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To cite this article: Gundula Ludwig (2018) Post-democracy and gender: new paradoxes and old tensions, Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory, 19:1, 28-46, DOI: 10.1080/1600910X.2018.1461669

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2018.1461669

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Published online: 24 Apr 2018.

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Post-democracy and gender: new paradoxes and old tensions

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ABSTRACT
Colin Crouch’s notion of ‘post-democracy’ has become a key notion for describing the current stage of democracy in western societies. Crouch argues that although modern democracies still maintain the facade of formal democratic principles, politics are increasingly shaped by political actors who lack any democratic legitimization. Taking up Crouch’s notion of post-democracy as a useful concept for describing contemporary democracies, the paper aims to reveal the gendered impacts of post-democracy. The paper aims to prove that a feminist perspective broadens the scope of the critique of the current stage of democracy in western societies. The first part counters Crouch’s argument that post-democracy needs to be conceptualized as decline from a formerly more democratic and inclusive form of democracy. Rather, from a feminist perspective also prior to the stage of post-democracy democracy was highly exclusive. This is highlighted along three dimensions – the construction of the political subject, the demos and the political. The second part highlights that post-democracy prolongs gendered exclusions and reconfigures the relationship between the political and the social. Taking up the three dimensions of the first part, the second part explores how the constitutive limitations of western democracy continue to exist in a modified way within post-democracy.

KEYWORDS
Democratic theory; feminist theory; post-democracy; androcentrism; gendered division of labour; gender and representation; gender and exclusion

In contemporary Western European societies, there are numerous indications of a dwindling democracy: the juridification of politics, the domination of market rationale at the base of democracy, decreasing possibilities for citizen participation, declining voter turnouts, increasingly more voters leaving parties, or the simple disinterest in politics. Colin Crouch’s notion of ‘post-democracy’ (Crouch 2004) has become a key term in social sciences to describe the current crisis of democracy. In his well-received book Post-democracy (2004), Crouch argues that although modern democracies maintain the facade of formal democratic principles, ‘politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites’ (Crouch 2004, 6). These elites are lobbyists, experts or economic entrepreneurs who take part without democratic legitimization. Consequently, in post-democratic societies politics are ‘shaped in private by interaction
between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests’ (Crouch 2004, 6).

Crouch’s critique of post-democracy is primarily motivated by his concern that post-democracy implies a backlash of social equality and that post-democracy reduces the possibility for struggles to emerge that politicize class-based inequalities and exclusions. Crouch indicates the importance of gender in understanding social changes that accompany post-democracy, such as the restructuring of class (Crouch 2004, 59; see also Crouch 2015). However, while he attends to the question of how post-democracy affects women and men differently and discusses forms of political mobilization by women in post-democratic societies, he nonetheless fails to systematically dismantle the gendered dimension of post-democracy – a fact that Crouch self-critically mentions in an interview with ROAR Magazine in 2015 (Crouch 2015). While Crouch refers to a few gendered effects of post-democracy (mainly its impact on class relations and class struggles), he does not employ gender as an analytical category to reveal how post-democracy itself is gendered and how it relies on masculinist assumptions regarding political agency and politics.

With this paper I aim to close this gap and shed light on the gendered impacts of post-democracy. I argue that the current transformations of democracy can be interpreted as a masculinist project that leads to new forms of gendered exclusion. Furthermore, by drawing on feminist theory as a materialist theory that links politics to social structures and social relations (Delphy 1975/1997; Federici 2012; Hennessy 1993; Jackson 2001), I contend that post-democracy must also be understood as a project that reconfigures the relationship between the political and the social: I argue that post-democracy needs to be conceptualized as androcentric depoliticization of the social. Thus, the overall aim of this paper is to highlight how a materialist feminist perspective broadens the scope of a critique of post-democracy. It does so by pointing out that a critical engagement with democracy requires a politicization of the ‘substantive conditions that have to be met in order to qualify for political equality’ (Phillips 1993, 108) and political participation.

A materialist feminist perspective not only broadens the scope of a critique of post-democracy, it also urges us to re-think the point of departure underlying Crouch’s analysis. While Crouch considers post-democracy as a historical decline of democracy (2004, 6pp.), a feminist reading counters this, because modern liberal democracies have always been a gender-exclusive project based on a narrow understanding of the political and on exclusions, particularly gendered exclusions regarding social issues, tasks, needs and relations. Against this background, I read Crouch’s contribution as an instructive description of the current stage of democracy in western societies. However, I disagree with his argument that post-democracy needs to be conceptualized as decline from a formerly ‘better’ and more democratic and inclusive form of democracy. Rather, post-democracy prolongs gendered exclusions and androcentric definitions of the political that are inherent to modern liberal democracies.

The paper is comprised of two parts. In the first part, I argue that the ‘democratic moment’ (2004, 6), which Crouch calls the stage prior to post-democracy, must be understood as a narrow and exclusive form of democracy. I sketch out a feminist critique of western liberal democracies by focusing on three dimensions: the construction of the political subject, the demos, and the political. In the second part, I explore how these constitutive limitations of democracy continue in a modified manner within post-democracy,
and argue that they can only be made visible through a materialist feminist perspective that considers politicizing the social as crucial to a democratic democracy.

1. **Feminist perspectives on democracy**

1.1. **Who counts as political subject?**

The grand narratives of modern western theories on liberal democracy and political agency have argued that political agency is grounded in reason and freedom. The political subject of modern western democracies is conceived as a free, rational, autonomous and sovereign individual, characterized by its ability to abstract from individual and ‘private’ interests qua reason in the name of the general will.

As many feminist scholars have examined, this figure of the liberal individual is genuinely masculine: Carole Pateman was one of the first feminist political theorists to dismantle the individual as ‘a patriarchal category’ (Pateman 1988a, 184pp): it relies on the masculinist assumption that the individual is an independent and autonomous being (Pateman 1989, 185). In a similar manner, Zillah Eisenstein has argued that ‘the individual is a man, in a male body’ (Eisenstein 1989, 77). Postcolonial feminist scholars have added that the figure is not only masculine but also white and eurocentric (Dhaliwal 1995; Kapur 2007). Until the early twentieth century, neither women nor non-white people counted as citizens.

It was not only historical exclusions that constituted the white, masculine character of the liberal citizen. The figure in itself is a masculine phantasm, because it presupposes the disavowal of the existing social relations, which cannot be organized based on reason and autonomy but through necessities, dependencies and relationalities (Brown 1995; Pateman 1989; Landes 1996; Sauer, 2001; Wilde, 2001). Furthermore, the masculine phantasm relies on the disavowal of bodily necessities, dependencies and relationalities; the political subject of modern western liberal democracies is a disembodied subject (Pateman 1988b, 116). Such an androcentric figure is based on exclusions of and abstractions from social relations and social necessities, which are configured as ‘feminine’ and ‘private’ and are thus excluded from the public sphere (Sauer 2001; Young 1987, 73). This gendered division that binds masculinity, reason, autonomy and femininity, emotions and needs together is the androcentric precondition of the ideal of the modern, liberal citizen.

Crouch’s description of democracy in Keynesian and Fordist societies as those that ‘probably come closest to democracy in my maximal sense’ (Crouch 2004, 6) begs the question of who actually counted as a democratic subject, and what the requirements were for becoming an eligible democratic subject in that era. Crouch affirms democracy in Fordist societies because then ‘many diverse groups and organizations of ordinary people’ (Crouch 2004, 7) actively participated in democratic agenda-setting processes:

> Popular political movements and parties themselves may well be dominated by boss figures whose personal style is anything but democratic; but they are at least subject to lively active pressure from a mass movement which itself in turn represents something of the aspirations of ordinary people. (Crouch 2004, 7)

Crouch focuses here on trade unions and their importance for the livelihood of Fordist democracy. Such a view on democracy in Fordist societies neither mentions the implicit
gendered character of the key actors nor the social preconditions for their democratic participation. Applying a feminist perspective therefore sheds a different light on Fordist democracy in two ways: first, in the Fordist ‘democratic moment’ the key political actors were mostly men (Phillips 1993; Pateman 2011). Second, Fordist democratic subjects also relied on a gendered division of labour and, along with it, a gendered separation between the public and private sphere. The Fordist class compromise and welfare state was built on a gendered division of labour that not only excluded women as political actors (Fraser 1996; Pateman 1989; Phillips 1993, 97; 1995, 57pp.). In addition, this gendered division of labour – and therefore also the feminization of the everyday, the private, the family and care work – was the unspoken precondition that enabled men to participate in politics and political movements. While Fordist democracy hinged on women’s contribution of care work, this work formed a practical barrier for women’s political involvement (Pateman 2011, 119; Phillips 1993, 96). If, as T.H. Marshall proposed, citizenship is understood as a ‘status bestowed on those who are full members of a community’ (Marshall 1963, 86), it follows that women lacked full citizenship within Fordism due to social inequalities – even though they were formally equal citizens.

At the same time, the fact that care and family work was done almost entirely by women as wives and mothers, this enabled men to actively participate in political organizing. Hence, from a feminist perspective, the Fordist democratic subject also conveys the androcentric ideal of western democracies: a male individual ‘free’ from social responsibility and dependency because he is able to delegate them to others. While trade unions were indeed strong and important political actors in forming a (more) participatory or social democracy in some aspects, this Fordist ‘democratic moment’ also entailed a gender regime that held women responsible for care and family work so that men could ‘freely’ enter into and act within the political sphere. Thus, democracy was also limited in Fordist society because membership to the political community was deeply contingent upon gender.

1.2. Who belongs to the demos?

According to the liberal concept of democracy, the demos is considered a united entity. This unit is viewed as either grounded in national belonging, shared duties or in a patriotic attachment to the state or constitution. Modern western political thought assumes that democracy requires citizens share a sameness which allows them to envision that they are part of a community and facilitates an identification with each other (Ferguson 2007, 30). In his review of democracy in Fordist societies, also Crouch highlights that citizens shared a commitment of belonging to the demos, which is also why they actively engaged in politics (Crouch 2004, 7pp.).

In societies structured around hierarchical gender, race and class relations, the demos can only figure as an entity by creating abstractions and exclusions. In hierarchical societies, unity can only be achieved when the less privileged – such as women or racialized ‘Others’ – are silenced for the sake of a common good or simply were/are excluded (Appelt 1999; Brown 2011; Kreisky 1995; Sauer 2001; Young 1996, 127). Thus, in hierarchical societies as long as the demos is configured as an entity, it is built on exclusions. Consequently, even after women formally gain equality, they still have yet to attain substantial equality within the demos due to social constructions of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, which are seen as correlating respectively to emotions, privacy, and particularity; and to
reason, public, and universality. When conceived as entity of rational and public citizens, the demos remains a masculine and highly exclusive construction (Fraser 1996; Phillips 1995; Young 1996).

Also in Fordist democracy, the demos was deeply masculinized. When Crouch describes Fordist democracy as a stage where ‘ordinary people’ demanded ‘to frame a political agenda which will at last respond to their concerns’ (Crouch 2004, 7) these ‘concerns’ were articulated within and by a predominantly masculinist demos. The ‘high level of widespread political involvement’ (Crouch 2004, 8) was a masculinist reality based on the substantial exclusion of women as politically active citizens.

Configuring the demos as an entity not only demands exclusions from the demos, but also the construction of a non-democratic ‘exterior’. This non-democratic periphery helps sustain the demos as a unity (Brown 2011, 51). The imagination of a non-democratic exterior ‘other’ requires nationalist demarcations (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Dhaliwal 1995). Hence, the Fordist demos was not only masculinist, it also relied on nationalist assumptions about non-democratic societies outside of Western Europe. In the context of the Cold War, Eastern Europe was configured as the non-democratic ‘outside’ of western democracies. The construction of a non-democratic Eastern bloc helped to forward the imagination of a democratic West. Within Fordism, democracy relied both on a masculinist construction of a unified demos and a nationalist construction of a supposedly non-democratic Other.

1.3. What counts as political?

The consequence of conceptualizing the demos as a unity is that social conflicts that cannot be subsumed under the ideal of entity must be excluded from the political by framing them as ‘pre-political’. Earlier on, Karl Marx showed that framing the capitalist relations of production as ‘private’ facilitates its exclusion from the realm of the political:

Where the political state has achieved its full development, man leads a double life, a heavenly and an earthy life, not only in thought or consciousness but in actuality. In the political community he regards himself as a communal being; but in civil society he is active as a private individual, treats other men as means, reduces himself to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien power. The political state is as spiritual in relation to civil society as heaven is in relation to earth [...]. The contradiction between the religious and the political man is the same as that between bourgeois and citoyen, between the member of civil society and his political lion skin (Marx 1967, 225pp, emphasis in the original).

Thus, in liberal democracies, the political is necessarily narrow and exclusive. A materialist feminist perspective adds that the political is also shaped through the exclusion of fundamental social and care issues. The depoliticization of the social order must be understood as an intrinsic element of the political within liberal democracies. One of the crucial contributions of feminists to political theory has been to emphasize that liberal democracies are built upon a gendered separation between the public and the private sphere (Hausen 1992; Lang 1995; Okin 1998; Pateman 1983; Sauer 1997). In contrast to liberal theory, feminist theory has proven that the private sphere is highly politically structured, and that the liberal conception of the public cannot exist without its constitutive exclusion of the social. Separating and dichotomizing the private and public enables the entire realm of social
reproduction (activities and experiences considered ‘private’ and ‘feminine’ such as caring and nurturing) to be excluded from both public and political realms.

In Fordist democracies the political was also founded upon gendered exclusions of the social: issues around social reproduction remained outside the domain of the political. Within a gendered division of labour it was considered ‘natural’ that women were responsible for raising children, doing housework, caring for the elderly and the sick people. The fact that these activities are crucial for the reproduction of any society – and that women largely perform these tasks within the private sphere – were deemed irrelevant to democracy. In other words, the Fordist welfare state relied on economic gender inequalities and dependencies that remained excluded from the political.

Reflections on Fordist democracy as a project structured according to ideals of political and economic equality (Crouch 2004, 6pp.) perpetuates a liberal and narrow understanding of the political as it forecloses considering social reproduction as a key factor by relegating it to the private realm, deeming it apolitical. Examining public and political equality in a narrow sense fully neglects the privatized dimension of social equality. A feminist approach can broaden the scope of analysis and can thus redress the fundamental assumption of modern androcentric political theory that ‘the public sphere is assumed to be capable of being understood on its own, as if it existed sui generis, independently of private sexual relations and domestic life’ (Pateman 1989, 3), thereby bringing to light the subtle and privatized preconditions of the political.

1.4. Depoliticizing the social

A materialist feminist perspective emphasizes that liberal democracy can only exist through taking social relations and the social organization of reproduction out of the equation. They are necessarily built upon a depoliticization and privatization of social and social inequalities or, respectively, a gendered division of labour and a gendered separation between the public and the private sphere. The organization of social tasks that are necessary for social reproduction are not and cannot be addressed as political issues within liberal democracy.

This rather sceptical picture of the history of democracy sheds a different light on the ‘golden age’ of democracy that Crouch appreciates about Fordist society. For feminists, democracy has never been ‘golden’. Also, the period of democracy prior to the recent post-democracy was founded upon logics of exclusion and authority that lead to a narrow understanding of the political. At the same time, these masculinist biases and exclusions gave rise to the women’s movements from the 1970s onward. The women’s movements made the gendered exclusions from (substantial) political participation as well as the masculinization of the demos visible. They contested the formal and subtle ways women were excluded from the demos by relegating them to the private sphere. The women’s movements further brought to light that all conceptions of political participation remained limited unless they also addressed the ‘private’ preconditions of political agency and integrated social issues into their political struggles. In other words, women’s movements revealed that until democracy is understood as social democracy and include the social fabrics of a society, it will always be an exclusive non-democratic endeavour.
A standpoint that approaches the current post-democracy as ‘decline’ of democracy (Crouch 2004, 6pp.) is not only based on androcentric premises. It is also these androcentric premises that, not least, lead to an inability to analyse the interplay between social and political democracy. Here a materialist feminist position opens up the possibility to also looks at social inequalities in relation to the political. By doing so it, discusses the current limitations and exclusions of post-democracy as a continuity of the constitutive limitations and exclusions germane to liberal democracies in general. Given this background, in the following I take up Crouch’s diagnosis of a post-democracy as the current stage of democracy – without sharing the interpretation of a decline of democracy – as I aim to reveal the ‘hidden’ gendered structures of post-democracy. In order to do so, I address the three dimensions previously discussed and examine how the construction of the political subject, the demos and the political are re-shaped in post-democracy as well as how these modifications are deeply gendered.

2. Revisiting post-democracy from a feminist perspective

2.1. The post-democratic political subject

For Crouch, in post-democracy experts and lobbyists are the prototypes of the political subject. He argues that ‘[i]n addition to dominating the economy itself, they become the class that also dominates the running of government’ (Crouch 2004, 44). Not only do the economic elites regain power in post-democracy, the firm also turns into a ‘key institution of the post-democratic world’ (Crouch 2004, 31). In post-democracy, political decisions are shaped through economic criteria. I consider these transformations that Crouch describes as an effect of what Michel Foucault has termed neoliberal governmentality (Foucault 2008, 215). For Foucault, neoliberal governmentality is characterized by an economization of the social: the logic of the enterprise is expanded and applied to the whole of society (Foucault 2008, 242pp.). The enterprise has become the organizing principle of social relations. As a consequence, (state) politics also explicitly follow market principles: the market has turned into a ‘permanent economic tribunal confronting government’ (Foucault 2008, 247). Another consequence is that the political subject has been transformed into an entrepreneurial self. The citizen is encouraged to act according to economic principles. This endeavour becomes a template for social relations and individual existence (Foucault 2008, 242).

Against this background, the hegemony of experts and lobbyists that Crouch analyses needs to be understood as expression of a profound modification of the political subject in post-democracy, within which it remains a free, autonomous and sovereign individual although the parameters of its freedom are – as Foucault has argued – defined as entrepreneurial freedom and not, as in liberal tradition, as ‘naturally given’ (Foucault 2008, 241pp.). Citizens should act according to entrepreneurial logic – this applies to experts and lobbyists as well as to voters who increasingly become consumers as Crouch rightly describes (Crouch 2004, 4pp.).

These modifications of the political subject have vital impacts in terms of gender: both, the fact that experts and lobbyists have turned into crucial political players and the entrepreneurisation of the political subject indicate a gendered backlash. Feminist theorists have argued that the more informal political networks are, the harder it is for women
to enter them because ‘informal’ networks still are organized on the basis of masculinist, fraternal logics (Sauer 2009, 114; Scheele 2011; Kreisky and Löffler 2009; Schunter-Klemmann 2001). Gender is a decisive gatekeeper since women cannot easily enter informal economic and political networks due to the pre-existing male bonding-structures and masculinist recruiting practices. Against this background, the fact that ‘experts’ and lobbyists gain increasing importance in politics has the effect that women are again, albeit in a subtler manner excluded from the group of influential political actors.

These inherent exclusive mechanisms of the post-democratic political subject are also noticeable in policies both on national and supranational levels. EU crisis policies that were installed to solve the financial crisis that took off in 2008 can be understood as prototype of Crouch’s post-democracy. In the key decisions of the EU’s authoritarian austerity policies that were installed in 2011/2012, such as the Euro-plus pact (March 2011), the six directives on EU ‘Economic Governance’ (December 2011), and the Fiscal Compact (March 2012), the key players included economic ‘experts’ with no democratic legitimation (Oberndorfer 2012; Kannankulam and Georgi 2014). The EU-crisis management has given not only ministries for finances but also the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), the General Secretariat of the European Commission, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) and the European Central Bank (ECB) significant more power in budget and economic policy decisions. All of the key protagonists here are unelected officials, lacking any democratic legitimation. In their feminist analysis of EU policies that reacted to the financial crisis, Elisabeth Klatzer and Christa Schlager emphasize that a re-masculinisation of the political subject is at work here (Klatzer and Schlager 2012, 2016): the access to political agenda-setting and decision-making is highly gender-selective and ‘experts’ are mostly men. Klatzer and Schlager’s diagnosis is echoed in the work of Alexandra Scheele on crisis policies in Germany: Scheele points out that the national-level ‘experts’ who are key players in articulating ‘reforms’ and anti-crisis measures are also mainly male (Scheele 2011, 17pp.). Thus, the increasing influence of experts and lobbyists as well as the informalization of politics lead to a perpetuation of the exclusion of women from the circle of relevant political subjects (see also Hozic and True 2016; Karamessini and Rubery 2013; Kantola and Lombardo 2017).

A feminist evaluation of the political subject in post-democracy deepens Crouch’s critique and points out that the increasing influence of economist elites in politics needs to be considered as masculinist project. However, a feminist perspective not only focuses on the aspect of the gendered access, but also criticizes the gendered structure of the post-democratic political subject. The fact that the homo oeconomicus has become the ideal political subject in post-democracy can be interpreted as neoliberal prolongation of the liberal phantasm of the political subject as an autonomous, sovereign and rational individual. A political rationale that encourages citizens to act according to an entrepreneurial logic necessarily disavows social relations, dependencies and needs. The logic of the market – competition and efficiency – ignores the fact that society also requires social relations that cannot be organized in accordance with market principles even though the neoliberal expansion of care industries assumes that this is possible.1 Framing the post-democratic political subject as entrepreneurial subject is again based on the ideal of the white, masculine, abled-bodied subject who is a free, autonomous and sovereign
individual. Thus, post-democracy also perpetuates the political marginalization of subjects and ways of living that do not fit this ideal (Sauer 2009, 107).

Interestingly, despite his rather sceptical diagnoses of the transformation of the political subject, Crouch points out that participatory and emancipatory political activities are still present in post-democratic societies along with social movements such as environmental movements, anti-racism movements and feminist movements (Crouch 2004, 63). He frames the latter as a counter-development to the tendency towards post-democracy and as ‘a democratic moment within the overall framework of the onward march of post-democracy’ (Crouch 2004, 63).

I agree with Crouch that within post-democratic circumstances various social struggles are still present and vital – including feminist ones. Feminist struggles have always scandalized political exclusions and fought to overcome them – not only by demanding inclusion within the existing political and social structures but even more so by inventing, creating and living new forms of politics, and by redefining who should count as a political subject. Due to the current economic crisis, feminists are struggling across the globe for new forms of political subjectivity that encompass more than the androcentric phantasm of an autonomous subject. Current struggles aim at creating new forms of caring, working and living together that overcome social inequalities and gendered hierarchies (Widersprüche 2014; Winker 2015). They scandalize the impact that the androcentric figure of the entrepreneurial self has on the organization of society, as it seeks to dismantle social and health care and public goods. These struggles are also dedicated to searching for new forms of political agency that replace the androcentric entrepreneurial subject with a political subject that takes the inevitable relationality of human beings into account, thereby underscoring the need to take a politics of care and relationality as a starting point in developing new forms of political agency (Precarias a la Deriva 2006).

### 2.2. The post-democratic demos

Despite the technocratization and bureaucratization of democracy and the economization of political subjects, post-democratic societies still hold on to the idea that democracy needs to be based on the ‘demos as a unity’. Here, Crouch’s work on post-democracy helps us to understand the following tension: while the demos is still viewed as an entity – and explicitly called for in political rhetoric – post-democracy entails two dynamics that constantly undermine this claim. Politically, the premise that the demos is a unity is undermined through the increasing influence of economic elites. They demonstrate that the demos is less of a unity and more of a conglomerate of various groups with antagonistic interests. Socially, the premise that the demos is a unity is undermined by increasing social inequalities. The tension between the professed unity of the demos and social antagonisms is certainly no new phenomenon of post-democracy but rather, as I argued above, it is a tension that is intrinsic to modern liberal democracies. Thus, as Crouch argues, it is necessary to point out that this tension has deepened within post-democratic societies. In the following, I present three core tendencies that serve as analytical categories for dealing with this field of tension within post-democratic societies. I propose grasping these key tendencies as crucial political mechanisms within current politics as a way of balancing the tension between the claim of the demos as an entity and its increasing fragmentation.
First, the increasing inclusion of women on a formal level can be interpreted as mode of re-securing and re-installing the phantasm of the demos as unity: post-democracy cannot only be described as a decrease in democracy. Paradoxically, not only ‘the forms of democracy remain fully in place’ (Crouch 2004, 6, emphasis added) and are ‘today in some respects actually strengthened’ (Crouch 2004, 6) but have indeed become more inclusive over the past decades. This can best be seen in the political representation of women that has – to a different extent – increased throughout Western Europe. The increase in women within parliamentary politics over the past decades is clearly an effect of the women’s movements and how they have transformed politics as a strictly masculine realm. At the same time, as argued above, women still remain marginalized in informal and economic networks, which are arenas that have gained importance with the emergence of post-democracy. Thus, we are left with the following paradox within the era of post-democracy: while women have successfully gained entrance into the realm of formal politics (such as the parliament and political parties), they still have limited access to informal, economic networks. Given that the latter has gained importance in the era of post-democracy and the former has substantially lost influence, post-democracy also implies new challenges for feminist struggles. Feminists need to find ways to address and call out these more subtle forms of exclusions within informal politics and networks. However, due to the simultaneity of formal inclusion and informal exclusion, on a rhetoric level it becomes possible to claim the demos is a unity built upon equality although the demos continues to be structured by fundamental inequalities that remain depoliticized. Thus, in reference to Birgit Sauer, Crouch’s diagnoses can be expanded: the inclusion of ‘women and gender equality politics did not necessarily democratize western democracies but instead it became part of a general process of de-democratization’ (Sauer 2011, 126, author’s translation).

A second technique to cope with the tension between the claim of the demos as entity and its increasing fragmentation is the transformation of the state into a security state that needs to be considered as element of post-democracy. According to Iris Marion Young the security state creates both an enemy outside and an interior enemy. The security state promises to provide protection against both ‘enemies’ at the price of receiving permission to carefully watch and observe its citizens (Young 2003, 8). The security state is built upon the promise to secure the demos by fighting the ‘threatening other’; the precondition of being ‘secured’ is, however, subjection to the security state (Young 2003, 3; Kreisky 2008). The security state helps constitute the nation as a single body united against interior and exterior threats. In this light, any form of dissent within the demos is not only considered dangerous, but also as disloyal and ungrateful (Young 2003, 9). The counterpart of the security state is the unified demos.

The third mode of dealing with the divergence between the postulated ideal of the demos as entity and its reality is the re-activation of nationalist rhetoric. Here I draw on Crouch’s repeated warnings against nationalist and right-wing politics and seek to push them even further. Politics that produce a nationalistic demarcation line between an imagined democratic ‘we’ and an imagined non-democratic ‘exterior’ are part of post-democracy, and also of the post-democratic security state. Such politics aim to construct a united demos towards imaginations of threatening exterior ‘others’. Currently, particularly the construction of a non-democratic ‘Islamic other’ plays a key role in the construction of this demarcation line. In this binary consisting of a democratic western
‘we’ and a non-democratic, non-western ‘other’, women’s rights have become crucial tokens for drawing a demarcation line between an assumed progressive Western Europe and a ‘backward Rest’. Sara Farris (2012) introduced the term ‘femonationalism’ to describe how nationalism in western states nowadays is also secured through referring to the state’s commitment to formal gender equality. ‘Femonationalism’ serves to bolster the imagination of a western liberal ‘we’ that aspires to fulfil liberal democracy’s promise of equality. However, this rhetoric not only forecloses the ongoing gender inequality in western states; it also uses the partial integration of some demands from women’s movements as a token for framing non-western nations and ‘cultures’ as backward. In post-democracy the partial acceptance of gender equality is thus used as means of legitimating a nationalistic unification of the demos despite the fact that gender inequality still deeply shapes the post-democratic demos.

All three mechanisms help to abstract from divisions that run through the demos in order to re-secure the phantasm of the demos as a unity that is still necessary within a post-democratic era. These political techniques that employ gender politics and a gendered logic are needed to depoliticize tensions, inequalities and antagonisms within the post-democratic demos in order to imagine a unified demos.

### 2.3. The post-democratic political

The last aspect I aim to elaborate on is that post-democracy also implies the continuation of a constitutive narrowing of the political. Crouch argues that post-democracy is characterized by the increasing importance of experts and lobbyists and the decreasing possibilities for citizens to participate in companies, universities, etc. in addition to a depoliticization of the social. Regarding this, Crouch primarily refers to the decreasing role of trade unions and to the transformation of social classes (Crouch 2004, 54pp.). This – as well as the entry of economic elites into the realm of politics – implies that the politicization of economic inequalities is no longer part of the political within the post-democracy era. Even though I agree with Crouch, I aim to add two aspects. First, these processes of depoliticization cannot solely be explained by pointing out the modification of the roles of the political actors. Instead, the depoliticization of the social is part of a broader transformation of the state. Second, post-democracy is based on a broad depoliticization of the social that also includes a fundamental depoliticization of social reproduction.

Linking Crouch’s diagnoses of post-democracy with materialist state theory (Jessop 1990; Hirsch 1994; Kannankulam 2008) enables us to grasp the post-democratic narrowing of the political and of the depoliticization of gendered social inequalities on a structural level. From a state-theoretical view, the emergence of post-democracy is embedded in a transformation of statehood as a result of the crisis of Fordism during the 1970s, when the Keynesian welfare state was replaced by the Schumpeterian workfare state. The latter promotes innovation and structural competitiveness in economic policy as well as flexibility and competitiveness in social policy. In the Schumpeterian workfare state, social policy no longer aims at redistributing and expanding welfare rights, but rests on the paradigm of ‘workfare’ (Jessop 1993, 18). In the neoliberal Schumpeterian state, welfare services should benefit business not individuals (Jessop 1993, 19). Consequently, social welfare has been cut and privatized. These privatizations also have led to a
narrowing of the political, since it dissociates social issues from the political. Thus, the transformation of statehood corresponds to a decline of social democracy as social policy, social rights and social risks are privatized and, therefore, excluded from the realm of politics.

Gender regimes compensate the outsourcing of social welfare and the decline of social democracy. Post-democracy not only relies on a depoliticization of the social but also on a depoliticization of the organization of social reproduction: on the one hand, outsourcing social tasks is compensated by the commodification of care work, and on the other hand by a re-familiarization and re-privatization. The rise of low-wage care industries can be seen as a response to the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state (paired with the increase of the employment rate of women). In informal and increasingly formalized forms of employment, mainly migrant women take over the bulk of the care for elderly and children – in addition to household tasks. Numerous feminist studies highlight not only the poor payment in these jobs, but also how gender functions as a ‘justification’ for the poor payment (Anderson 2000; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010; Lutz 2008). For example, the 24-hour nurses and au pair assistants receive low wages because the necessary expertise is not seen as a result of training and experience, but are considered skills that (migrant) women have ‘naturally’ (Caixeta et al. 2006; Haidinger 2013). The outsourcing of care work to (migrant) women perpetuates gender stereotypes of care work as a ‘natural’ feminine trait. This logic also comes into play when the neoliberal outsourcing of care work is compensated within the family in a non-commodified manner. Here, too, largely female family members perform these tasks (Anderson 2000; Bakker and Silvey 2008; Federici 2012; Wöhl 2014; Young et al. 2011). Thus, within a commodified or ‘private’ context, the majority of social reproduction is still performed by women. Care work and social reproduction remain in the hands of women. The fundamental antagonism of androcentric capitalist societies – namely, that society requires social reproduction, which state regulations envision as privately organized – remains vital to post-democracy societies. This privatization not only perpetuates the existing social inequalities, it also facilitates a depoliticization of the privatization of fundamental reproductive tasks within capitalist societies.

Thus, post-democracy also means that the neoliberal state has included some feminist demands such as the representation of female politicians on a formal level (as argued previously), but is still based on the depoliticization of social inequality in gender relations. The radical demand of women’s movements of transforming society substantially – and thus transforming the separation of the public and private as well as the division of labour – is clearly not met. Instead, the formal inclusion of women in representative politics was accompanied by taking off the agenda the radical feminist demands aimed at economic and social gender inequalities. Despite quotas in parties and gender mainstreaming social inequalities remain intact (Abels and Mushaben 2012; Sauer 2011; Wöhl 2007).

The transformation of statehood and the accompanying privatization of social reproduction have indeed intensified in the current financial and economic crisis. The narrowing of the political through the exclusion of social issues is characteristic for current crises policies. Scheele interprets the current crisis policies as ‘gender-political conservatism’ (Scheele 2011, 18, author’s translation) that aims to preserve a modernized form of the Fordist gender regime that addresses men as fulltime breadwinners and women as
additional income earners (Scheele 2011, 18). In their analysis of EU crisis policies, Klatzer and Schlager also conclude that the aim of stable monetary value and the general assumption that solutions of the crisis must be market-based result in an increase in gender inequality. Welfare-state cutbacks and wage dumping on the labour market affect women much more (Klatzer and Schlager 2012, 29; see also Karamessini and Rubery 2013). Furthermore, the cutback of welfare-state benefits presupposes that social tasks are compensated by private gender arrangements. Austerity policies therefore rely on the assumption that women are an endless resource for compensating the cutbacks of public services and thus, also help to secure social sustainability and stability in times of crisis. In this way, the ‘private sphere is once again serving as a key social realm for the provision of women’s unpaid work’ (Wöhl 2014, 96). The privatization of social reproduction with the effect that women take over social responsibilities without being paid or being paid only poorly are simultaneously effect and precondition of a narrow understanding of democracy.

3. Conclusion

A materialist feminist perspective broadens the scope of analysis and critique for studying post-democracy. Analytically, it expands the realm by starting from the indisputable premise that the political and the social are intertwined. By doing so, the scope for analysing the current ‘crises of democracy’ is expanded not only to the realm of formal politics, but also to the social preconditions of politics. It sheds light on how social inequalities shape access to political participation and define what counts as ‘political’ in the first place. A feminist perspective not only grasps democracy as form of organizing (state) politics and governmental administration by means of popular suffrage, but also as a way of organizing society as a whole. The scope of studying democracy cannot be limited to the field of the political or the state, it must also encompass the social. As a consequence, problematizing the current ‘crisis of democracy’ cannot only focus on the reshaping of politics, but must also examine the continuity of social relations as relations of power outside of post-democratic processes of reshaping of politics. Thus, criticizing post-democracy from a materialist feminist perspective expands the critique that in our times democracy is not only reshaped and ‘de-democratized’. It sheds light on the fact that the reproduction of the entire society, and thus our everyday social practices, continue to be structured according to non-democratic and thus fundamentally hierarchical and unequal social relations and logics. Depoliticizing these social inequalities consequentially remains both the precondition for and a crucial effect of our post-democratic present.

In this vein, a feminist perspective emphasizes that depoliticizing the social that Crouch uncovers for the post-democratic era is much deeper than he assumes. First it is manifested in the ideal of the homo oeconomicus as political subject; second in the construction of a post-democratic demos structured through social inequalities that are made to disappear in the phantasm of the demos as (national) unity; and third in the abstraction of social necessities and of the social question how they are met. Post-democracy is therefore characterized through a narrowing of the political that can be understood as manifestation of a fundamental transformation of statehood where neoliberal governmentality has led to an increase in the (re-)privatization of social reproduction. Thus, post-democracy can be understood as way of prolonging social inequality and the absence of democracy in the
social fabric, and as prolonging the assumption that it is possible to separate the political from the social. All these elements of the post-democracy need to be understood as masculinization of the political. In post-democracy – like in any other liberal democracy – the tension between the liberal ideals of unity, representation, rationality, sovereignty, autonomy and freedom and the social fact of a gendered division of labour and a gendered separation between public and private can only be ‘solved’ by depoliticizing them – or, in other words, this depoliticization takes place through a gendered division of social spheres and social tasks. However, in contrast to Fordist democracy, in post-democracy feminists face a paradox situation: while explicit forms of gender discrimination and gender exclusion in the political sphere have to a broad extend and not least due to feminist struggles been removed, they have entered the stage again through the backdoor: post-democracy is a masculinist project despite its proclaimed equality on a formal level because it relies on more subtle and indirect forms of gendered exclusions.

In light of this conclusion, I argue that post-democracy acts as a parallel to what feminists within cultural studies call ‘post-feminism’ (Brooks 1997; Genz and Brabon 2009; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Rottenberg 2014). These scholars have introduced the notion ‘post-feminism’ that functions as an ‘analytical category’ (Gill 2016, 612) for understanding the entanglement of neoliberalism and gender politics. Their key argument is that neoliberalism has incorporated selected elements from liberal feminist demands for equality within existing social structures and thus, but without radical transforming them (Rottenberg 2014). Rosalind Gill, for instance, has noted an increase in ‘feminist visibilities’ (Gill 2016, 615) within neoliberal popular culture accompanied by an undercurrent of depoliticization. While the rise of neoliberalism has brought attention to some elements of (liberal) feminism within popular culture, gender politics have been kept separate from critiques of structural inequalities and reduced to ‘key liberal terms, such as equality, opportunity, and free choice’ (Rottenberg 2014, 421; see also Gill 2016, 613), allowing gender to be understood as merely an individual characteristic rather than a structural category. Gender is professed as something women can (and should) use to enhance their individual success, but is only available to them if they ascribe to hegemonic gender norms and distance themselves from feminism (McRobbie 2004; Rottenberg 2014). Post-feminism relies on the assumption that feminism has become obsolete. Post-feminism can be described as complex form of anti-feminism or, as McRobie puts it, ‘undoing of feminism’ (McRobbie 2009, 11). It is not merely backlash, but a ‘complexification of backlash’ (McRobbie 2009, 11) because post-feminism ‘positively draws on and involves feminism as which can be taken into account, to suggest that quality is achieved in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed’ (McRobbie 2004, 255). In other words, what post-feminism offers is ‘female individualization and the new meritocracy at the expense of feminist politics’ (McRobbie 2009, 16).

This analysis of post-feminism within popular culture corresponds to my own feminist critique of post-democracy. The core critique of post-feminism can also be applied to post-democracy on a political level. Like post-feminism, in post-democracy gender inequality continues through subtle enactments of de-articulation and depoliticization. Both post-feminism and post-democracy prolong gender inequality because, regardless of the language they employ, they still rely on the feminization of social reproduction. Furthermore, just as post-feminist discourses within popular culture want to make people believe...
gender equality has been reached through rendering it an individual achievement and disregar-
ding gender as a structural category, post-democracy promotes the myth that gender inequality
is no longer relevant by reducing it to only include explicit and formal forms of exclusion. Thus,
our present is not only shaped by a ‘cultural politics of disarticulation’ (McRobbie 2009, 35) of
feminism, but also by a post-democratic politics of disarticulation.

This simultaneity of formal inclusion and informal exclusion in a post-feminist post-
democracy confronts feminists with new challenges: since on a formal level, even in
post-democracy gender equality measures exist, feminist critique can easily be dismissed
through referring to these measures. This is what happens currently and increasingly in
so-called ‘anti-genderism-discourses’ by conservative and right-wing political actors
(Hark and Villa 2015; Kuhar and Patternotte 2017). By only looking at the formal structures
of politics, they argue that gender equality has already been established in Western societies
and there is no longer any need for feminist critique. Consequently, feminists are depicted
as threat of the existing social and political order. These ‘anti-genderism-discourses’ dras-
tically prove that the simultaneity of formal inclusion and informal exclusion requires new
political strategies that also address the more subtle and indirect masculinist logics of post-
democracy that prolong gendered exclusion and gendered forms of narrowing democracy.

In light of my diagnoses that rings true for both post-feminism and post-democracy,
namely that the myth that formal equality signifies the absence of gender inequality, fem-
inist strategies that counter post-democracy must repeatedly refer back to the ‘old’ femin-
ist paradigm that as a movement feminism cannot reduce gender politics to the personal
achievements of individual women, but must expand gender politics to encompass social
and collective justice. Feminism is a radical project that seeks to transform both politics
and society, and as such it needs to include structural inequality in its vocabulary. Political
and social changes that only allow certain individuals to benefit while perpetuating the
feminization of social reproduction or re-affirming the masculinization of politics, do
not do justice to feminism or democracy.

From a feminist point of view, countering post-democracy means highlighting the fact
that the contemporary ‘crisis of democracy’ extends into realms far beyond the political. A
serious engagement with the premise that the political and the social are inseparable implies
that solutions to the current political crisis cannot focus solely on the political realm. Given
that the lack of democracy on a political level corresponds to a lack of democracy within
social organization, a fundamental democratization of the social is vital for overcoming
the current ‘crisis of democracy’. In other words, this fundamental democratization of
the social is crucial in overcoming the inequalities and hierarchies that are deeply inscribed
in the social fabric, for fundamentally reshaping the gendered division of labour, organi-
ation of care and getting rid of the separation between the public and private spheres.
Grasping democracy with regard to the organization of the social from a feminist point
of view, it becomes clear that the current political crisis calls for a radical democratization
of our everyday practices so that gender might become obsolete as a subtle yet powerful cat-
egory that organizes both the social and the political.

Note
1. The rise of care industries in neoliberalism prolongs this contradiction that neoliberalism
requires the expansion of the logic of the market to the realm of care on one hand, but
that care work cannot fully be commodified on the other hand, because providing care or emotional support, e.g. for elderly people, cannot simply be (fully) organized based on market criteria (Haidinger 2013). As empirical research has shown care workers in commodified labour-relations try to compensate this contradiction by investing additional ‘personal’ extra-labour (such as personal conversations with their ‘clients’) to make their work appear less commodified, marketized and ‘impersonal’ (Müller 2016).

Acknowledgements

The author is a recipient of an APART Fellowship of the Austrian Academy of Sciences at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna. I am very grateful to the Austrian Academy of Sciences for their financial support that provides a space for academic thinking and writing which has become rare. I would also like to thank the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna for their financial support of the proof-reading. Furthermore, I am very grateful to Erika Doucette for her edits. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and inspiring comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Austrian Academy of Sciences under Grant ‘APART’.

Notes on contributor

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