present vulnerabilities as different among groups, but also interconnected, and in this way, through the concept-practice assemblage the importance of creating alliances will be pointed out.

Assemblage would mean to focus not on the content but on relations, not in independent objects, subjects or structures, but on its intra-connections. Thus Puar (2012) argues that “concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist prior to them, rather, relations of force connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts” (Puar 2012: 57) . Moreover “assemblages are interesting because they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing” (Puar 2012: 57). In this sense, this idea will connect with what has been argued previously about inherent vulnerability and interdependences, in a way that we are made by relations, the human body will be nothing it itself if her connection to others, objects, context and structures, are not taken into account. Furthermore, this idea of assemblage challenges the binary opposition of subject and object and includes the structures as a third element that intra-act with them. If we think all as relations, the differences among the subject, objects and structures become smaller, and there are not even inter-actions, but intra-actions. These intra-actions will imply that they will be part of each other and one cannot make a complete and clear distinction among them. According to the feminist theorist Karen Barad (2001), these three elements – objects, subject and structures – are intra-actively constituted; this means that they do not pre-exist their intra-action and they are not fixed/abstract-able entities. Moreover, different structures are in intra-action with other structures. In “Nature’s Queer Performativity” (2012) Barad argues that “what we commonly take to be individual entities are not separate determinately bounded and propertied objects, but rather are (entangled “parts of”) phenomena (material- discursive intra-actions) that extend across (what we commonly take to be separated places and moments in) space and time” (Barad 2012: 32). In this sense, differences among objects, subject and structures can exist, but there is such an intra connection among them, that we cannot understand them separately. Thus we need to take into account, material, discursive and space and time based influences which become part of these subjects, objects and structures.

Understanding difference and differences which are interconnected and in constant movement, Barad argues that there are constant changes and shifting of boundaries which will create the possibility of agency. In this way, the absence of determinism regarding the boundaries between objects, subjects and structures, opens up a space for agency. A space that challenges power relations, a space of possibilities. She writes: “Reconfigurations of space, time and matter – in their being agential – require an ethics of knowing and being. Intra-actions have the potential to do more than participate in the constitution of the geometries of power, they open up possibilities for changes in its topology, and as such, interventions on the manifold possibilities made available reconfigure both what will and what will be possible”(Barad 2001: 103-104) .In this way, Barad argues for a place for possibilities. Taking into account intra-connections of subjects, objects and structures, together with time and space, opens up a space for action- This space of possibilities “does not represent a fixed horizon within which the social



location of knowers can be mapped, neither a homogeneous fixed uniform container of choices. Rather the dynamics the space time manifold is produced by agential interventions made possible in its very re(con)figuration”(Barad 2001: 103-104). Furthermore, this space can be used for political purposes, for a challenge of power structures and discourses: “Perhaps what is needed is a ‘politics of possibilities’: ways of responsibly imagining and intervening in the re(con)figurations of power”. (Barad 2001: 103-104). In this sense, when approaching intersectionality as intra-actions, besides making more complex the boundaries of differences, it is also highlighted the importance of agency and political implications. In this way, it seems that the politics of possibilities presented by Barad (2001) are very connected with activism. Since there is a space for political change, this politics of possibilities will let agents to take action. Agents – that intra-act with other agents, objects and structures – would be able to organize them, to take an activist position from this politics of possibilities in order to challenge intra-connected oppressive power structures. In this sense, there is a remarkable connection between intersectionality, intra-actions and activism.

Having as departure point the concept-practice of intersectionality and assemblage, I will connect it with the experiences and practices of the feminist and transfeminist activists from *the workshops*. These activists are trying to have an intersectional way of doing politics, in which experiences and daily struggles play an important role. Furthermore, what has been presented about intersectionality can also be connected with the idea of a political collective agency already mentioned, which comes from a shared feeling of vulnerability. Being vulnerable and being aware of the potential of sharing it, means to recognize an interconnection with others, and in this sense to consciously create a collective agency from an inherent intra-action. Furthermore, experiences and daily struggles that are the base for having an intersectional practice are also the main source of connection among vulnerabilities, and therefore the base for creating a collective agency.

The transfeminist movement in the spanish state has received influences from feminist, black women’s and lgbt movements. In this sense, this movement takes into account the intersections between oppression, and therefore argues for an intersectional struggle as a response. Accordingly, in the feminist and transfeminist collectives I am engaging with here, differences – differences among women, but also among other feminist allies – are taken into account. Additionally, having vulnerability as a departure point, implies that people with similar vulnerabilities will gather together. However, it is important, that despite differences with other people’s vulnerabilities, there would be a strong intention to acknowledge and intra-act with other vulnerabilities in order to challenge a network of interconnected oppressions. As Barad (2001) wrote, there is an intra-action between subjects, objects and structures, which change and interact with each other. She points out that the possibility for changes, becoming agents and making decisions is also part of those intra-actions. A collective agency plays an important role when entering into this politics of possibilities: a collective agency which is political, in this specific case feminist and transfeminist, which is created through and from vulnerability, empathy and solidarity. In the next section, I will engage more in depth with the importance of alliances and the acknowledgment of differences in order to create broader resistance and support networks. But first I want to reflect on the

experience of one of the participants of *the workshops* about how feminism was necessary for her in order to understand the importance of taking into account other oppressions, and thus the importance of having an intersectional approach connected with empathy. She says: “a partir del feminismo te das cuenta de que hay muchas identidades que están en la misma posición que la tuya. Eres muy consciente de que hay mucha peña que está sufriendo muchas opresiones, mayores, menores que tu, como sea...y que se pueden sentir vulnerables en un momento dado y lo entiendes desde otro lado, como que puedes empatizar de otra manera”/ “*from feminism you realize that there are many identities in the same position as yours. You are aware that there is a lot of people suffering many oppressions, bigger or smaller than you, whatever...and who can feel vulnerable at certain point and you can understand it from another place, like being able to empathize in a different way*” (Haizea 2013: Second workshop). Thus, this experience can illustrate the importance of taking into account differences, different oppressions and vulnerabilities which need their own space and their own struggle. At the same time, this statement also shows the importance of being aware of the existence of those others’ vulnerabilities and differences. This becomes relevant in order to intra-act – as the oppressive structures do –, but also in order to create stronger solidarity and support networks instead of being oppressive with each other.

The practice-concept of intersectionality, when engaging with the importance of differences and their inter-actions, has influenced the understanding of the category of women from feminist and transfeminist activisms. Moreover, from these movements, besides recognition of many differences and therefore struggles among women, there is also a vindication for a subject who does not necessarily need to identify with the category of woman itself, thus opening spaces for other fixed and/or fluid identities.

Similarly as when discussing the roots of intersectionality, daily struggles and experiences are also very important when thinking about a collective agency which, from a shared vulnerability, creates different networks and alternatives within the feminist and transfeminist sphere. Thus, the context and location that influence daily struggles and activist lives become important. When one is challenging power structures, there can be ways of resistance which are focused on direct confrontation, but there are also others connected with the creation of different ways of relating and supporting each other. For both of these ways of resistance – which are clearly interconnected –, it is necessary to have referents of other similar experiences from the past or from the present, preferable from a similar location and context. As it will be further elaborated in the next chapter, voicing and sharing our own experiences already constitutes, for many of us transfeminist activists, a way of resistance. Accordingly, in connection with this elaboration of intersectionality and assemblage, I will now present the experiences of two participants of *the workshops*. One of them, when asked about a remarkable example of her feminist-transfeminist activism, points out the importance of having a network in a specific location and context with whom to share daily experiences and daily activism: “a mi se me viene a la cabeza cuando vivía en Estrecho, cuando estaba en la Colmena (una casa okupada), cuando acababan de okupar al lado la Enre (un centro social okupado y vivienda), y también las de la Ruda (una casa okupada solo de mujeres y bolleras)...fue un momento de auge en Estrecho de un montón de gente okupando por ahí, muy potente...Y yo sentí que a nivel político se empezaban a cuestionar muchas cosas y fue super importante

la familia feminista que hicimos...mozas repartidas por todo el barrio... Además fue un momento en el que desde la Enre, a partir de agresiones machistas que se estaban dando, los hombres que estaban en el colectivo se fueron, las mujeres les echaron... Fue un momento muy chulo a nivel político, de crecimiento, a nivel grupal, de familia...”/ *“it comes to my mind when I lived in Estrecho (a neighborhood from madrid), when I was living in La Comena (a squatted house), when they just squatted La Enre (a social center and house), and also the ones of La Ruda (a squatted house only for women and lesbians)... It was a boom time in Estrecho, lots of people squatting there, were powerful... and I felt that in a political level many things were being put into question and the feminist family that we created was super important... girls around the whole neighborhood... It was also the moment in which from La Enre, due to sexist aggressions which were taking place, the men who were part of the collective left, the women throw them out... I was an amazing moment politically, of collective growing, of family feeling...”* (Carla 2013: First workshop). Thus, besides highlighting the importance of creating, building and resisting from the group, and the empowerment and capacity of action that implies having a feminist network in the same space, she also points out the fact that politics and activism are not separated from our own daily lives. Feminist and transfeminist politics take place in the street, but also in the house, in the neighborhood, in a squat, in your home, in a conversation, in a presence.

The other participant presents, through her own experience in an alternative lgbt collective, the importance of interacting with people who have similar experiences than yours. Specially when your experiences, identity and way of understanding and being in the world differ from the ones that invade the tv, the educational system, the patriarchal and heteronormative rules, the capitalist and individualist system. In this way, she argues that “con *acera* (el colectivo lgbt alternativo) , para mi supuso también construir muchas cosas buenas, como referentes de otras formas de vida (...) Como que no te puede llegar todo por inspiración divina...tienes que conocer a gente, otros referentes”/ *“with acera (the alternative lgbt collective), for me also implied to build many good things, such as referents of other ways of living (...), like it cannot arrive to you through divine inspiration, you need to get to know people, other referents”* (Inés 2013: Second workshop).

To sum up, in this section I have pointed out the interconnections and resonances between the concept-idea-practice of intersectionality and the feminist and transfeminist sphere, specifically the experience of the activists from madrid. The practice of intersectionality has been illustrated with experiences of subjects who connect their struggles with vulnerability. They make these connections when taking into account other subjects for their politics, and the importance of experiences and referents. Moreover, it is as well important the influence of intersectionality in feminist and transfeminist movements when acknowledging the importance of alliances. In the next part of this chapter, I will engage with the relevance of those alliances within a feminist and transfeminist activism which acts with a collective agency aiming at a way of doing politics where empathy and care occupy an important position.

### 3.4. ALLIANCES

As it has been already mentioned, different power structures and oppressions are interconnected. In this sense, from a feminist and transfeminist activism, an alliance and interconnection of vulnerabilities and ways of resistances becomes important in order to directly confront those structures and oppressions, but also to create alternative and support-care-solidarity networks.

In the second chapter, I mentioned the importance of taking into account other vulnerabilities, in order to avoid dynamics of exclusions and oppression being reproduced by oppressed subjects or groups towards others. However, I will now focus more in depth in the importance of creating alliances among different struggles through the experiences of the workshop participants.

Pointing out the relevance of alliances from feminist- transfeminist spheres, one of the participant argues that “a veces nos miramos mucho el ombligo y también mola abrirse a otra gente con la que tenemos muchas cosas en común, más de las que nos creemos...creo que el feminismo parte de la vulnerabilidad, y darse cuenta de una situación de vulnerabilidad y quererse trabajar eso”/ *“sometimes we contemplate our own navel too much, and it would be cool also to open to other people with whom we have many things in common, more than we think...I think that feminism comes from vulnerability, and being aware of a situation of vulnerability and wanting to work on that”* (Kani 2013: Second workshop). Even though I could present different alliances, due to the experiences of the participants, I will focus on a feminist- transfeminist alliance with the movement of ‘functional diversity’ that is currently taking place in the spanish state.

In order to engage with this alliance, I will first introduce a group who struggles for their rights and lives, the “Foro de Vida Independiente”. Inspired by the movement of Independent Life which appeared in the u.s. in 1972, this collective was created in the spanish state in 2001. They are a community of people from all around the state who share a philosophical framework: “La Filosofía mundial de Vida Independiente, se constituye en un nuevo pensamiento teórico-práctico en torno a la realidad humana, denominada “diversidad funcional” / *“the global Philosophy of Independent Live, constitutes itself in a new theoretical-practical thought around the human reality called ‘functional diversity’”* (forovidaindependiente.org). They claim for a collective and individual right to be able to live independently, but connected to and being part of a broader community, with the necessary support (what they will call “personal assistance”). Moreover, they argue that “No queremos aceptar la institucionalización como forma de vida, puesto que entendemos que “somos riqueza” y, por tanto, debemos disponer de los apoyos humanos y tecnológicos que nos resulten necesarios para poder ejercer nuestra ciudadanía en igualdad de condiciones, y aportar a nuestra sociedad”/ *“we do not want to accept institutionalizations as a way of living, because we understand that “we are richness”, and therefore, we should dispose of the human and technological supports needed to be able to exercise our citizenship in equal conditions and contribute t our society”* (forovidaindependiente.org).

From the “Foro de Vida Independiente”, it appears clearly that their vindication concerns: human and civil rights, self-determination, self-support, empowerment, responsibilities among their own lives

and actions, rights to assume risks, and the right to live in common. This collective also believes that every human life has value, that anyone can make choices and that people with functional diversity have the right to have control over their lives and to participate in society. A slogan which illustrates their philosophy says: “nothing about us without us” (forodevidaindependiente.org), a slogan which makes a clear statement against assistentialist projects that does not aim at working together with the people with fictional diversity but which tells them what to be and do.

Regarding their public activities, this collective participates in institutions and state politics, in conferences, congresses and seminars. They present themselves as follows: “Somos veladores por el cumplimiento de la Convención de la ONU sobre los Derechos de las personas con discapacidad y difundimos su contenido. Hemos participado en el estudio y análisis que desde la Universidad Carlos III se ha hecho sobre el impacto de la Convención en el ordenamiento jurídico español” / *“we are caretakers for the compliance of the ONU Convention about the Rights of disable people, and we spread its content. We have participated in the study and analysis made from the University Carlos III( madrid) about the impact of the Convention on the spanish legal system”* (forovidaindependiente.org). They also reflect debate and investigate, generating various kinds of knowledges, documents, articles and book publications. Furthermore, direct actions and protests have a central role in this struggle.

Part of this collective also voices the necessity to investigate but also make visible a claim for a broader understanding of sexuality and pleasure in which different bodies, fantasies and sexualities can have a space. In this way, the collective started an alliance with part of the feminist-transfeminist groups and individuals who are working and researching around post-porn. This alliance started in barcelona in 2013, with an audiovisual project, a documentary called “Yes we fuck”.

“Yes we fuck” is a documentary film, a project started by Antonio Centeno, a member of “Foro de Vida Independiente”, and a documentary maker called Ramón de la Morena. It is a documentary which wants to make visible and talk about the sexuality of people with functional diversity. However, as they present it, this documentary is more than just a documentary, it is a process, it is a larger project: “Yes, we fuck! no es sólo un documental, sino un proyecto donde la gente participa, dialoga y, sobre todo, cuestiona; en el que las redes sociales tienen una importancia fundamental. Además, el proceso de elaboración está sirviendo para tejer alianzas entre diferentes colectivos que trabajan políticamente cuestiones vinculadas al cuerpo y la sexualidad (diversidad funcional, feminismos, transfeminismos, LGBT, queer, intersex, gordxs, entre otrxs).” / *“ Yes, we fuck!, it is not only a documentary, but a project in which people participates, converse, and above all, questions; in which social networks have a fundamental importance. Furthermore, the process of elaboration, is bringing in the creation of alliances among different collectives which politically work on issues related to body and sexuality (functional diversity, feminisms, transfeminisms, LGTB, queer, intersex, fat, among others)”* (yeswefuck.org). In this way, through idea of making a documentary, there is a whole project full of reflections, shared and new knowledges, practices and various experiences in different spheres. In order to create this documentary, and also inspired and connected to it, there have been different projects going on such as congresses and seminars about functional diversity and sexuality, but also various workshops, interviews and work with

different groups of people from different ages, locations and spheres, publications of articles, videos and books.

One of the aims and/or consequences of this project have been, and actually is, the creation of different alliances with other groups, collectives and individuals with whom there are shared interests, practices and places from which start an horizontal learning and knowledge sharing. One of these alliances is with the feminist-transfeminist movement, sharing together spaces of debate and practices. There is a specific alliance with the post-porn feminist sphere, a sphere interested on creating other kinds of porn, a feminist one, one that does not only focus on sexual excitement, but also in other feeling – such as pain, fear, joy or disgust –, and also inhabited by diverse identities and bodies with diverse sexual preferences. This sphere is very broad, with different interests and projects, but to highlight some, there is an alliance with the people who organize in barcelona “la muestra marrana”, which is a self-organize post-porn festival in which the theme of functional diversity has been included. Furthermore, there is a collective called “post-op”, which organized, together with people from the “foro de vida independiente” and other collaborations, the first workshop and story for the documentary in April 2013. It was a workshop to share and discover pleasure, to create and try with different bodies, with different people, a sexualized space of practices and debates in which non-normative bodies and non-normative practices were the protagonist.

The spaces and location are also important for this documentary project. Public and private spaces, important for people with functional diversity who narrate their experiences, are part of this project. In this way, daily practices and locations have relevance. However, those locations – public and private spheres – are also important in order to create a safe atmosphere for the participants of the project when making visible and when vindicating certain practices and situations. Social networks become an important source of knowledge and communication for this project; the project itself has been presented in institutional, but also alternative spaces – such as squats – connected with the topics of sexuality, functional diversity, post-porn, care-work, etc.

Even though I could have chosen another alliance of struggles, I found it important to present this little part of the alliance between the feminist-transfeminist movement and the movement of functional diversity. Now I will further articulate this alliance through the experiences and opinions of the participants of the workshop I have organized. I feel that such an alliance has a strong potential: it brings a lot of inputs and knowledges for both spheres, and it is a process that we are living nowadays and we are seeing its evolution and strengths.

In this thesis-project, I have been arguing for the possibility of taking vulnerability as a starting point, focusing on a feminist-transfeminist sphere and experiences. The importance of a collective way of doing, creating and resisting has also been pointed out, and the fact that there are different vulnerabilities and possibilities for alliances too. I have argued how there are different spheres and parts of our identity, and vulnerabilities associated with those different parts which can be connected with the vulnerabilities that emerge from other identities which are not like our own. Furthermore, those alliances can turn into potential, into strength, into action, into support, care and networks to make easier our existence, and

even to make out very survival possible. As an example, I have discussed the alliance between the movement of functional diversity and the feminist-transfeminist activism takes place in different ways and spheres: there are shared vulnerabilities, and those which are not shared are important to take into account in order to not exclude and oppress the other; but it is also crucial to recognize that while there is an alliance through one(or more) aspect, each movement, each collective, each different context, needs its specific space and reflections. For example, one of the participants of *the workshops* I organized explains how, according to her own experiences, a possibility, a connection among feminisms and the movement of functional diversity can be seen as a place from where create a powerful alliance, a meeting point between these plural movements-activisms: “en mi experiencia, el movimiento feminista, exceptuando al movimiendo de diversidad funcional, es de los pocos movimientos que conozco que luchan para ellas mismas... En mi experiencia, cuando yo empecé a hacer feminismo, fué la primera vez que yo sentí que el sujeto por el que luchaba, aunque fuera diverso, era el mio. En ese sentido la colectividad era imprescindible. (...) Y es super importante la alianza con el movimiento de diversidad funcional porque también compartimos es, que son sujeto de su propia lucha”/ “*according to my own experience, the feminist movement, with the exception of the functional diversity movement, it is among the few moments that I know that fight for themselves...In my experience, when I started to do feminism, it was the first time that I felt that the subject for whom I was fighting, despite its diversity, was mine. In that way, collectivity was indispensable.(...) And it is super important an alliance with the functional diversity movement because we do also share that they are also the subject of their own struggle*” (Eco 2013: Second workshop). In this way, the slogan of “Foro de Vida Independiente” already mentioned which argues “nothing about us without us”, can be also applied to feminist and transfeminist movements and projects, and diverse alliances can emerge from this connection.

A participant of *the workshops* who was present in the first workshop of the documentary in barcelona, narrates her experience there, according to her: “el taller de diversidad funcional y postporno de barcelona, si que fue un ejemplo de esa alianza que aún no había ocurrido, pero íbamos a hacer que ocurra. Eso sí fué un espacio de compartir vulnerabilidad, y te das cuenta todos los matices que tiene la vulnerabilidad, como que había mogollón de gente con un cuerpo no normativo, muy diverso funcionalmente, y estaban super empoderadas en el tema de la sexualidad, y como que estaba en el medio de la sala disfrutando mogollón...Y luego había gente que no. Como que tu mirabas a la gente y había una cantidad de matices y de situaciones posibles en cuanto a vulnerabilidad en ese lugar, que la vulnerabilidad era una riqueza, no como cosas super fijas”/ “*the workshop of functional diversity and postporn in barcelona, was an example of that alliance that was still not happening, but we were gonna make it happened. That was a space to share vulnerability, and realizing all the tones that vulnerability has. Like there were many people with a non-normative body, very diverse functionally, and they were very empowered on the issue of sexuality, and they were in the middle of the room having a lot of pleasure...And there were also people who did not. Like that if you would look to the people there were loads of tones and possible situations regarding vulnerability and that place, as if vulnerability was a richness instead of fixed things*” (Eco 2013: Second workshop) . Through this experience, she points out

the richness of sharing, recognizing and creating from vulnerabilities in a safe space with different people, and how it is possible to learn from other vulnerabilities. This experience also constitutes an illustration of the variety of vulnerabilities and the interconnections among them. Furthermore, as it has been already mentioned, vulnerabilities, exclusions and inclusions are socially constructed, but also the interconnections among power structures and oppressions are socially constructed, accordingly I suggest that interconnections among struggles can be equally constructed. The first part of Eco's experience illustrates that there has been an intention of making the transfeminist and the functional diversity struggles converge. The situation is changing since then, the alliance is gaining strength and the knowledge and experiences shared in this process are also growing and empowering more people.

One of the participants, when referring to other vulnerabilities, points out the difficulties that one can have to recognize others' vulnerabilities and oppressions: "estamos aquí al lado y no nos hemos visto, mira la pared ésta tan bien colocada"/ "*we are here next to each other, and we haven't seen each other, look the wall, it is very well positioned*" (Haizea 2013: Second workshop). This is not only a matter of being focus on our own vulnerability – to make it stronger and more effective –, but it is also connected to the source of oppression itself, a kind of education, a kind of economy, and kind of capitalist and individualist way of seeing the world which is teaching us not to empathize with other oppressions. Furthermore, it is easier also for the operation of the system to have separated and even faced exclusions and therefore struggles, thus the networks will be weaker, and resistances would be more isolated. However, taking into account vulnerability, empathy, care and the importance of alliances we can be stronger, as the same participant says: "ver como contando con esa vulnerabilidad, rompemos las cajitas y pensamos en otra historia"/ "*to see how taking into account such vulnerability we can break the little boxes and we can thing in other story*" (Haizea 2013: Second workshop).

Not only sharing knowledges and experiences is important in order to create alliances, but also having a safe space in which different collectives, and individuals can feel like creating those connections is crucial. In this case, the accessibility to the space for people with different abilities is very important. Accordingly, in part of the transfeminist sphere of madrid there has been an acknowledgment of how important it is to have an accessible space; thus, in order to share with other collectives, the aim is also to have accessible locations. On the other hand, the transfeminist movement carries out their activities, projects and activisms in different spaces, and for some groups and collective, the use of squats and self-organized spaces is a political choice. Thus, some meetings had taken place in those spaces too, and some people and collectives from the functional diversity movement have made their first acquaintance with such places.

There have been many and different projects and ideas which have emerge from the realization of the documentary "Yes, we fuck", and from this alliance: projects that do not have a direct relation with the documentary itself, but which are contributing to the creation of stronger networks among these two movements, and which also work to give visibility to these struggles in other spheres and locations. An example of this is a project called "pornotopedia". Inspired by the first workshop for the documentary, the group 'post-op' has been developing a set of sex toys and accessories for people with different bodies



and abilities.

Post-op are a group of activist artists, in their own words, they are a “Grupo interdisciplinar relacionado con la investigación de género y la post-pornografía. Proyecto que apuesta por la resexualización del espacio y la esfera pública y la relectura crítica del discurso normativo. Seres vivos creativos se unen para generar un espacio de trabajo híbrido que aborda sexualidad y género desde la noción de cuerpo y performance. Cuerpos, roles y morfologías aparecen como entes en tránsito que cuestionan el orden legitimador y proponen prácticas sexuales y géneros no esencializantes”/ *“Interdisciplinary group connected with gender research and post-pornography. A project that bets on the re-sexualization of space and public sphere, and a critic re-read of the normative discourse. Alive beings gather together to generate a hybrid work-place which approaches gender and sexuality from a notion of body and performance. Bodies, roles, morphologies appear as entities in transit questioning the legitimated order, and they propose non essentializing genders and sexual practices”* (postop-postporno.tumblr.com). They are part of the transfeminist sphere in Barcelona, and after the encounter with the people from the functional diversity movement who works in the documentary decided to start this project. “Pornopedia” deals with the lack of sexual toys for everybody. In this project, “post-op” asked diverse people about what would they like to have, aiming at creating more inclusive sex toys. In this way, people with different ways, bodies and abilities could contact them through the internet giving ideas and suggestions, from which they would choose some, in order to start the creation of sexual pleasure together. Post-op is a collective about post-porn, and for them, “La idea no es que puede hacer el postporno para las personas con diversidad funcional sino que pueden hacer ellos por el postporno”/ *“The idea is not that we can do porn for people with functional diversity, but what can they do for post-porn”* (postop-postporno.tumblr.com). In this way, they try to create an horizontal space to share and create together, not a place of inclusion, but a place in which we can learn from each other, and in this case, a place in which the post-porn can learn from the movement of functional diversity: “Con esto lo que queremos decir es que precisamente esa otra forma de sentir el cuerpo y esa otra forma de moverse generan prácticas que de otro modo sería muy difícil imaginar, prácticas que enriquecen el imaginario común.”/ *“with this we are arguing that precisely this other way of feeling the body and this other way of movement, generates practices that otherwise would be difficult to imagine, practice which enrich the collective imaginary”* (postop-postporno.tumblr.com)

This alliance, as an example of other possible alliances across different experiences, oppressions and vulnerabilities, illustrates the potential of connecting struggles for specific projects, the potential of learning from each other, the potential of having inspirations and referents and the potential to interconnect struggles, vulnerabilities and dependencies: “En palabras del Foro de Vida Independiente y la Agencia de Asuntos Precarios Azies: “como todo lo que “es” necesariamente, la interdependencia puede tomarse como una suerte de maldición como una suerte, a secas. Nuestra apuesta sería entonces tomarlo como una oportunidad a aprovechar”/ *“In the word of the “Foro de Vida Independiente” and “Azies”: “as everything that necessarily “is”, interdependence can be taken as a kind of curse, or just like kind of luck. Our bet would be to take it as an opportunity to use”* (Orozco 2014: 238).

In this third chapter, by taking feminist- transfeminist activism as an example, I have presented and illustrated the importance of thinking as a collective agent when wanting to engage with and challenge different oppressions. Since in this project I am focusing on vulnerability as a place from which to struggle, resist and create, I found it relevant to engage with the idea-concept-practice of intersectionality and its relation with experiences, referents and differences. Next, I have connected these issues with vulnerability and feminist-transfeminist experiences and activism. Finally, I ended this chapter focusing on the importance of creating alliances from vulnerabilities; I illustrated it with a specific and located example. Different experiences and aspects of a contextualized feminist-transfeminist activism based on vulnerability, care, solidarity and community building have been presented.

Placing in the centre the possibilities of empowerment from vulnerability through the creation of a collective agency, in the next chapter, I will present different tools and strategies of resistance to face various ways for repression. Furthermore, I will also engage with the building of solidarity, care and support network from shared vulnerability positions.

## CHAPTER 4. DEALING WITH REPRESSION. VOICE AND SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

### 4 1. VULNERABILITY, SOLIDARITY AND REPRESSION

In this thesis project I have been engaging with vulnerability in a feminist-transfeminist activist sphere: I have engaged with vulnerability as place from where to build, create and resist in the context of a political movement; through public and private experiences and activisms, and more specifically, through feminist and transfeminist activisms. I have contextualized the project even more by bringing in this discussion the experiences of activists from Madrid. In this way vulnerability has been connected with those experiences, examples and spheres. When I did the workshops, we discussed about what vulnerability was for us as feminist-transfeminist activists, but we also discussed about repression and solidarity. In our context and due to our participation in public and private activism, we are exposed to different punishments and acts of repression. Moreover, as it has been already mentioned in other chapters, solidarity networks and other tools to face vulnerability are important in order to keep this activisms going, and at times, even in order to survive. Thus, I will dedicate this chapter to discussing practices of repression, and the creations of tools for resistance and solidarity networks.

When engaging with vulnerability, solidarity and repression, it becomes difficult to identify which one is the consequence of the other. They are all interconnected and, depending on the experiences and lives, these entanglements are different. *In the workshops*, for example, different connections among the three practices were presented.

One of the participants elaborated on a connection between vulnerability and solidarity, the latter being necessary to more easily face the former: a vulnerable situation needs solidarity, but also “de tus redes, de tus afectos, de tu gente, de todo lo físicamente externo a ti que a la vez también te completa” / “*your own networks, affects, people, it would need from all what is physically external to you but also completes you*” (Clau 2013: Second workshop). Furthermore, she also points out a connection between solidarity and repression: “solidaridad como herramienta de creación, como arma con la que enfrentarse a la violencia del sistema y su represión” / “*solidarity as a tool for creation, as a weapon to face the system’s violence and repression*” (Clau 2013: Second workshop).

Another participant points out vulnerability as a consequence of repression and vulnerability as a place from which create solidarity. Connecting the three of them in a different manner, another person could as well see repression as a situation which generates solidarity and vulnerability.

Finally, there is also the experience-opinion of a participant who sees repression as a situation from where anger emerges; this anger makes it possible to act from a vulnerable position despite the fear. This participant also sees vulnerability as a disadvantage which then leads to searching for solidarity.

The connections between vulnerability, solidarity and repression can be diverse, because diverse

are the vulnerabilities, the solidarity networks and the repressive systems, but also because location and time have an important influence in such diverse experiences. However, there seems to be a similar point of view among the participants of the workshop, one that I also share with them. Vulnerability, repression and solidarity can have to different sides, one that can empower and another one who can be prejudicial for individuals and for the collective. These two sides are not completely opposed to each other, situations are different, and both sides are interconnected. To be more specific, one can feel, understand or see vulnerability as a weakness, but as I have already elaborated, we, as beings, are all actually vulnerable. Moreover, through this project I am showing how the people who are more affected by certain vulnerabilities, when sharing it with others, can resist, survive and become empowered to build new life alternatives and struggle for them.

Regarding solidarity, an active solidarity which grows from a vulnerable situation, or from any kind of repression can be a way of facing life and surviving, creating a life based on support and care networks. However, when solidarity becomes a discourse, a practice separated from a real situation and a local empathy, it has the danger of taking a paternalistic connotation, and reproducing power discourses about the people (from the past or from the present) we want to show solidarity with. Furthermore, a discourse about solidarity with a certain population can imply the evasion of real solidarity and responsibilities with closer populations and situations. This could be the case of state ceremonies showing solidarity with dramatic situations in other states, without acknowledging their possible responsibilities selling weapons to such states or being part of an economic chain which exploits the people from the places with whom we want show solidarity with.

Finally, there are different kinds of repression can destroy lives, can change and break family and support networks, but it can also be a reason to react, to act in groups, to face such repression in common, creating support and care network for the people who has and is being repressed and their community. It can be a departure place for change, for change from the sphere of human relationships, in order to face oppressive structures in this and other spheres. Moreover, experiences of solidarity and support networks which grow from a repressive situation can be referent for other people.

In this chapter, I will focus on repression, a repression exercised directly by the repressive state forces such as the police, but also a repression which is daily reproduced by social discourses creating an ideal of normality and punishing those who do not follow, or want to follow, patters of normality and tools which grow from it, including solidarity networks.

## **4 2. REPRESSIONS**

When asking about repression in *the workshops* I organized, the participants of the group pointed out different words such as impotence, frustration, fear, rage, deprivation of freedom, social control, chains, bars, survival, violence, tool to depoliticize, insecurity, state and security-police forces, lack of choice, and boycott of projects. One of the participants describes repression as “sentir que cada vez tenemos que tener más cuidado con lo que hacemos y decimos. Sentir que nos toca de cerca, que no es

algo lejano, lo hemos vivido con lo de las capillas, lo del parlament, desalojos, juicios, multas...”/ *“feeling that more and more we need to be more careful with what we do and say. Feeling that it is somethings that closely touches us, not something far away. We have lived it with the things of the chapel (a feminist action in a chapel who become an constant media new and a legally repressed case), the parliament (another repressive case in which 19 people were judged and demanded 8 years of prison for being part of a protest around the catalan parliament due to the strong cuts taking place at the moment by the government), evictions, court cases, fees...”* (Juli 2013: First workshop). In the same line, another participant presents her understanding of repression as follows: “Miedo a la violencia, al dolor, a sentir que te puede pasar, a no poder defenderte. Es como de repente que no hay posibilidad, o como pasar de repente a otro estadio, a ser visto y juzgado previamente, a tener un veredicto antes de que te conozcan. No tener herramientas para defenderte” / *“Being scared of violence, of pain, of feeling that it could happen to you, of feeling that you cannot defend yourself. It is like if suddenly there is not option, like that you can move to another state, in which you can be seen and judged in advance, having a verdict before they know you. Not having tools to defend yourself”* (Haizea 2013: Second workshop). Repression can be a paralyzing force, a scary system which can affect us anytime due to the lives that we have chosen to have, or just by chance. However, as I have already articulated in the previous section, repression can also have another side, and there have been also participants who connected repression with opportunities, with imagination and creation.

When thinking about repression, I personally think about an imposition, a chain, but a limitation that does not necessarily have to come from the state. Due to our activism, we do face state repression with the police as protagonist, we do have to pay fees, to spend days in police stations, and in the worse cases in jail; we support people with court cases and see all the suffering that those processes bring; we see people being kicked out from their homes. However, we also see social rules and paths that we are supposed to follow, and the feeling of having to follow them without wanting to, or the punishment for a refusal to follow them, could also be seen as a way of repression.

A participant of the workshop when thinking about repression distinguishes three levels-spheres: the police-estate, “opresiones que sufrimos las personas no normativas en nuestra cotidianidad por la sociedad en general”/ *“oppressions that we, non-normative people, suffer in our daily life by society in general”*, and “policia interna. Barreras que nos ponemos a nosotras mismas”/ *“internal police. Barriers that we put to ourselves”* (Sara 2013: First workshop). Following this division, I present this part of the chapter in three sections: one related to state repression, a second one related to social repression to dissidence, and a third one related to the feelings of fear and anger. These feelings could be understood as individual barriers and auto-repressions; however, I do believe that there are also parts of a repression caused by social discourses.

#### **4 2 1. STATE REPRESSION**

The professors and human rights activists Carlos Martín Beristain and Francesc Riera have

compiled different experiences and testimonies from people affected by state repression in latin américa. As a result, they wrote a book called *Afirmación y resistencia. La comunidad como apoyo*(1992) which has been used in diverse locations and spheres in order to help support groups, and people in general to face repression collectively. Even though the experiences come from latin américa, they can be useful also if put into dialogue with other contexts. Furthermore, the book has been very important for me when thinking about repression and in trying to transform rage and impotence into action and support. Therefore, I will use it in this project when making reference to state repression and its causes and consequences, but also when engaging with the importance of collective support and the construction of different tools for resisting and surviving in repressive situations.

According to Martín Beristain and Riera (1992), there is a connection between modern democratic states and repression; there is an aim in our society to have a specific kind of citizen. A citizen who has to follow certain rules and who is punished and/or excluded in the case of a refusal to be part of the game. In her speech at the university of alcala, Judith Butler (2014) refers to political public mobilizations connected with vulnerability and she points out the dangers connected with the visibility of repression, arguing that all public assembly is haunted by the police and threatened by imprisonment. Connecting it with the previous idea about democracy and citizenship, which pointed out the state's aim to have a specific kind of citizens, Butler understands "political imprisonment and the institution of prison-industry as a global mechanism for the regulation of citizenship" (Butler 2014: video-conference). However, as important as taking repression – and its connection with democracy and citizenship – into account when doing activism (in any sphere), it is also crucial to be aware that repression does not only affect us individually, but also collectively. An individual can be directly punished by the state, but this will also affect her political affinity group, as well as her family and friends.

Similarly to the idea of collective agency already presented, Carlos and Francesc (1992) introduce the concept of "tejido social solidario" (*social solidarity network*): "siempre que se generan procesos de organización de la gente para hacer frente a sus necesidades como personas y como comunidades (para reivindicar un solar y poder poner la vivienda, organizarse para defender los Derechos Humanos, que un grupo de vecinas pida agua para todos, que un grupo étnico quiera que sus derechos como pueblo y personas se cumplan, etc.) se crea un tejido social solidario. Este tejido social solidario pone en cuestión el concepto de poder y exige también de la redistribución de la riqueza y la participación en la gestión política" / "anytime that organizational processes are created in order to face community an people's necessities (like a claiming for terrain in order to build a house, organizing to defend Human Rights, that a group of people ask for water for everyone, that an ethnic group wants its rights as people and individuals to be executed), a social solidarity network(I will refer to it in its original language – castellano : "tejido social solidario") is created. This "tejido social solidario" questions the concept of power and requires wealth redistribution and the participation in the political management" (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 26). From a vulnerable situation, with a specific aim, these solidarity networks are created and they are useful when confronting an injustice, but also when supporting each other in different situations.

The two authors engage with political repression, distinguishing four main impacts and objectives of such state-based repression. One of the aims of repression is to break the “tejido social solidario”; in this way, not only individual ideals – when those oppose the established power – would be broken, but also the collective processes and experiences: “para quebrar las convicciones contrarias de cada persona y lograr la individualización y la ruptura de la comunidad o el colectivo, el Poder no escatima en métodos”/ *“to break the contrary convictions of any person and achieve individualization and community rupture, the Power does not cut down on methods”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 26). In this way, the Power, which will be understood as a combination between social, economic and political oppressive powers, will have the aim of individualizing trying to break the social network.

Another aim of repression would be to control the internal enemy, the enemy that is inside society, insurgent groups and activists or suspects of being part of those groups. These collectives become presented by the state as dangerous for democracies and derogatorily described in media and other political propaganda from the Power in order to control them making the society being afraid and against them (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992).

The idea of state impunity is important when justifying, normalizing and/or making repression invisible. In this case, the authors argue that impunity implies “el convencimiento de que nada ni nadie podrá torcer el desarrollo de los acontecimientos fijados por el Poder y que nada ni nadie pedirá cuentas por tantos delitos y violaciones. Y en consecuencia el convencimiento de que el poder ejerce un control total y que a la gente no le queda otra cosa que adaptarse y colaborar para sobrevivir”/ *“the conviction that nobody and nothing would change the developing of the events fixed by the Power and the conviction that nothing or anybody would ask for responsibilities regarding so many crimes and violations. And as a consequence, the conviction that the Power executes a total control and people do not have other option rather than adapt themselves and collaborate in order to survive”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 28). Impunity implies a dilution of responsibilities when justifying accusations of repression and tortures, but also the implantation of a feeling of not being able to decide our own lives. This will be part of a kind of psychological repression which affects individuals and collectives. A kind of repression which needs a collective response.

Finally, political repression will aim at transforming the population in complicit of such repression, in a collaborative society: “la guerra psicológica que conlleva la represión política supone la introducción de un lenguaje, de una forma de vivir, de una manera de pensar orientadas a que la gente acepte las situaciones” / *“the psychological war that implies political repression implies the introduction of a kind of language, a way of living, a way of thinking focused on people’s acceptance of the situation”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 29). Different ideas and ideologies are reproduced in the media, passing on a discourse of fear or other discourses which want to make the population complicit with state repression. This complicity is searched by the state arguing for the necessity to collaborate with social safety, and messages which exclude this mobilized people from a socially valuable category of citizenship.

In sum, the authors of *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992) present the intentional and political aim in

repression, with the purposes of breaking the social solidarity networks with a psychological repression. This repression comes together with the feeling of an impune state that needs good citizens in order to be safe tries to intimidate the population and to make people complicit of its rules.

The idea and practices of repression presented by the authors are based on experiences in latin américa, however, their model is very useful also to understand how repression works in the spanish state, that is my context and the workshop participants' context.

We, as feminist and transfeminist activists deal with a repression that is supported by media with fear and discourses of exclusion-inclusion and citizenship, but also with its invisibilization due to the impunity of the state – and in our case also due to the impunity created with the european union. We are surrounded by many experiences of repression which have been denounced, and which have damage people and communities. One of the workshop participants shared her experience with state repression, the fear felt when thinking that she was alone, and the relief when having her feminist companions again around and supporting her.

One morning, without knowing the reason why, this participant was arrested by police officers at the door of her house, she was taken to the police station and kept there for two days. There were 19 detentions on the same day, but she was inside the police station alone, without knowing it, without knowing what was going on until her lawyer came. They were accused of having taken part to a non-allowed demonstration at the university against the new study plan which has crazily raised the tuition fees among other disadvantages. The participant relates her experiences when leaving the police station after two days of isolation: “no sabía nada de lo que estaba pasando fuera, pero parece que había mucho apoyo... (...) Cuando yo salí estaba de subidón, y luego era como... “pero que está pasando aquí!”, había mazo de gente y una línea de maderos, y flashes y como que el subidón inmediatamente se transformó en rabia...también por lo que había pasado la noche anterior en comisaria, y en vulnerabilidad, de pensar que podría estar todavía ahí metida, como que también el abogado me había dicho que estaban pasando muchas cosas fuera, que mis compas estaban a tope, pues esa vulnerabilidad enseguida se convirtió en “podemos con esto”, o sea, como que somos un montón de gente, que no estás sola cuando te pasa algo así y eso...que sale la rabia, pero también sale el amor absoluto y la fuerza que te da saber que pasa algo , que detienen a 19 personas, y que se moviliza un montón de gente”/ *“ I did not know anything about what was happening outside, it seems that there was a lot of support...(...). When I left I was high, and then it was like “what is going on here?”, there was a lot of people and a line of cops, and flashes, and like the feeling of high immediately turned into rage, also due to what happened in the police station the previous night, and into vulnerability. Vulnerability because of thinking that I could be still inside that place. Like the lawyer told me that there were many things going out outside, that my friends were giving it all, therefore that vulnerability soon turned into “we can do it!” , like, we are a bunch of people, that we are not alone when something like this happens to you, and this...that you get anger, but also the most absolute love and the strength of knowing that something happens, that they arrest 19 people, and that many people are then mobilized”* (Sara 2013: First workshop). This experience, can be an example of how repression works in our context, in our feminist- transfeminist activist sphere, an example of the



impunity of a state which can go to your own house months after a demonstration or a street action, and kidnap you from your life as much as they want, putting also into practice a psychological repression when not giving explanations, and isolating a person for days. However, with this experience, it is also highlighted the double side of repression: how with a collective support group, one can have access to specific lawyers – that are mostly friends or at least activist with a political affinity – and specially, a group which will be there, which has also suffered the repression from outside, and which will make possible the transformation of anger and vulnerability in strength and collective reaffirmation of certain ideals.

In the next part of this chapter, I will focus on the repression exercised against dissident groups by social discourses and practices; afterwards I will come back to this experience, its consequences and how other participants who were there also experienced it.

## **4 2 2. SOCIAL REPRESSION TO DISSIDENCE**

Butler (2014) refers to vulnerability as something that we have and we are consciously exposed to, but also unconsciously, as something previous to our existence which will affect us anyways. She exemplifies it with gender norms, being this also an illustration of a way of repression in which the protagonist are not the security forces of the state and the police, but society itself, the educational, cultural and economic system.

Butler (2009) argues that there are different social norms which will build the subject, which will determine the possibilities of everybody. In this sense, the author presents the idea that there is no life without taking into account a broader frame. Furthermore, different levels of vulnerability are social constructed and dependent of those frames. However, since we are vulnerable to certain discourses, we do also have possibilities to create and resist with new and/or different ones. In her book “Bodies that Matter” (1993) Butler engages with the materiality of the body, with how due to certain social norms and discourses previous to the body’s existence, this body is shaped and materialized. There are power relationships that influence the materiality of bodies, of subjects, but there are also the possibilities of creating different discourses which will have an effect of bodies’ materialization.

Bringing into the discussion the discursive and material ways in which power is exercised and social norms are created, following Foucault (1975) and de Lauretis (1988), Rosi Braidotti argues that “the adquisition of subjectivity is a process of material (institutional) and discursive (symbolic) practices” (Braidotti 1984: 148). Furthermore, she points out the relationship between knowledge and power relations, and how they interact at that symbolic and material level.

That certain social norms affect us implies that we are susceptible to – among others – gender norms; we also have the possibility to create different discourses about it, but we are vulnerable to these norms from the start. In this way, Butler argues that “norms (gender norms) both require and institute certain forms of corporeal vulnerability without which their operation would not be thinkable. That is why we can and do describe the powerful citational force of gender norms as they are instituted and

applied by medical, legal and psychiatric institutions”(Butler 2014). Discourse is necessary when reproducing and creating gender norms, but these discourses have an impact in institutions which put into practice such discourses and materialize them, in this way, the discursive and material spheres would be interconnected having an effect on each other. However, since discourse and performativity create and reproduce a certain reality, they could be also tools to create an alternative. Not following certain gender rules can turn into discrimination, punishment and exclusion but in a discursive aspect and in a material one, but structures and oppression are socially constructed, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, alternatives can also be constructed. Butler present the condition of being susceptible to social rules also as a place from which create resistances, in this case a queer resistance to normative gender discourses: “Although gender norms precede us and act upon us, that is one sense of their enactment, we are obligated to reproduce them and that is the second sense of their enactment precisely because something unexpected can happen in this realm of “being affected”, we find forms of gender that break with mechanical patterns of repetition, deviating from, resignifying, and sometimes quite emphatically breaking those citational chains of gender normativity, making room for new forms of gendered life” (Butler 2014). As Butler points out, we can break those gender norms despite of the repression system which sustain them. Sharing experiences, having referents and being able to give words and make visible other ways of understanding gender and sexuality are the main tools to resist and to struggle.

As well as with the example of gender norms, a participant for *the workshops* presents repression connected to socially constructed discourses and norms. In this way, she understands repression as: “no poder elegir, que tus decisiones sean continuamente atacadas. Que tus proyectos sean boicoteados” / “*not being able to make a choice, that your choices become constantly attacked. That a boycott is done to your projects*”(Eco 2013.Second workshop). This definition, illustrates another understanding of repression – shared with Butler’s example of gender norms –, which is not the violence of the repressive state forces, but that it is part of society as a whole. In this sense, in the population itself who reproduce and repress with daily comments and attitudes, creating understandings of gender norms – in this case – which will be reproduced in the media, and which will become material through institutions such as hospitals, schools, shelters, psychiatrics, etc...

There is a very fine line, if there is even a clear division, between the repression which comes from social discourses and practices and a kind of individual repression, a kind of internal police. State repression, social discourses and the repression that we do to ourselves are interconnected; there are different spheres and parts of the same system. In *Discipline and Punish* (1978), Foucault engages with the different methods in which discourse and social norms and institutions exercise a power that materializes in bodies. He argues that through a discipline exercised from schools, hospitals and other state institutions – in the form of discourses and social norms –, bodies are shaped. He distinguish methods such as timetables – which establishes rhythms and regulates activities (Foucault 1987: 149) –, and the organization in ranks, cells, places also as a way in which “the disciplines create complex spaces that are at one architectural, functional and hierarchical” (Foucault 1978: 148). In this sense, Foucault is presenting a way in which with a repression connected to repetitive practices and discourses, bodies are

affected and organizes in society. Not following social norms – based on an efficient, individualist and capitalist model – will mean punish and exclusion. This disciplines and punishes will be part of what Foucault (1976) name bio-power, a power that would mean the extension of a repressive power from the state to the physical and political bodies of the population. In this way, the main place in which power is exercise would be in the life. Power is now exercised over life, and is exercised either to foster life or to disallow it.

This idea of bio-power and discipline takes shape in social norms and discourses. In this way, connected to my experience, I believe that there are social norms and rules imposed since we are little in schools, tv and houses. These norms influence and create our own behaviors and ideas, in this way, when we repress ourselves in a private sphere, when we feel bad, lonely, guilty or scared; we are just feeling a repression from social norms that are punishing us for a non-normal behavior.

In this last part I will engage with a kind of repression which affects individual emotional states, but also collective ones. Fear and anger would be two examples of feelings that in certain situations would be connected with repression.

#### **4 2.3. FEAR, ANGER AND EMOTIONAL REPRESSION**

As it was pointed out in the workshop, one of the consequences of repression can be fear, a fear that can be shared with others, but that it is something that comes with us, and influence our daily routines and lives. Not knowing what is going to happened with you in a police stations, or what will happened with your friend who has a court case, or the fear of running followed by the police in horses in the middle of a demo, the fear of not knowing, or of knowing that any repressive situation could be possible, the fear of walking alone in the street, the fear of going to school or to the hospital being a dissident person, the fear of explaining who you are ...And any other fears that appeared as a way of repression, as a protection for knowing the reality, the practical and discursiveness repressions in our societies.

Regarding this topic, one of *the workshops'* participants explains her experience with fear, vulnerability and feminism: “recuerdo cuando el feminismo entro en mi vida, por ejemplo yo no tenía miedo, yo no tenía miedo de ir por la noche sola y de repente, cuando empecé a ser consciente de mi lugar, de donde la sociedad me colocaba, de alguna manera empecé a nombrarlo, y me empezó a dar miedo volver a casa”/ *“I remember when feminism arrived to my live, for example I was not afraid. I was not afraid of walking alone at night, and suddenly, when I started to be aware of my own place, the place in which society located me, in some way I started to name it and I became scared of coming back home alone”*(Carla 2013: First workshop). With this experience, the participant points out how being aware of a situation, of a conflict, makes you more vulnerable and create fear.

Even though fear is a feeling that can appear in different situations to anyone, I will focus in the kind of fear which will grow from repression. Since I wanted to focus on feminist-transfeminist activist, I gave the example of one of the participants who was presenting the fear that comes from a kind of social-

cultural-ideological repression called sexism. In the case of the previous example about the person who was arrested for two days, the kind of fear that she points out is caused by the repressive forces of the state, but it is also connected with the fear of not having enough information, not knowing for how long the situation is going to last, etc...

However, from feeling fear and therefore vulnerability, different possibilities, alternatives, support and care networks can also be created. In this way, the participant who explains her fear of walking alone in the street will also argue that for her it is important to take and use that fear: “ser consciente y transformarlo, asumir la vulnerabilidad y coger las herramientas necesarias para empoderarte y construirte a ti misma, a partir del miedo, hacer un proceso de empoderamiento al autodefinirte” / *“Be aware and transform it, assume vulnerability and take the necessary tools to empower yourself and build yourself, to make an empowering process in order to define yourself from the feeling of fear”* (Carla). Furthermore, two participants of the workshop who were part of the support group of the person who was arrested, argue that from that situation, from that fear, from that rage, they started to gather together, the group became stronger and they started to look together for anti-repressive strategies based on support and empathy (Juli and Su 2013: First workshop)

In the book *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992), the authors point out the positive consequences that confronting fear in community can have, they also present the importance of being aware of fear, recognizing it in order to struggle against it. They write: “en general, cuanto más clara sea la amenaza, más posibilidades habrá de situarla y hacerle frente” / *“in general, the clearer is the threat, the chances of situate and face it would be higher”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 69). In this sense, being aware of the fear and it causes gives the possibility of developing more tools in order to face it.

The authors present fear as a possible defense mechanism: “el miedo hace reflexionar a la persona y conocer cuando debe retirarse, conocer cuando se puede avanzar, avisar cuando se puede hacer una cosa, cuando no...De lo contrario, si no existiera el miedo, la lucha desde hace mucho tiempo se habría perdido” / *“Fear makes the person reflect and know when to move away, know when it is possible to go further, to warn about when it is possible to do or do not do a thing...On the contrary, if fear did not exist, the fight would have been lost long time ago”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 71). Accordingly they propose “fear” as something to protect ourselves and know our own limits, but they also give some advice to be able to overcome in group certain fear, in order to relieve a certain person or just in order to be able to keep on with one’s life and struggle. They recommend putting in common experiences of fear, to share them in order to break them down. However, the fears would first need to be recognized, analyzed and then socialized to get over and learn from them.

In a compilation of text by Audre Lorde named *“Sister Outsider”* (1984), there is a writing in which she argues for the importance of speaking as a Black lesbian poet. She presents the importance of breaking the silence of overcoming the fear of speaking. In this way, Audre approaches “fear” as a strength: recognizing its existence, we can struggle against it and create empathy and support networks, in this way: “We can learn to talk and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired” (Lorde 1984: 44). Accordingly, the author argues for the importance of

breaking the fear to communicate, because in this way, differences among women – in this case Black women – can be approached from a different position, resulting in alliances.

Even though I will come back to the importance of communication and breaking the silences in the next part of this chapter, I would like to engage, together with Audre Lorde, with another feeling: anger; which is also related to repression. Anger appears in different moments and ways, but in this project I will focus on anger as the feeling of having to follow a path and that not doing it will imply a punishment which will make anger grow. These are for example, moments and feelings of anger when observing a world made of interest and oppression that affects us directly, but also makes us responsible for them. However, I would also like to present anger as a place from where share and create with others an alternative, a vulnerable position with a strong potential for action.

Audre defines anger as “a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful” (Lorde 1984: 152) in contrast to hate, which would be “an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will. Anger, used, does not destroy. Hatred does” (Lorde 1984: 152). In this way, the author sees a potential in anger, and focusing on the importance of this feeling for Black women’s alliances, together with the importance of overcoming the fear and breaking the silence, she argues that “the angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth” (Lorde 1984: 131). In this sense, the empowering possibilities of anger through sharing and communication processes are presented by the author.

However, Lorde arguing that “Yet anger, like guilt, is an incomplete form of human knowledge. More useful than hatred, but still limited. Anger is useful to help clarify our differences, but in the long run, strength that is bred by anger alone is a blind force which cannot create the future” (Lorde 1984: 152), highlights that the transformative force that can grow from anger will be a departure point, but not a state in which to live in.

This understanding of anger can be connected with the situations lived by the participants of *the workshops*. In the first place, a close relation with injustices and fear has been used by all of us to gather together, to want to be part of feminist and transfeminist collectives and political projects. Furthermore, in specific situations of repression (by social-cultural-ideological norms in our daily lives but also by the police and the judicial system), anger is something that has appeared, individually and collective. Due to such anger, the group cohesion has become stronger, solidarity, care and support network have grown, and a feeling of collective empowerment when sharing such anger has been present.

In this part of the chapter I have presented different ways in which various and interconnected levels of repression influence our own vulnerabilities and lives. I have briefly proposed ways in which repression can as well be a departure point for resistance, the creation of solidarity and support networks, but also an opportunity to face fear and anger collectively. In the next part instead, I will focus on strategies that, from a collective agency, deal with the vulnerabilities that repression brings.

### **4.3. EMPOWERING TOOLS: BREAKING THE SILENCE AND THE COLLECTIVE.**

As it has been already pointed out, communication, breaking silences in order to create alliances and a collective response and support networks, it is our main strength and weapon against repression (Lorde (1984) and Martín Beristain and Riera (1992)).

In this processes of facing any kind of repression that affects political collectives and projects, the group and communications networks become very important. Audre Lorde (1984) argues for the necessity of breaking the silences among Black women in order to create alliances and support each other. This subject of struggle can be an example of a shared vulnerability at a certain level, being alliances and mutual support necessary to survive. However, we can also be inspired and have as a referent what Lorde argues regarding Black women for other socially repressed groups and collectivities. She argues for the necessity of communication and support as a tool for empowerment: “For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered” (Lorde 1984: 111). In this way, she argues for the use of what it could be socially understood as a vulnerability, the necessity of share and depend on others, as an empowerment resistance tool. Furthermore, the author argues that from this sharing experiences and creating references, we can create an alternative of live, and we are using and creating our own tools, from our common vulnerabilities and necessities.

Regarding the importance of collective support, the authors of *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992) engage with the importance of collective support when doing activism, when being part of a political collective, because the individual problems that can appear due to repression, are actually collective ones and therefore will be solved collectively. Regarding the overcoming of the fear caused by repression and the recuperation of one’s live and confidence after a traumatic situation (due to repression), they will argue that “es importante que se puedan entender los problemas como resultado de la represión política y no como problemas individuales o privados. Solo desde este sentido social se puede ir restableciendo la capacidad de confiar”/ “it is important that problems can be understood as the result of political repression and not as individual or private problems. Only from this social understanding it is possible to re-establish the capacity of trust” (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 174). In this sense, having a collective support from a group with common ideals and ways of understanding and experiencing the life, it is very important to face and survive repression.

Carlos and Francesc (1992) point out the idea of understanding help and support as a horizontal way of care and solidarity based on direct communication: “no entendemos la ayuda como una relación paternalista, sino como ayuda a la toma de conciencia y apoyo emocional, material y social recíproco. La herramienta necesaria para poder llevar adelante el proceso de ayuda es una buena comunicación”/ “we do not understand support or help as a paternalistic relationship, but as a help when being aware and a social, emotional and material reciprocal support. The necessary tool to carry on with the support process is a good communication” (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 173). Thus, they reinforce the idea

already presented in the second chapter about the danger of understanding vulnerability as a weakness that needs a paternalistic support, instead, it will be necessary to understand communication and support and the base for subsistence and giving and receiving it in an horizontal way, recognizing our limitations and necessities without relating to each other from a power position. Moreover, I find also important to highlight the importance of emotional but also material and social reciprocal support that that authors mentioned. These three kinds of support are interconnected as the oppressive structures and ways of repression are. Repression has consequences in different parts of our lives and it is important that the mutual support can take action in all of those spheres.

Regarding the importance of sharing experiences, the case of state repression pointed out in the previous part by one of the participant of *the workshops* can illustrate the impact of anger and fear when making a group stronger. She mentions how what is now a feminist-transfeminist group of friends and activist was a group of people who had just meet with a common interest. In this sense, that facing together different oppressions and situations have made them stronger as a group. Specially the moment of doing a support group for the one arrested, was very important in this process of cohesion and the creation of stronger solidarity, support, affect and care networks. In the same line, pointing out the possibilities that anger can bring when creating and making stronger a collective agency, Audre Lorde (1984) will argue that “When there is no connection at all between people, then anger is a way of bringing them closer, together, of making contact”(Lorde 1984: 168).

Fear has been presented in the previous section as a possible place from which create and resist. One of the participants presented her experience in which being able to recognize a fear and sharing it lead her to the possibility to develop tools and networks to face it. Furthermore, another participant will argue that “cuando por fin le pones nombre a algo, eres consciente de algo, entonces puedes hacer algo” / “when you finally name something, you are aware of something, in that very moment you can do something” (Sara 2013: First workshop). Thus, being able to break the silence, to name, to be aware and make visible or express vulnerability, a fear a problem, would be an important tool for resistance.

However, sometimes is not enough only with verbalizing a vulnerability. Looking for its meaning, contextualizing it and sharing with other people can position the vulnerability in a place from which we can learn and find solutions. In *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992), the authors point out the importance of sharing experiences of repression, but also the necessity of a collective reflection and support about them which makes possible the placement and reintegration of such experiences in the individual and group. They will argue for “no solo expresar, pero encontrar un sentido a lo vivido” / “not only express, but find a sense to what has been lived” (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 157). In this way, they propose to open an space for the emotional relive, create a confidence relationship facing an individual harm, but also understand and transform the situation: “reconocer los cambios que se han producido y ayudar a replantearse la vida, las relaciones con los otros y el compromiso social” / “recognizing the changes that have occurred, and help to reformulate the life, the relationships with others and the social commitment” (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 158).

In this part of the chapter I have presented some of the tools that are created from vulnerabilities

and repression, in order to survive and face oppression from an activist experience. The importance of the group, of having horizontal relations of care and support has been pointed out, as well as the process of breaking the silence and communication. I have shown how important it is to share but also to analyze the fears and vulnerabilities in order to place them and create from them, collectively, different strategies and ways of living. Experiences and referents become very important because the Power – social, economical and political oppressive practices and discourses of normality – wants us lonely, isolated and individualized; but learning to resist and live from our own vulnerabilities is possible in common, horizontally and with emotional, material and social support.

#### **4.4. ACTIVE SOLIDARITY NETWORKS.**

In the whole thesis, I have been referring to the importance of solidarity and solidarity networks as a tool to face repression, as a tool to create alternatives of lives in common, as a tool created from diverse vulnerabilities and alliances, as a tool to survive.

When asking about vulnerability in the workshop, different feelings, practices and associations came to the minds of the participants: empathy, networks, mutual support, strength, autonomy, self-sufficiency, projects' support, energy for change, basic for co-habitation, feeling accompanied and understood by others, home, share, give and receive, care, unity among equals, struggle, etc...

Furthermore, another participant connects solidarity with a creative and easier way to survive: “a mi se me viene a la cabeza momentos donde buscas soluciones, ideas para hacer las cosas de otra manera, para ver el lado facil de la vida” / *“it comes to my mind moments in which you look for solutions, ideas to make things differently, to see the easy side of life”* (Haizea 2013.Second workshop). In this way, there is already a general understanding of solidarity as an important process, a motor for change, and a way of making our daily lives easier.

It is important to clarify that, in this thesis, I want to approach solidarity as an horizontal, reciprocal and careful process, and in this way, I think it is important to include in this understanding the idea of one of the participants of the workshop who argued that solidarity is “ceder tu comodidad, renunciar a privilegios en relación con lxs otrxs”/ *“to yield your comfort, to renounce to privileges regarding others”* (Seño 2013.First workshop). Moreover, taking solidarity as something prolonged in time rather than a specific moment, I would also like to point out the possibility of solidarity as a way of life. Following this line, another participant present solidarity as: “atreverse a vivir en colectivo. Tiene que ser elegida y consciente para que funcione. Colectivizar tus posibilidades y tu amor. Estar cerca de tu gente elegida y aprender a sacar de los conflictos herramientas” / *“to dare to live in community. It has to be a conscientious choice for it to work. Make collective your possibilities and your love. To be close to your chosen people and learn how to get tools from conflicts”* (Eco 2013.Second workshop). In this way she approaches vulnerability as a conscious choice, as a way of living collectively. However, due to her activist context, she also points out the kind of solidarity that the feminist-transfeminist movement tries



to put into a practice: “la solidaridad también es que ese grupo elegido sea capaz de responder, de empatizar y crear lazos fuera del grupo de afinidad”/ *“solidarity also is that the chosen group would be able to respond, to empathize and create networks outside the affinity group”* (Eco 2013. Second workshop). In this way, Eco highlights the importance of a kind of solidarity that goes further than specific projects and actions

As it has been already pointed out in the previous part, when dealing with any kind of political repression, it is important to have a collective response because “las experiencias de represión política afectan a la persona en cuanto miembro de un grupo, de una lucha, de una comunidad; por tanto, la acción de ayuda también debe ser grupal y comunitaria”/ *“the experiences of political repression influences the person as a group, struggle and community member, therefore, the action of supporting should also be collective and communitary”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 191). An easy and more effective response to repression is searched in order to keep on with a political struggle and in some occasions, in order to survive. In this way, the importance of collective power created by solidarity network is pointed out by Carlos y Francesc (1992): *“la suma de fuerzas individuales y el poder de acción creado por el grupo suponen una mayor capacidad de intervención sobre los propios problemas del grupo y sobre la sociedad” / “the sum of individual forces and the action power created for the group imply a stronger capacity of intervention on group problems and society”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 198). As it was already pointed out with the idea of a chosen collective agency in order to make easier life and decisions, Martín Beristain and Riera (1992), do also highlight the relevance of group strategies in order to have a stronger impact, in order to create more tools and in order to reach more social spheres.

The experience of one of *the workshops*’ participant can illustrate the importance of collective support and solidarity networks when a repressive case takes place: “A un amigo mio le detuvieron y estuvo un mes en la carcel y estuvo 6 meses entre juicios, preventiva, y todas estas historias, y no era aqui, era en otro país, y eso era más difícil porque normalmente tu red de apoyo y afecto está más dónde has crecido, donde has vivido más tiempo. (...) Y descubrir que eres vulnerable, que pasas a un segundo lugar donde incluso la gente te pregunta, y te cuestiona sobre una persona que tú conoces y tienes que defender...Que te pueden detener por cualquier cosa y de repente cambia tu vida, pero también como se crean una serie de herramientas para intentar acompañar esos momentos e intentar pensar cómo salir de esas situación. Y al final salió...Hubo un montón de gente y millones de cosas que no se te ocurren sola, pero que gracias a compartirlo y crear ciertas solidaridades con más personas, pues de repente como que habia mucha gente, como una tela de araña que tenía muchas partes y cada cual aportaba lo que podía y dependía de tu grado de cercanía, pues compartías unas cosas u otras”/ *“A friend of mine was arrested and he was a month in jail, he spend 6 months In court cases, the preventive prison, and all those things, and it was not here, it was in another country, and that was more difficult because usually your support and affect network is where you have grow, where you have lived longer. (...) And discovering that you are vulnerable, that you move to a secondary place where you are even asked by people, and questioned about a person that you even need to defend...That you can be arrested due to anything and suddenly*

*your live changes, but also many tools are created in order to try to go along with the person in such moments and try how to get over that situation. And he finally got over it...there were a million of persons, like a cobweb that had lots of parts, and each person contribute with what she could, and depending on your degree of closeness, you would share some things or other things”* (Haizea 2013: Second workshop). With this experience, she will illustrate the feeling of vulnerability created by an institutional repression, which will not only affect the individual but also the people around. In this way the response needs to be collective, and to overcome such a difficult situation, a solidarity network was needed. She also highlight the possibility of creating resistance tools from a repressive situations is also presented. Finally, creating a support network is not only important in order to have a space in which feelings and emotions can be shared, but also as a way of sharing care responsibilities. Furthermore, working on different sphere and issues becomes also relevant when having political aims.

Following with the importance of doing a support in different spheres that has been illustrated with the previous example, regarding solidarity; the authors of *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992) argue that: “solidaridad quiere decir también apoyo emocional para construir unas relaciones de ayuda y aprendizaje mutuas. Pero la solidaridad no sólo es un espacio para dentro del grupo, sino que implica al grupo en su tarea social: ayudar a resolver los problemas, a emprender soluciones para liberarse de la impotencia política que la represión pretende imponer” / “*solidarity does also means emotional support in order to build mutual support and learning relationships. But solidarity is not only a space for inside the group, it rather implicates the group in its social task: helping to solve problems, to start solutions to get rid of the political impotence that repression tries to impose”* (Martín Beristain and Riera 1992: 195). In this sense, with their horizontal understanding of support and solidarity they emphasize the constructive, practical and social part of solidarity, necessary to face repression

The kind of solidarity and support networks proposed in *Afirmación y Resistencia* (1992) can be an inspiration for different political groups and collectives who deal with repression in any of its shapes. I have been presenting in this project a kind of feminist-transfeminist movements and projects that have grown from sharing vulnerabilities and ideals, in which solidarity and support networks become the base for public and private political action. In this way, I can see strong connection among feminisms and horizontal understanding of solidarity not only to face injustices and do concrete actions, but as a choice from which to relate to each other and build live alternatives.

Following this same line of argument line, Judith Butler (2014) makes a connection between solidarity networks, women’s movements and feminisms. She presents the importance of women in supporting prisoners: “prisoners solidarity networks are among the most important grass-roots movements, and in places like Turkey, Chile, Argentina, Serbia and Palestine, women are at the forefront of those struggles” (Butler 2014). Moreover, she points out the importance of feminism in those kind of anti-repressive struggles: “Feminism is a crucial part of these networks of solidarity and resistance precisely because feminism critique destabilizes those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice, and it criticizes those institutions and practices that inflict violence on women and gender minorities, and, in fact, all minorities subjected to police power for sharing up and speaking

up as they do”(Butler 2014). In this way, the importance of feminisms is highlight when dealing with repression and support networks, and even though feminisms can learn from other political movements and struggles, their example when being collectives and projects in which care, empathy and solidarity are the base not only of their actions but of their daily lives and basic ways to relate with each other, can be an important referent for facing repression and creating a collective, horizontal and aware way of activisms in different spheres.

In this chapter I presented different modes of repression and their interconnections, but also, and importantly, different ways of facing and reacting to it from political activist experiences. The importance of taking collective responsibility for repression and the creation of solidarity, support and care networks has been pointed out, as well as the relevance of voicing, sharing, being aware and share fears, rage and vulnerabilities in order to create collective alternatives. Even though I have been using referents and ideas from different authors, I have tried to connect it with more specific and direct examples from the participants of the workshop.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to present an empowering vision of vulnerability, an understanding of vulnerability as a place for collective action and sharing process, as a place from which to do a political resistance to repression, as a place from where alliances but also solidarity, support and care networks can grow. In conclusion, I have discussed vulnerability as a place for collective creation, a place from where an alternative reality is created and put into practice to oppose and face different kinds of repression and oppression.

Different authors and theories have been used and combined in this thesis. They have complemented each other and also the experiences from the participants of the workshop. Even though they come from different backgrounds, the combination of the spanish authors Amaia Orozco and Silvia Lopez Gil but Judith Butler shows the international relevance of the topic, the similarities when approaching vulnerability and the possibilities that come from it that the three authors point out. It is also remarkable how through the combination of Scott, Stryker and Valentine's ideas, an alternative for an individual ideal of agency has been contested. Finally, I would also like to highlight the importance of engaging with of Foucault and Butler's ideas about repression connecting them with the experiences from latin américa brought by Martín Beristain and Riera. Even though the all come from different backgrounds, their different approach to repression – together with the participants' experiences – complements each other.

I engaged with vulnerability in a specific place and context. Even though I used specific authors from other locations who have inspired me – but also in order to give the required academic consistence to my (and the participants of the workshops) arguments – in this thesis I have given the most space to voices from parts of the current feminist and transfeminist activist sphere of madrid. These parts of the feminist and transfeminist projects and activist groups have been presented through the different experiences and ideas of the people who participated to *the workshops* that I have organized, as well as from other activists and theorists. In this sense, I have approached vulnerability from within this activist sphere and points of view. I have engaged with the political possibilities entailed in an understanding of vulnerability as an inherent characteristic to human life. This is an approach that also recognizes the socially constructed part of vulnerability, which makes some subjects more vulnerable than others through social discourses of citizenship, productivity, racism, sexism, ableism, etc.

Through the experiences of the participants to *the workshops*, I have explained the importance of feminist and transfeminist struggles – which position care and solidarity at the center of their personal and public political projects –, for giving an empowering connotation to vulnerability, and as examples of how, from these shared vulnerabilities, changes and creation of alternatives become possible.

In my methodology the experiences of the participants of *the workshops* were a way of bringing down the earth ideas and practices presented by other scholars and authors. Since, as a political choice, I have decided to write about a topic related to my own life, context and activism, it was important for me to create a knowledge that could bring the reader and the issue closer in an easy way. I believe in a

knowledge production that can be useful, useful for the people who participates in the creation of that knowledge, and for the people who breaks the silence with their shared opinions and voices. However, I find it also important that this knowledge can be useful for people who can learn about and be inspired by it, and who can find referents in these experiences and knowledges.

I believe – based on my personal and shared experience – that in the academia there is a lack of knowledge produced and spread which comes from daily experiences and activism. Therefore, in this thesis I have tried to present a practical knowledge as an inspiration from where the reader can reflect on her own experiences and context. At the same time, with this topic I want to claim for the importance of such a practical and experience-based knowledge. Voices narrating about their own experiences are many times silenced or appropriated by others in academia due the in-accessibility to such sphere by many. In this sense, I chose to put the participants' experiences in the centre, as a way of doing justice to these activist voices which create and fight for feminist and transfeminist issues daily, and which are inspirations for many authors and theorist connected with the topic. However, I do not intend to universalize the experiences and examples here presented, or to present a homogeneous image of the feminist and transfeminist sphere in madrid through the stories and ideas from the participants of *the workshops*.

In this thesis I have presented a specific understanding of vulnerability connected with the feminist-transfeminist sphere, and I have highlighted different important aspects that give strength and political empowering connotation to such vulnerability. One important tool to understand vulnerability as a political weapon is the idea of collective agency. I have presented the possibility of having a kind of collective agency created when sharing vulnerabilities and in opposition to an individualistic and capitalist understanding of agency which does not take into account interdependency. Together with different authors and the experiences brought up in *the workshop*, I have shown how this collective agency is part of the feminist and transfeminist way of doing politics, giving the possibility for political action from the creation of support, solidarity and care networks. Furthermore, from shared vulnerabilities that turn into a collective agency, it is important to have a horizontal approach to other vulnerable groups. In this sense, respecting and recognizing others' vulnerabilities allows us to empathize with different groups – that due to their vulnerabilities focus their political action in a certain struggle. It is then from these horizontal positions of empathy and respect that sharing vulnerability can turn into empowerment. There are different vulnerabilities and from a shared position, it would be easier to create alliances and face oppressions which are actually interconnected.

I have presented an interconnection among vulnerabilities, solidarity and repression, which relate to each other differently depending on each situation and experience. Being for example repression a way of making people vulnerable, and vulnerability a place from which to create solidarity networks. Even though I have tried to present different experiences that come from an empowering understanding of vulnerability, the last chapter had the aim of being an important example of it. I find very important to present different ways of repression (state and police repression, social discourses and practices which repress dissidence, and internal repressions very connected with the social ones). In this way, through

different experiences and examples I have tried to illustrate the resistances made to those repressions. Sharing, communicating, caring for each other, and an understanding of repression as something which affects a collective, not only the individual repressed, and that therefore needs a collective response, are part of these strategies for resistance, as well as the creation – from a vulnerable position – of care, support and solidarity networks.

Finally, I would like to conclude arguing that in this thesis I have tried to present a positive, inspiring and empowering understanding of vulnerability. Together with friends and inspiring authors I have tried, not only to bring a hope, but realities, specific examples and practices that are real, that are taking place currently in our lives as feminist and transfeminist activist. I found it a challenge to bring it to an academic sphere, a contradictory process, but I did my best. I hope that people keep on trying to bring experiences and daily struggles into different spheres in order to create referents, to inspire other people, and to connect theories and authors to daily realities. As far as I am concerned, I will keep creating and struggling in different self-organized projects, in common with friends and allies, and making from solidarity, support and care networks, the base of our surveillance and personal and public politics.

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