Can "the people" be feminists? Analysing the fate of feminist justice claims in populist grassroots movements in the United States[1]

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Abstract

In this article I examine the fate of feminist justice claims in the context of grassroots populist movements in the United States. By exploring populism on the left—in neighbourhood community organising—and on the right—within the community organising among the Tea Party—I argue that a "politics of authenticity" is deployed in each movement with strikingly similar effects on the development of feminist consciousness and justice claims in each movement. In left-wing community organising I find that feminist claims are suppressed in order to preserve solidarity among grassroots actors and to be perceived by movement outsiders as patriotic. On the right I demonstrate how women-centric practices are generated through the strategic use of an identity I label "concerned motherhood". For the Tea Party, women appear to have the ability to identify as women for local action but this process seems to threaten both feminism and democracy by women's support for a politics of inequality. I conclude with a discussion about whether feminism and populism can be reconciled and the perils that confront feminist activists in the current upsurge of populist movements around the globe.

Introduction

In the United States, community organising activists typically legitimise their practices in urban grassroots movements by adopting populist principles. For both left-wing and right-wing groups, populism is deployed to spotlight political, cultural and economic elites who, populists claim, are undermining and distorting the will of "the people". For populist claims-making to be successful, activists must discursively construct and reinforce adversarial identities and relations between "us" and "them": the "authentic" and virtuous public versus the selfish and out-of-touch elite. Through these discursive practices, community organising activists argue that popular solidarity across a range of potentially divisive identities such as class, "race" and gender is built and sustained and as a result, groups can be effectively organised and mobilised for actions that will benefit the majority.

In this article, I compare the claims-making and framing strategies by which right and left wing community activists construct some citizens' claims as

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authentic expressions of "the people" whilst other claims are labelled as divisive or partisan and are thus silenced from the dominant community organising discursive repertoire. In particular, I chart the fate of feminist justice claims—articulations and practices that seek to transform hegemonic gender roles, in order to "end sexist oppression" and encourage women to organise *as women* to advance equality and justice (hooks 2000: 18). Understanding what happens to feminist claims and practices within community organising politics is important because women are typically the key activists in these grassroots urban movements. As Cynthia Cockburn (1979) and Nancy Naples (1997) note, because of women's location in the private spaces of the family and community they have an intimate connection to the local state through their experiences of local social welfare services. "Women experience themselves and are expected by others, to be the prime caretakers of families, neighbourhoods and communities—and are the ones especially placed to make demands for their protection" (Ackelsberg 2001: 409). Thus, exploring how community organising ideas and practices shape women's understandings of their identity, gender consciousness and the nature of the inequalities they experience is crucial to understanding how grassroots populist politics influence and legitimise the available space for certain forms of identity and activism.

I begin my analysis with a short discussion of populism and how this idea is operationalised in US-based democratic politics. Following Iris Marion Young (1997: 400), by "democratic politics" I mean "a process where citizens aim to promote their interests knowing that others are doing the same...It is also a method for determining the best and most just solution to conflicts and other collective problems". I will then move on to explore the formation and structure of populist discourses and identities in both left-wing and right-wing grassroots movements[2]. On the left, I examine the language and practices of the so-called "New Populist" neighbourhood movement that came to prominence in the early 1980s and still exerts a strong influence on contemporary progressive community organising today (Boyte 1980; Boyte and Reismann 1986; Kling and Posner 1990; Fisher 1994; Leavitt 2003; Kleidman 2004; Martin 2010; Atlas 2010). On the right, I analyse the language and practices of the Tea Party movement. Self-consciously modelled on populist left-wing community organising, the Tea Party is the most high profile counter-movement against

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[2] I use the terms "left-wing" and "right-wing" as broad political categories that encompass a range of ideas and social practices. I do not mean to imply that contemporary political thought reflects a simplistic one-dimensional spectrum of political ideas or that the boundaries between right and left are so easily identified. Nevertheless, in the community organising tradition, these labels are infused with meaning and convey important ideas about authentic grassroots practice. By "left-wing" I include those political ideologies and practices that seek social justice in the form of the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor and the recognition difference in terms of identities among various groups (Young 1990 and Fraser 1997). By "right-wing" I include those political ideologies and practices that seek to preserve the status quo in terms of economic and social hierarchies, oppose state-based remedies for economic and social inequalities and seek to use the state to defend and expand traditional morality and values (Klatch 1988 and Diamond 1995).

Barack Obama's Keynesian fiscal policies (Lepore 2010; Lilla 2010; Zernike 2010). In comparing these two populist movements, I do not wish to imply that these movements are unproblematically unified, coherent and homogenous. Indeed, what is compelling about the "New Populist" neighbourhood movement of the 1980s and the Tea Party of today is that in spite of their disparate and fractured characteristics, they have managed to articulate a fairly clear vision about the common good and mobilise new groups of actors who would not normally participate in community or electoral politics (Boyte 1980; Boyte and Evans 1986; Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). Through my comparative analysis I also do not want to convey that I am comparing like with like. The purpose and ambitions of the New Populists and the Tea Party are very different, but what binds them together is the strikingly similar ways in which they adopt and practice populist politics in the US context—and the complementary ways in which they systematically silence feminist claims from their discursive repertories.

For both the left-wing and right-wing populist groups, I will explore how the subject position of "the people" is constituted and how particular policy preferences are articulated and legitimised by grassroots practices. I will also be analysing how gender claims are constructed in these discursive landscapes and discuss the implications this has for our understandings of authenticity. I will conclude with a discussion about whether feminism and populism can be reconciled in grassroots movements. Before I turn to explore populism in more depth, I want to first briefly outline my discursive research methods.

Analysing populist discourses

Post-structuralist discourse analysis is concerned with understanding the construction and reproduction of identity within particular discourses through the analysis of talk and texts. Post-structuralism asserts that language's primary function is not to necessarily to describe reality but to ascribe meanings and value-systems about our identities and relationships (Derrida 1974; Foucault 1980; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Words are not simply instrumental ways in which to communicate; they insert themselves between us and reality so that they convey specific cultural knowledge and "truths" which discipline us to think, feel and behave in specific ways.

Following Hansen (2006), I have adopted post-structuralist discourse analysis (PDA) approach to analysing texts, discourses and identities in this article. It is important to note that PDA does not seek to "uncover" hidden truth claims in texts. Instead, the focus is on mapping the formation and structure of discourses in relation to significant historical events and investigating how these discourses simultaneously open up and close down particular identities for individuals and groups at particular moments in time. In terms of grassroots populism in the US, the salient historical moment that typically sparks populist action is an economic crisis (Boyte and Evans 1986; Kazin 1998a). It is no surprise then that left-wing populism is revived by the energy crisis recession of the late 1970s

whilst the Tea Party is organised in the context of the global banking crisis in 2008. These politically significant moments in time set the boundaries of the constitution of grievances, the nature of solidarity within groups and the available identities for mobilisation.

Hansen (2006: 82-6) argues that rigorous text selection and analysis is the linchpin for valid and reliable PDA research. She proposes a clear set of criteria for the selection of texts for analysis. In terms of general criteria, she states that all texts selected should have a "clear articulation of identities", "be widely read" within the field and should have the "formal authority to define a political position" (Hansen 2006: 85). Realistically, however, not all texts selected for analysis are able to fulfil all three criteria and thus should meet at least one of the criteria and be balanced by the selection of other texts that fulfil the rest of the criteria. Hansen (2006: 82-5) then suggests three further characteristics texts should have for selection. Firstly the majority of texts selected for analysis should be from the time periods under study. Secondly, primary texts such as books, newspaper articles and speeches directly related to the topic should be given priority for analysis however secondary texts such as academic work should be included in order to understand the social, political and historical context of the discourse and identity. Finally, to supplement the texts directly related to the topic, conceptual history texts should also be included in order to show how discourses and identities have interacted and changed over time.

I analysed populist discourses through an iterative method of reading a variety of relevant texts in order to understand how the patterns in the language of populist grassroots movements constitute the nature of their grievances, the structure of solidarity, their policy preferences and their social practices for the organisation and mobilisation of subjects. My selection of texts of community organising in the US spans two different time periods. For the New Populist neighbourhood movement, I analysed texts published from 1979 to 1995 and this textual selection was supplemented by a number of more recent texts published in the 2000s to demonstrate the continuity of various discursive practices in left-wing populism. For the Tea Party, my text selection spans from 2008, when the Tea Party was first constituted, to the time of writing in 2011.

Due to the recent establishment of the Tea Party, a comprehensive body of literature analysing its ideas and practices does not as yet exist. However, I have attempted to select texts about the movement that seek to understand it in relation to history, social change and individual biography—as C. Wright Mills (1959) suggests social scientists should approach the sociological analysis of phenomena. I have defined "texts" as books, academic, newspaper and magazine articles and speeches that constitute the discourses of populist community organising. Based on Hansen's method of text selection, these texts have been chosen for analysis based on their clear articulations of discourse and identity (they represent various schools of thought with regard to populist community organising), they are cited widely by other texts (in terms of intertextuality and the linking of texts through extensive citations and the use of interpellation and catchphrases) and they provide a mixture of "official"

discourses (in terms of hegemonic conceptualisations) and oppositional discourses (in terms of re-framing dominant definitions, processes and events). In addition, these texts are a mixture of primary, secondary and conceptual history sources.

By understanding the ways in which populist discourses construct the terms of their politics, it is possible to analyse the identity formations they generate. The final part of my discourse analysis is to trace how populist groups define themselves and who they include in their sense of self and, in contrast, how they define "the other" and who they exclude from their idea of an authentic self. In terms of policy preferences and identity constructions, I focus particularly on how populists legitimise their claims as authentic and the impact this has on other competing identities and claims—especially in terms of feminist justice.

An important critique of a discourse analysis methodology is that "anything goes" in terms of the quality and rigour of analysis offered (Parker and Burman 1993; Antaki et al 2002). An on-going problem with discourse analysis is that mere presentation, quotation or summary of texts is not sufficient in providing a rigorous, systematic, rational, compelling and persuasive analysis. Critics argue that:

> The analytic rush to identify discourses in order to get on with the more serious business of accounting for their political significance may be partly responsible for the tendency...to impute the presence of a discourse to a piece of text without explaining the basis for specific claims (Widdicombe 1995, quoted in Antaki et al 2002: 12).

Discourse analysis can often privilege circular logic whereby the selective presentation of texts is used to illustrate patterns in the discourse which in turn justify the existence of discourse in texts. The goal of this article is not to simply identify and analyse discourses and identities and then hold forth about their importance and influence on populist community organising. Instead, I wish to understand the significance of how these discourses and identities interact with and perhaps displace oppositional feminist claims and practices. Thus the focus of my analysis is not simply to argue for the existence of a particular discourse but to explore how the language and practice of populism disciplines social actors in particular ways—ways that undermine a transformational feminist politics of social justice.

With my methodology and methods explained, I will now move on to discuss the idea of populism in further detail.

Populism as strategy—not ideology

Populism is notoriously difficult to define. "We simply do not have anything like a *theory* of populism, or even coherent criteria for deciding when political actors have turned populist in some meaningful sense" (Mueller 2011: 1, emphasis in original text). Sometimes populism is used as a short-hand for dismissing overly simplistic political analyses and policy proposals. Other times it is deployed as a synonym for nativism or totalitarian tendencies in democratic politics. For the

purposes of this paper, I am interested in what populism might mean in the context of democratic politics in the United States. Margaret Canovan (1999: 3) defines populism as the "appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society". She argues that populism is a three-pronged concept: it is an articulation of popular grievances, a unifying call to the sovereign people and a challenge to perceived elite power and influence.

Firstly, populism is an articulation of ordinary people's feelings of disrespect and exclusion from the operation of political, economic and cultural power in society. There is a sense that the everyday ideas and traditions of local people are being ignored or disregarded and as a result, the health and future of the country is imperilled by the practice of elite power. What is important to note here about the articulation of grievances is the explicit link that is made between "ordinary people" and authentic uses of power. If power is wielded in ways that unnecessarily challenge popular belief systems or undermine the "will" of the people, then this power is seen as dangerous and illegitimate.

Secondly, populism is a call to arms for ordinary people. The people are constructed as united and virtuous because of their shared values and beliefs. Because the people are grounded in local institutions and traditions, they are typically the guardians of *real* politics that serve majority interests. Thus "the people" claim popular sovereignty and stewardship of the nation because it is their values, beliefs and institutions that provide the nation with a true sense of itself through authentic expressions of the popular will.

Finally, populism is a revolt against elite power. Canovan (1999) argues that the idea of "elites" should be understood broadly: populists are challenging elites in politics (especially those in mainline political parties), economics (the super-rich and corporate bosses) and culture (cosmopolitan metropolitans, academics and the media class). Elites are seen as disconnected from and contemptuous of ordinary people and their traditions. Because of their lack of grounding in workaday life, elites represent dangerous partisan interests that threaten popular sovereignty. Thus, political, economic and cultural elites have to be dislodged from power because they actively seek to distort and undermine the will of the majority.

What is important to bear in mind here is how, in Michael Kazin's (1998a: 3) words, populist politics are "elastic and promiscuous": populist ideas about grievances, the people and elites can apply to both left-wing and right-wing political thought. This is the power and allure of populism—especially for grassroots political actors. Rather than articulating a coherent set of political ideas and positions like a traditional ideology, populism allows actors to express "idealistic discontent" (ibid: 3) with the current practice of democracy and verbalise "moralistic... normative distinction[s] between 'the elite' and 'the people' " (Mudde 2004: 544). Populism gives actors the opportunity to reflect and re-interpret a generalised "mood" of angst about "politics as usual" and a means by which to disrupt the taken-for-granted ways in which power is exercised by both actors and institutions (Canovan 1999: 6). Because populism

does not advance a particular political ideology as such but advocates a different process by which democratic politics is conceived and practised, I argue that it should be understood as a political strategy for organising and mobilising the public. This is why it can be used, with seemingly little difficulty or contradiction, by both the right and left in grassroots movements at this moment in time in the United States. I will now turn to explore how populism is operationalised in the US context.

Populism is a central concept in US politics; its emphasis on self-rule and democratic egalitarianism is part of the mythology of the founding of the United States and forms the basis of ideas of "American exceptionalism[3]" (Kazin 1998a; Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). This mixture of populism and patriotism is important in this context because these ideas crowd out other ways of building solidarity and mobilising ordinary people. Populism displaces various revolutionary ideologies because populism is perceived as an inherently "American" idea whilst revolutionary political ideas are seen as dangerously foreign or even seditious (Kazin 1998b). Because America has already had its revolution for equality and freedom, transformative politics are seen as largely irrelevant to the American political tradition because they seek to alter that which has already been perfected in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Populism does not seek to overturn the basic mechanics of American democracy; rather, it attempts to better perfect what has already been laid out by the Founding Fathers. As Kazin (1998b: 80) notes: "America is viewed [by populists] as an isolated island of civic virtue whose people have to be constantly on guard" against efforts to undermine or radically change it by unpatriotic elites. Thus populism in US politics should be seen as a conservative form of practice. By staying within the bounds of patriotism and by seeking legitimacy by appealing to the status quo, populism does not attempt to revolutionise society but to preserve and even strengthen various social conventions and traditions.

From this discussion about the constitutive elements of populism, we can see how difficult it might be for feminist justice claims to be legitimised within this form of grassroots politics. For the purposes of this paper, I define feminist justice claims as those ideas and political practices that seek to "end sexist oppression" by advancing the political, economic, social and cultural equality for different types of women[4] (hooks 2000). I argue that generalised appeals to "the people" do not appear to recognise differences and inequalities among and

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[3] Proponents of American exceptionalism argue that America is a beacon of light and inspiration for other nations because it waged a war of independence based on the principles of individual liberty and equality. The American Revolution was a unique event in that it combined Enlightenment ideas with a revolutionary fervour and this confirms America's distinctive place in human history.

[4] I use the term 'different types of women' to signal the fact that 'women' are not a homogenous group and that considerable inequalities and conflicts exist between women on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age and disability (Spelman 1988; Mouffe 1992; Emejulu 2011).

between individuals and groups due to "race", ethnicity, gender and class, and may make it difficult to incorporate feminist analyses or practices. However, since women seem to be key actors in both left-wing and right-wing populist grassroots politics—both in terms of their leadership and their mass actions—it is important to explore in more depth what happens to feminist justice claims when they intersect with populist politics. I will first turn to analyse the so-called "progressive populism" on the left.

Progressive populism and the suppression of feminist justice claims

Progressive populism in the United States traces its roots back to the late 19th century when small farmers and artisans in the South and the West organised the People's Party to counter the growing domination of industrialists and large landowners (Fisher 1994; Kazin 1998a, 1998b). Small farmers were unable to sell their crops at market at a competitive rate and artisans were being deskilled by new industrial production techniques. The People's Party provided a platform for "ordinary people" (in this case, mostly white evangelical Christian men and women) to articulate their grievances about capitalist elites' destructive impact on their livelihoods and the collusion of political elites that allowed this abuse to continue. Simultaneously, Marxist actors and trade unionists were also articulating similar critiques about operation of industrial capitalism and the immiseration of the urban working classes (Fink 1994; Fisher 1994). Throughout the 20th century, left-wing community organising actors have used this analysis of economic exploitation and political corruption as a strategy for organising and mobilising poor and working class communities (Alinsky 1946, 1968; Fisher 1994). These ideas of populism were revived in the early 1980s—a time of right-wing retrenchment and the dismantling of the Lyndon Johnson's Great Society reforms—as a new way to appeal to majority interests within a community and are still used in community organising today (for example see Chambers 2003; DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2009; Atlas 2010).

The New Populist neighbourhood movement was not unified; it sprung up in different regions across the country and focused on a variety of issues including housing, anti-nuclear protests and large-scale job losses due to factory closures (Boggs 1983: 344). Perhaps the best known manifestation of new populism is the now defunct Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now (ACORN) which was a nation-wide network of grassroots groups working on a range of issues including voter registration and turnout, redlining and loan sharking (Delgado 1986; Fisher 1994; Atlas 2010). Other new populist organisations include Public Citizen, Fair Share, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and Communities Organised for Public Service (COPS). Some of these organisations, such as the Campaign for Economic Democracy (CED) in Santa Monica, California focused on local issues and formal municipal politics whilst others such as Fair Share and Public Citizen sought to build regional networks for social change (Boggs 1983; Delgado 1986). Despite the significant

differences between these organisations, it is possible to identify a progressive populist discursive repertoire that unites them, which I will now turn to discuss.

As Boyte (1980: 7), a key proponent of progressive populism asserts, this new neighbourhood movement represents:

> a renewed vision of direct democracy coupled with a mistrust of large institutions, both public and private. Such a democratic vision represents a rekindled faith in the citizenry itself, a conviction that, given the means and the information, people can make decisions about the course of their lives.

In other words, progressive populism is focused on the decentralisation of power to community-based institutions in order to revitalise the practice of democracy in the US. It is populist through its insistence that ordinary people have the ability and capacity to make decisions about their lives and the "public good".

The social practices of progressive populism are constructed as:

> cooperative group action by ordinary citizens motivated both by civic idealism and by specific grievances...Citizen activism frequently grows directly from traditional and particular group identities that leftists tend to see as "backwaters" of parochialism—religious and civic traditions, ethnic ties and family relations. In the course of struggle, people often feel deepened appreciation for their heritage, symbols and institutions close to home—a far cry from the abstract cosmopolitanism of the dominant liberal or left imagination (Boyte 1980: 7).

As I described earlier, populism in the US tends to displace revolutionary ideologies because that form of politics critiques and seeks to transform "the people". In contrast, progressive populism constructs traditions and folkways as the authentic basis to build real democracy:

> Contemporary citizen organising is more down to earth, more practical, above all more enduring and rooted in the social fabric [of community life]. It seeks to build ongoing organisations through which people can wield power. It is accompanied by a sense of the rightness, creativity and vitality in people's traditions, folkways and culture that 60s radicals were prone to scorn or dismiss (Boyte 1980: 139).

As we can see in the quote above, it is important to note the hostility of progressive populism to revolutionary politics. Socialism, feminism and Black nationalism all appear to be constructed as elitist because they seek to subvert community institutions and traditions. This is crucial to our understanding of populism on the left: it not just party political elites and corporate fat cats that are challenged—groups advancing an explicitly ideological position about the structural nature of social problems and solutions in communities also appear to be branded as elitist.

The structure of the progressive populist discourse hinges on three concepts that drive community organising: the idea of "democracy", a so-called "non-ideological majoritarian strategy", and a focus on organisational "victories" rather than the political education of grassroots actors.

"Democracy" in the progressive populist discourse is understood as "popular power—control by the majority of people, with equality of resources sufficient to make such control realisable—and of direct participation by freely cooperating men and women" (Boyte 1980: 175-6). Democracy is defined as government by and for the people—focusing on the self-governing of free citizens in the interests of the majority. In order to achieve this ideal of self-government the threats to citizen self-rule—elite-dominated institutions—must be limited. As Reissman (1986: 54) declares: "large numbers of people feeling submerged and overpowered by big institutions and big government are attempting to get some control over their lives. They are struggling for empowerment".

In order to achieve this notion of empowerment, populist actors practice a so-called "non-ideological majoritarian strategy". This strategy focuses on building mass-based, multi-class and multi-racial citizen-controlled organisations that are rooted in neighbourhoods, focused on local issues and targeted on winnable issues (Boyte 1980; Delgado 1986; Fisher 1994). "If we are to successfully challenge concentrated wealth and power, we need to begin by building and strengthening autonomous organisations and institutions that are deeply rooted in the experiences and values of people in local communities" (Miller 1986: 132). This strategy is non-ideological because the organisations are built and issues are identified and campaigned on based on the "authentic" interests and concerns of citizens rather than organisers' or outsiders' ideological interpretations of community-based problems and solutions. "Our philosophy is very closely related to our membership's daily life experience. There's no ideology that instructs what we do. People make decisions and they start moving" (Rathke 1979 quoted in Delgado 1986: 190-1).

The strategy is majoritarian because the community organisation is composed of a broad-based constituency which is multi-class and multi-racial and issues are fought for which have broad-based appeal in the neighbourhood. In a contemporary account of progressive populism, Scanlon (2001: 62) argues: "we must choose policy priorities that address the most prevalent economic concerns of US citizens...we must prioritise those policies...which could potentially unify poor, working and middle class citizens". This non-ideological majoritarian strategy ensures that social problems identified by community organising are always framed in terms of the powerful—government and corporations—against the powerless—the (unified and homogenised) people. Potentially divisive issues—especially those related to race and gender—are not pursued because it would compromise the unity and consensus of the organisation. Only issues with a clearly defined enemy and a clear path to success are defined as viable for mobilising and campaigning. As Mike Miller, (1973, quoted in Boyte 1980: 93), a central practitioner of new populism, notes, "grassroots groups must overcome the divide-and-conquer tactics of the powerful; middle-income people are potential allies, not adversaries; tactics should not alienate the public".

It seems that by seeking to build a majority to advocate for a particular community issue requires a broad-based definition of democracy and active

avoidance of elitist ideological domination. Importantly, by supporting the issues and concerns of a numerical majority, this may well lead to an affirmation of the status quo and a marginalisation of issues that challenge established community traditions that reproduce inequalities between different groups.

The final concept of the progressive populist discourse is "victory" which is constructed in two ways. Firstly, building and maintaining a citizen-controlled organisation becomes its own victory for local people—a perpetual self-justification for the process of organising. "This idea of being organised in a constituency-based organisation... is more important than the particular issue we work on. Again, we might lose or we might win and still the need to be organised remains" (Campbell 1979 quoted in Delgado 1986: 202). A permanent organisation, composed of activists ready to react to abuses of power by the state or corporations and who can also advance their own self-interest, is constructed as the most effective kind of power people can wield. Secondly, targeting winnable issues, with a clear enemy and a clear campaign strategy, builds the confidence of citizens and re-enforces the need for a permanent organisation. "An expansion of income transfers and remunerations for domestic labour are not viable policy proposals... populists... must help US families to understand their shared interests in policies that reduce threats to the well-being of all workers" (Scanlon 2001: 66). People will join and actively participate in an organisation that is perceived to be powerful, formidable and effective.

In terms of identity constructions, the progressive populist sense of self is constituted by the way in which it defines "the people". The people are all the same: they are civic-minded, they share the same interests and they are not in conflict with each other over power and resources at the grassroots level. As Wade Rathe (1975 quoted in Fisher 1994, p.148), the former chief organiser for ACORN reflects, "I wanted to build on a majority constituency rather than on a minority, where the next-door neighbours are in it together, not fighting each other". Ultimately, "the people" are reified through the way in which traditions, folkways and community-based institutions are fetishised in the discourse:

> Populism...grows from the living fabric of communities seeking to control the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. Populism...is ultimately about values and cultural meanings. Rather than drawing its base from large organisations...in which people are cut off from their family roots and communal ties, populist politics finds its power and vision in the institutions integral to social life: churches, synagogues, neighbourhood organisations, union locals (Boyte 1985:1).

By defining everyone as the same and by emphasising the essential goodness and unproblematic nature of community structures, these constructions aim to make it easier to build solidarity and organise competing groups for collective action. The problem, however, is that the very real conflicts, contradictions and interests between different groups are ignored for the sake of organisation building. This appears to have the effect of closing down other possible identities—especially feminist consciousness and feminist identities.

Controversial issues are avoided or reframed to make them palpable to the majority interests and as a result, crucial minority issues may well be silenced.

Three types of elites represent the other in the progressive populist discourse: government, corporate and revolutionary. As I have demonstrated throughout the previous discussion of the New Populism movement, not a lot of distinction is made between these three very different types of elites because the discourse constructs them as having the same harmful impact: undermining the self-determination of the people. Whether it is domination through corporate power, through the centralisation of state power or through "ideological" language and ideas, all elites prevent the people from making decisions on issues that are important to them. As Fisher (1994, p.139) argues, "unchecked power has become concentrated in the hands of a very small number of people who are at the helm of the major corporations of the nation. Because government remains unaccountable to most people, it too, along with business is part of the problem". Whilst Boyte (1980, p.9), argues that:

> the left can neither understand nor successfully participate in the citizen ferment [of New Populism] if it sees [community] groups instrumentally—as constituencies to be rallied behind a left or "progressive" agenda... Dialogue that reshapes left categories means recovering activist traditions outside the liberal, socialist, or communist experience.

Homogenising the idea of the people combined with the othering of revolutionary political elites means that, unsurprisingly, feminist justice claims appear to be silenced within the progressive populist discourse. I want to take a closer look at how this marginalisation takes place as this may form the basis by which feminist organising and claim-making can better challenge dominant practices of community organising. Firstly, feminist justice claims are silenced and gender consciousness is suppressed by the progressive populist discourse through the systematic marginalisation of women's interests and experiences. In practice, we can see how this takes place in many community organisations during the 1980s.

In a pioneering article about women community organisers, Cheryl Hyde interviewed a range of women activists to discuss their views of working in male-dominated organisations. One activist notes: "It's the men...that disrupt [our peace affinity group] because they don't have a sense of what collective work is...[and] they're not comfortable with having [a woman] who is trying to help everyone manage their feelings and their conflict" (Woman activist quoted in Hyde 1985: 81). In a similar vein, the Women Organizers' Collective (1990: 12) argues, "we are trained to be organisers in what is largely taken to be a gender-neutral model. But, as is usually the case, this "neutral" model is not neutral at all, because by claiming gender blindness it ignores issues and concerns specific to women".

On a related note, Adamson (1980 quoted in Delgado 1986: 195-6) discusses the impact of silencing both race and gender in the new neighbourhood movement organisations:

> For young Blacks, if you want to get into what's happening in your community, an ACORN or a Fair Share is not the place to do it... The organisations are inadvertently racist... What they do is they treat everybody the same way. If you don't take into account the fact that there are real differences culturally, you're going to have problems... The hierarchy [of these organisations] is reflective of essentially what society is; it's all white and mostly male.

From the quotes above, we can see how the progressive populist discursive practice of constructing "the people" as unified and homogenous appears to suppress gender identity and feminist justice claims. The systematic way in which the discourse silences gender is one of the main reasons for the development of explicitly feminist community organisations during the 1980s and 1990s (Hyde 1985; Ackelsberg 1988; Bookman and Martin 1988; Women Organizers' Collective 1990; Stall and Stoecker 1997).

Secondly, we can see how the deployment of the notion of authenticity in the progressive populism discourse seeks to silence feminist justice claims. For example, feminist arguments such as this from Ansara and Miller (1986: 154-5) pose, I think, irresolvable problems for the discourse of progressive populism:

> Important ethnic, racial, class and cultural differences divide "the people"... The new populism of community organisations has not developed either an intellectual breadth or a strategic clarity that would create conditions for a broader appeal to the constituencies that are at the heart of the women's... movement.

Because feminism seeks to transform the relationships, identities and values associated with "women" and "men" this is constructed by the progressive populist discourse as a "special interest" that will split and undermine populists' hard won work of building the unity and solidarity of the people. Sawer (2004: 13), exploring the fate of state feminism in Canada, argues that populist politics reconstruct feminist justice claims from a "public good" to a "special interest" by severing the link between feminist justice claims and redistributive justice claims: "Doubt was being cast on the authenticity of such [feminist] goals and on the interests and motives of their proponents... [Feminist groups] were no longer regarded as having an authentic democratic role... but rather were depicted as self-interested and unrepresentative special interests".

Within the discursive landscape of progressive populism, we can see similar processes at work: feminist justice claims are constructed as incapable of advancing the people's authentic interests because it only speaks to and supports "special pleaders". Scanlon (2001: 64) argues that rejecting feminist and anti-racist justice claims makes good sense strategically because these ideas have very little popular support; it is reasonable to focus only on authentic issues that will unify a majority: "It is increasingly clear that policies targeted to address racial and gender injustices have insufficient potential to animate a broad-based movement for economic justice... race and gender based policies cannot unify the bottom two-thirds of the US population".

The author goes on to argue that feminist and anti-racist struggles are counterproductive for the left because they alienate potential allies. Better, he

argues, to focus instead on a "working families" agenda that "could allow us to use a unifying language about... the fortunes of common people" (ibid: 64). Because women and minority groups would disproportionately benefit from measures to reduce economic inequality, it is sound politics to jettison ideas and identities that might put this strategy at risk. Furthermore, since most Americans "simultaneously yet rationally hold substantial economic populist sentiments and conservative beliefs...[it] may not be necessary to educate or enlighten many... Americans before speaking to their basic class interests" (Martin 2010: 374). Again, in terms of strategy and reflecting the authentic views of the people, from a progressive populist standpoint, it seems a folly to unnecessarily antagonise potential allies by focusing on issues that might alienate them from the cause of social justice.

From the quotations above, we can see how feminism (and anti-racism) are constructed as "divisive", "political" and/or "partisan" whilst populism is constituted as "unifying", "strategic" and "viable". Progressive populism, in its attempt to build a majority, appears to systematically displace and marginalise identities and practices—especially those related to the development of gender consciousness, feminist policy preferences and feminist justice claims.

To understand this self-censorship by progressive populism we need to recall how populist politics in the US context is seeking to interpellate patriotic ideals. It seems that as long as progressive populism seeks its legitimacy and authenticity in American exceptionalism rather than in transformative social justice ideas, it will continue to suppress gender consciousness and feminist practices in urban movements.

I will now turn to analyse the discourse, identities and social practices of the Tea Party and explore the fate of feminist justice claims within this right-wing discursive repertoire.

The women of the Tea Party: motherhood as anti-feminism

The Tea Party positions itself as the heir to the populist politics of Barry Goldwater in the 1960s and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. During the 1964 Presidential race, Goldwater, a Republican, campaigned as an anti-communist, a free-marketeer and above all, an angry man tired of the tyranny of state over the lives of ordinary people. Here is Goldwater (1964, p.1-2) summarising his political philosophy:

> It is the cause of Republicanism to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people... We Republicans... define government's role where needed at many, many levels, preferably through the one closest to the people involved. Our towns and our cities, then our counties, then our states, then our regional contacts - and only then, the national government. That, let me remind you, is the ladder of liberty, built by decentralised power.

Goldwater's failed campaign for the presidency articulated a different emphasis on the role of the state which contrasted with the dominant model used during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in the 1960s. Rather than the state

being defined as "activist" whereby its role is to intervene in the lives of citizens in order to ensure equality of opportunity and (to a lesser extent in the US context) equality of outcome, Goldwater defines the state in a much more limited way. The state's responsibility is simply to maintain the societal status quo in terms of morality and class, racial and gender hierarchies (Klatch 1988; Diamond 1995). This populist backlash against the social reforms of both the New Deal and Great Society programmes captured the imagination of a burgeoning grassroots right-wing movement (Fisher 1994; McGirr 2002; Lassiter 2007).

When Reagan (1981, p.1-2) comes to power in 1981, he echoes Goldwater's populist ideas and places them at the heart of his Administration:

> We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history... In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?

The Tea Party is organised and mobilised in relation to the banking crisis of 2008 and the subsequent ballooning of national debt (Lepore 2010; Lilla 2010; Zernicke 2010). In order to prevent the meltdown of global capitalism, George W. Bush and then Barack Obama bailed out the financial services industry, large mortgage providers such as Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae and the auto industry, most notably General Motors through the Troubled Asset Relief Programme (TARP) (Lanchester 2010). In addition, Obama and the Federal Reserve instituted a "stimulus" to the economy by pumping new money into banks and infrastructure projects in order to stabilise the market, support job creation and prompt banks to start lending again to businesses. The almost total collapse of the American economy and the subsequent efforts to prevent another Great Depression by increasing government spending to bail out the banks was a salient political moment that sparked the initial Tea Party mobilisation (Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). Importantly, Obama's continuation with his other domestic priorities, especially healthcare reform, also galvanised right-wing grassroots actors.

I label the discourse of the Tea Party as "regressive populism" as its goals are concerned with limiting government intervention in the lives of Americans. Zernike (2010: 2) summarises the aims of the Tea Party as organising for "less invasive government, lower taxes, [and] fealty to the view of the nation the founders enshrined in the Constitution". It is important, however, to note that the "Tea Party" is not a unified movement. It is constituted by a number of local and regional groups and has no centralised leadership (ibid: 2010). Certainly, organisations such as FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Patriots and the Tea Party Express and Republican politicians and commentators such as Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin and Jim DeMint are all seeking legitimacy to speak for and direct Tea Party activities, but, at this moment in time, no one national organisation or identifiable leader has emerged to corral this disparate group of

actors. Regressive populism's social practices are two pronged: organising and mobilising networked community organisations to challenge elite domination in government and transforming the Republican Party to make it more reflective of the authentic will of the people.

The regressive populist discourse is structured by one key idea: a return to the first principles of the Founding Fathers. The Founding Fathers—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and a number of others—are used as a proxy by the discourse to interpellate two inter-related ideas related to retrenchment. Firstly, looking back to the Founding Fathers is a discursive device to build solidarity among Tea Partiers by uniting grassroots actors, rather paradoxically, under a banner of radical individual autonomy. The Founders, regressive populists argue, conceived of America as a place of unfettered freedom whereby individuals could pursue happiness unconstrained by an overweening state. Regressive populism:

> fires up emotions by appealing to individual opinion, individual autonomy, and individual choice, all in the service of neutralizing, not using, political power. It gives voice to those who feel they are being bullied, but this voice has only one, Garbo-like thing to say: I want to be left alone (Lilla 2010: 2).

Liberty for regressive populism means a focus on negative rights—the right of citizens not to be interfered with in getting on in life by other citizens or by the state (Diamond 1995: 6-9). In interviewing a number of Tea Partiers across the country, Zernicke (2010: 10) found that "they had a visceral belief that government had taken control of their lives—and they wanted it back... They had a strong faith in the autonomous individual". For regressive populism, "real" autonomy can only be guaranteed by a limited state.

This notion of autonomy is important as this helps to shed light on the second idea that is interpellated by the promotion of the Founding Fathers: laissez-faire capitalism. It seems strange that in light of capitalism's self-evident destructive activities in the financial sector and its negative effect on the economic well-being of the American public that regressive populism adopts this concept. However, because the guiding principle of the discourse is a libertarian view of negative liberty, this form of autonomy can only be achieved through the practice of free-market capitalism. Capitalism is the symbol and safeguard of negative liberty because it is only in an environment of a decentralised state and a free market that individuals can be radically free to pursue happiness. "Free markets just needed room to work... it was the American people, not the elites in Washington, who knew how to confront the [financial] crisis" (Zernicke 2010: 24). Since the state has been captured and is controlled by self-interested elites—both unrepresentative party political hacks and bureaucratic "pointy-headed" social reformers—the state cannot be trusted to protect liberty. The state is fatally compromised and corrupted. Only the free market, which is ideologically free from elite interference, can guarantee individuals the opportunity to practice freedom.

These structuring devices of the discourse orientate its social practices in terms of community organising. What is interesting to note is how the social practices of the discourse mirror those of the progressive populism. As I discussed earlier, since the Tea Party self-consciously models its community organising work on progressive populism, we see two movements, using similar ideas of populism, similar strategies for organising but mobilising actors for divergent goals. For instance, the elite Washington-based organisation, FreedomWorks, which is seeking to capture and direct the disparate groups which all identify with the aims of the Tea Party, discusses strategies for organising the movement like this:

> Don't reject that label [of community organiser]! Embrace that label... true community organisers are what this movement is all made of. We don't like that term because now we have a Community Organiser-in-Chief [referring to Barack Obama who worked as an organiser in Chicago in the 1980s] who got his lessons from Saul Alinsky. I say, let's read Saul Alinsky... and let's use it against them (Steinhauser quoted in Zernicke 2010: 3).

With this explicit adoption of progressive populist practices, regressive populism also uses a majoritarian strategy to unite "the people" and to avoid unnecessary alienation of potential allies. Again, FreedomWorks argues that activists should avoid discussing social issues (especially abortion and gay marriage) and stay focused on arguments for a limited state and individual autonomy: "It's going to split this movement, it's going to distract us... The debt is $13billion. Why would you focus on gay marriage when that's the real threat to freedom—the debt?" (Steinhauser quoted in Zernicke 2010: 42).

Regressive populism also directs its community organising work towards infiltrating and co-opting the Republican Party to force out so-called Republicans in Name Only (RINOs) to ensure that the Party reflects the authentic interests of the people. This practice of co-optation takes on two forms: primary challenges and transforming local party leadership. Sometimes grassroots actors target centre-right elected officials who are deemed to be ideologically compromised by serving elite interests in Washington rather than the will of their constituents[5]. A primary challenge is instituted when a Tea Party candidate enters a local race in an attempt to displace the incumbent and win the nomination as the Republican candidate. Other times, grassroots actors are organised to infiltrate the Republican party "from below" by running as local party officials and thus attempting to change the nature of the Party from the inside (Zernicke 2010).

Although regressive and progressive populism share similar social practices, in terms of identity constructions, regressive populism is noteworthy—especially in terms of gender consciousness and identity (Klatch 1988; Jetter, Orleck and Taylor 1997; Blee 1998). In the discourse, the idea of the self is constituted in

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[5] For an excellent exploration of how the Tea Party uses primary challenges to pressurise the Republican Party to change, see the *This American Life* (29th October 2010) episode entitled: "This Party Sucks" http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/417/this-party-sucks

two ways. Similar to progressive populism, the self is constructed as the "authentic people". Within regressive populism, the idea of the people is typically supplemented by appeals to the normalcy of actors involved in the movement:

> I don't think people understand how normal these folks are and how diversified. You've got evangelicals and libertarians walking hand-in hand in cause of defence of individual liberties, against encroachments of big government... These folks are as normal as you and me. It could be your mother, your father (Armey 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010: 44).

I suspect that one of the reasons the discourse deploys authenticity and constructs its subjects as "normal" and "real" Americans is to justify why the membership and the leadership of the various Tea Partier groups is highly unrepresentative of the American population. Unlike progressive populism, which was seeking to unite middle and working class Americans of all backgrounds, the Tea Party appears to be dominated by white, educated, middle to upper class men and women who hold far-right views[6] (Zernicke 2010; Parker 2011). The discursive pattern in regressive populism repeats the tropes of "real America" and "real Americans" as a way to legitimise the interests and social practices of a very narrow group of Americans as the true voice representing of all Americans.

This narrow group of actors taking on the identity of "real Americans", however, appears to be led by women and unlike in the progressive populist discourse, these women seem to articulate a clear gender identity and a right-wing gender consciousness. Importantly, these women appear to have found space within the Tea Party to organise *as women.* Here are a few examples of these expressions:

> You know the old saying that if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy... Well, when legislation messes with mama's kids and it affects her family, then mama comes out fighting (Dawald 2010 quoted in Vogel 2010: 2).

> Women can be stay-at-home moms and public servants... This isn't about gearing "conservative" towards women and separating the movement. It's not about changing the [Republican] party to suit the identity. It's about reaching out to people like you. (Mott 2011 quoted in Hess 2011: 3).

> Barack Obama's fatal mistake was that he came between me and my child's future (Stefano 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010b: 108).

From the language used above, we can see how some women use their identity as mothers to make sense of their activism within the Tea Party. In keeping with the regressive ideas of this discourse, it is not surprising that some women find a seemingly stereotypical idea of "concerned motherhood" as a valuable way of informing their community organising work. Indeed, it seems that the discourse creates space for these types of identities to be generated in order to legitimise

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[6] Trying to understand who Tea Partiers are is a highly contested topic. However, Zernicke (2010), through a New York Times poll and Parker (2011), through a multi-state survey do appear to document that middle to higher income whites holding far-right views are over-represented in the Tea Party whilst various minority groups of any political persuasion are vastly under-represented.

its credentials as an authentic expression of the people. Having women identify as mothers fighting for their families' futures further deepens the populist claims of the discourse.

The other is constructed, unsurprisingly, as cultural and political elites. Ironically, economic elites are not challenged or displaced. It is both the Democratic and Republican Parties and the entrenched liberal elite in the mainstream media and in government bureaucracies that are othered in this discourse. For example, this activist is discussing why she was attracted to the Tea Party and why she started organising: "It was [composed of] very motivated people, people like me... They hadn't spend a lifetime being politicians; they didn't go to the Kennedy School of Government [at Harvard University], they didn't work as a staffer on Capitol Hill" (Stefano 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010a: 1). As we can see, politicians, east coast liberals and political insiders are all othered by being constructed as inauthentic and incapable of serving the will of the people.

The question remains, however, why regressive populism creates space for at two ideas of the self—the people and concerned mothers—whilst the progressive populist discourse suppresses gender identity and consciousness. Klatch (1988) and Schreiber (2010) argue that, for social conservatives, motherhood is a key identity and institution through which to defend traditional moral values. The way in which regressive populism constitutes this particular identity of concerned mothers also seems to corroborate Zernicke's (2010) and Parker's (2011) findings about the reactionary views of many Tea Partiers. As I noted earlier, this phenomenon of self-censorship on the left can be partly explained by populism's patriotic roots in the US. Left-wing populists have to work harder to prove their pro-American credentials. Some progressive appear to be haunted by the "extreme" rhetoric of 1960s social movements and do not want be labelled as radical as this might derail their political aims. Therefore progressive populism highlights victories of "the people" over broader analyses of systemic change.

However, regressive populism is employing some interesting discursive methods with regards to women in activism and this needs to be explored in further detail. In order to prompt some women into action, the discourse needs to appeal to an essentialised identity that many women deeply value—motherhood. Rather than interpret what Nancy Naples (1992) calls "activist mothering" as solely a progressive activity, it is important to define conservative women's social practices that seek to preserve traditional social relations and reduce the role of the state in the lives of women and their families as activist mothering as well (for an interesting discussion of this which focuses on elite right-wing women's social practices see: Schreiber 2002 and 2008). Women's Tea Party organising seems to generate a gender identity, consciousness and a sense of efficacy which influences their policy preferences.

Although she is discussing left-wing women, Sue Tolleson-Rinehart's (1992: 31) analysis of gender consciousness appears to perfectly describe the conservative women of the Tea Party: "[Gender] consciousness beyond stimulating women's

beliefs about their own political roles, also reorganises orientations toward other issues by motivating women to believe that they have unique perspectives on public problems and can offer unique solutions". Indeed, when Sarah Palin discusses her idea of "Mama Grizzlies" she is attempting to channel a tough-minded identity of motherhood that seeks to mobilise women for political action based on their unique perspectives as women and mothers. By adopting the role of activist mothers, some women actors in the Tea Party seem to be infused with a sense of efficacy and work towards issues that are important to them and their families.

The question remains, however, whether identifying as women and mothers is sufficient for generating a feminist perspective and articulating feminist justice claims within the populist discourse of the Tea Party. Tellingly, the policy preferences of the Tea Party—the rolling back of the state and the unleashing of free-market capitalism—are not compatible with a feminist vision of equality and social justice. What we appear to be seeing in the Tea Party is a familiar and constrained performance of gender in right-wing politics (Klatch 1988; Jetter, Orleck and Taylor 1997; Blee 1998). Rather than generating feminist identities and justice claims, a traditional, moralistic and highly problematic identity of "activist mother" is constituted whereby "mothers' activism may indeed (temporarily) *expand* the base of political participation but with the goal of *limiting* citizenship and constraining democracy (Ackelsberg 2001: 406, emphasis in the original text). Women identifying *as women* and entering public space to be activists in the Tea Party is not necessarily a positive process that will strengthen feminism or support democratic politics since these women appear to be advocating for policies that would reduce the equality for all citizens through the dismantling of key state institutions and social protection systems. A gender identity of concerned motherhood is not enough to generate feminist justice claims by these right-wing women in action.

From my analysis we can see how populism in both left-wing and right-wing community organising silences feminist justice claims and makes it difficult for women to develop a feminist identity that might orientate their actions towards radical social change. In my final section I will turn to discuss whether, in spite of the contradictions between feminism and populism, these two discourses can somehow be reconciled.

The possibilities for reconciling populism and feminism

It is unsurprising to discover how populist community organising discourses and practices suppress feminist justice claims. Because populist actors are concerned with voicing multi-issue grievances about the actions of elites, the discourse of populism is not really designed or equipped to accommodate a sophisticated construction of "the people". That the public feel they are being shut out of their democracy, being bossed around, disrespected and economically exploited by selfish elites is sufficient enough to motivate people

into action. Feminist politics, of course, make complimentary critiques about the problems that plague liberal democracies. As Minnich (1986: 191) argues:

> A feminist vision of populism shares... a commitment to the rights of all people and an insistence that these rights are not to be set aside in the interests of any power group. We, too, insist that those governments are legitimate that derive their power from the people... We, too, insist that significant disparities of power in society disrupt the polity and so take our stand with those who lack power is not just a personal problem but a threat to the commonwealth.

Given this shared critique, the question remains whether populism and feminism can be reconciled. On the one hand, it is clear that these two perspectives are incompatible with each other. Populism derives its persuasive power from its ability to unite a diverse group of people under a single banner of grievance against elites. In hegemonic discourses of populism, anything that unnecessarily problematises this unity (in this case, feminism) must be silenced as this weakens the movement for change as solidarity will be compromised. This is why acknowledging power imbalances between people or advocating for specific policy solutions that disproportionately benefit a single group are marginalised.

Populism is a utopian "politics of faith" in the promise of democratic renewal (Canovan 1999, 2004; Arditi 2004). In the US, during this moment in time, there exists a yawning gap between the promise of democracy and what is actually delivered by elites and institutions. Populism, both progressive and regressive, brings into focus the democratic deficit that a significant number of Americans experience. As Arditi (2004:142) argues, populism haunts liberal democracy like a spectre "disturbing and renewing the political process". Thus it seems that populism and feminism cannot be reconciled because populism is not interested in the political, social and cultural concerns of feminism. Populism is the flipside to the operation of politics as usual. It is focused only on re-linking the ideal of democracy to its actual existing practices. This is why populism haunts democracy: it is always fluttering on the edges the democratic machinery of the state ready to strike when machinery of parties, politicians and bureaucracies become self-serving.

On the other hand, several left-wing community organising theorists argue that populism and feminism (and other identity-based movements) can co-exist. Rather than construct progressive populism as solely a practice of redistributive justice, these authors claim that populism can be reconstructed into something they call "transformative populism" (Kennedy, Tilly and Gaston 1990; Kleidman 2004). "Transformative populism [insists] on understanding and valuing diversity and on dealing with all kinds of inequality and injustice and not just the one type that affects the largest number of people in a community...[It builds] popular consciousness that makes it more difficult to shatter or co-opt the coalition" (Kennedy, Tilly and Gaston 1990: 319).

For transformative populists, community organising is constructed as a process by which to support forms of solidarity that encourage an organised and democratic left-wing voice that speaks to the discrete interests and the common private troubles of different groups. By building alliances based on difference,

this form of populism is constructing ways in which a diverse range of individuals and groups can struggle together for expanded social, political and economic rights. Ultimately, transformative populism is characterised as a way in which community-based problems can be linked to and explained by the social, political and economic structures of American society that reproduce inequalities.

While this way of reconciling populism with feminism is persuasive in theory, I am not convinced about how effective it is in the practice of displacing hegemonic forms of populism within left-wing community organising movements. Indeed, as I have demonstrated earlier in this article, progressive populism's dominant practices of suppressing difference—especially feminist claims—are well documented (Sen 2001; Martin 2002; Leavitt 2003). Based on my analysis of texts, I do not think it is possible for feminism and progressive populism to be reconciled without feminist justice claims being set aside for the sake of "solidarity". The logic of populism demands homogeneity and unity among "the people"—this appears to me to be an irreconcilable difference with the feminist project of expanding the idea of politics and political subjects in order to achieve equality and justice for women.

When we consider right-wing populism, the logic of populism continues to pose irresolvable problems for feminism but for different and perhaps more dangerous reasons. The regressive populism of the Tea Party appears to create space for women to adopt a gender identity and develop a form of gender consciousness. However, this identity of "activist mother", whilst providing meaning for some women's actions in public space, is deeply problematic. As Orleck (1997: 5) argues, right-wing activist mothers are not necessarily acting from positions of liberation: "The institution of motherhood... regulates acceptable behaviour, restricts expression and designates appropriate spaces for action... It is against the nexus of power relations that mother-activism must be assessed". Activism to maintain hegemonic gender roles and gender-based oppression may well promote efficaciousness but this form of activism should not be confused with social justice practices that seek to transform what we think is possible for women and men. Women organising *as women* is not necessarily feminist and as feminist actors we must guard against our language and practices being co-opted to legitimise anti-feminist and illiberal activism.

Conclusions

Populist politics are about articulating grievances, building solidarity among "the people" and challenging political, economic and cultural elites. Populist actors promote the concept of "authenticity" to movement outsiders, potential allies and to elites in order to legitimate their actions and transform the dominant practice of power in democratic regimes. Populism in the United States typically displaces revolutionary ideologies because populism is strongly associated with the founding myths of the nation in terms of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness. At this moment in time in the US, community

organising groups on both the left and the right are using populism as a way to mobilise local people and influence the policy outcomes at the local, state, national and international levels. In this article I explored how both left-wing and in right-wing populist discourses—in different ways and for different reasons—marginalise and silence feminist justice claims.

I analysed how left-wing progressive populist actors, concerned with being perceived as patriotic by outsiders, actively undermined and silenced feminist claims. The progressive populist discourse promotes gender neutrality in community organisations to marginalise women who seek to identify as women whilst at the same time operationalising a politics of authenticity to reconstruct feminist claims from "social justice" to "special interest" thus labelling feminism as an unrepresentative expression of elite partisan interests. This silencing of feminism was justified in terms of strategy: because feminist ideas cannot muster a majority in a given neighbourhood, it must be jettisoned for ideas and policies that can deliver a numerical majority to the movement.

In contrast, I also analysed how a right-wing regressive populist discourse as operationalised by the Tea Party used claims about motherhood to mobilise a constituency for action. Drawing on a rich mix libertarian ideas of radical personal autonomy whilst also borrowing organising strategies from progressive populism, this discourse seeks to reverse the New Deal and Great Society reforms by reducing the role of the state in lives of individual Americans. I examined how some women in the Tea Party, spurred on by the language of retrenchment, seemed to articulate a gender identity to make sense of their grassroots activism. Due to the development of a right-wing gender identity which limited women's ideas about themselves and their social role to traditional notions of motherhood, I argued that women in the Tea Party may well be undermining feminism and democracy through policy preferences that seek to reduce the equality of all citizens. Feminists working at the grassroots should be deeply suspicious of populist claims and practices for the organisation and mobilisation of different groups, since, based on my analysis, this appears to necessitate the displacement of feminist identities and justice claims in order to effectively constitute "the people" against "the elites".

Canovan (1999) discusses how democracy has two faces: one of faith and one of pragmatism. Populism, like feminism, can be understood as a politics of faith as it is demanding a transformation in the operation and practice of democracy through the redistribution of political, economic and cultural power from the few to the many. However, populism's construction of a fictitious people render its politics highly dangerous to the very democracy it is seeks to fortify because it denies the indispensable ingredient that gives democracy meaning: pluralism. By ignoring difference, populism cannot bring the promise of democracy into being—the process of different citizens encountering and deliberating with each other in public space to collectively identify problems and make just decisions.

Although much agonised over and debated, contemporary feminisms (and other politics of difference movements) do seek to make democracy meaningful by creating spaces, opportunities and processes for the articulation of different

social perspectives and collective decision-making about the nature of justice. As we move into a winter of discontent, populist movements are sweeping the globe and have, as they are designed to do, captured the imagination and drawn many people into protests in which they might not have otherwise participated. From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street to *los indignados* to the alarming rise of the far-right in Europe, populist politics are on the upsurge. Feminist activists should be deeply sceptical and on-guard about these populist movements because if "the people" are invoked in ways that deny the plurality of various social experiences and perspectives for the sake of a mistaken belief in or cynical promotion of an abstract ideal of "unity" then feminists may well be left out in the cold.

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