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Gender Grassroots Democracy

Five Demands for a Queer Politics

Animated by a queer ethos, the concept of affirmative and transformative recognition opposes the type of social reality that hierarchically classifies and categorizes people, and that stabilizes this hierarchy through laws, institutions, representations, positions, and so forth. From a queer perspective, hierarchical division and distribution don't appear as unchangeable facts, or as 'natural' realities. Thus, a comprehensive implementation of this ethos will require the deconstruction of categories and hierarchies (as well as their consequences and effects for humans). It will also require those of a 'higher' standing within existing hierarchies to actively reflect and transform their own status. (Perko 2008: 66)

What is gender grassroots democracy?

Gender grassroots democracy is a neologism that proposes the inseparability of the meanings and implications associated with two key concepts: gender democracy and grassroots democracy. I contend that the notion of gender grassroots democracy enables us to critique the social and conceptual contradictions associated with the term, gender democracy. As such, it allows us to conceive of a grassroots version of gender relations, social relations, and even alternative forms of socialization. The existing concept of gender democracy is hampered by a number of immanent, irreducible contradictions: on the one hand, it pushes for general emancipation and democratic participation for all women, persons, and sexes; and on the other hand, it encourages the formation of female elites. This is where the notion of gender grassroots democracy comes in. Borrowing from a host of theoretical and activist traditions associated with the new social movements, it takes queer theory as a starting point in order to articulate demands for a queer politics. Centered around the neologism "gender grassroots democracy," this intellectual project contains utopian elements, which are necessary in order to critique existing social relations, and to question the seeming lack of alternatives (i.e., a rhetoric that is often used to prevent social change). In what follows, I will outline the set of problems that can result from an unspecified use of the concept of gender democracy. Next, I will use four different critiques of gender democracy to formulate five political demands of gender grassroots democracy, which are based on the insights of queer theory.

2. What is gender democracy?

In 2005, only 8 out of 187 national houses of parliament have no female members. 16% of all members of parliament worldwide are women (Samouiller/Jabre: 439). This could easily be seen as the result of a successful realization of gender democracy, going back to the efforts of women's movements. But in order to evaluate the successes of this approach, we need to start by clarifying the range of its political claims. So, what is gender

democracy about, exactly? Roughly speaking, the term, gender democracy, must be understood along the lines of two dimensions:

- A national and supranational dimension, where gender democracy figures as the equality of men and women within the context of representative democracy (European Pact for Gender Equality)
- A dimension influenced by feminist and gender theory, which includes a comprehensive critique of both representative democracy, the nation state, and supranational forms of governance

2.1. Gender democracy in the context of European gender equality policies

The first dimension of the term 'gender democracy,' which is particularly relevant within the context of the European Union, promotes "the intention to create democratic relations between men and women."¹ As Beate Hoecker points out, the successes of this notion of gender democracy are being evaluated with regard to women's quantitative level of participation: "[W]omen in positions of executive political power are still rare throughout Europe. Considering that the average percentage of female members of parliament is currently at roughly 20%, most EU member nations must still be called 'unfinished democracies'². Generally speaking, this dimension of the term 'gender democracy' that affects EU policy can be understood as the project to create "a better balance between men and women" (Walter Hollstein: 10). This type of gender democracy locates the processes necessary to democratize the relations between men and women within the frameworks of representative democracy, the nation state, and supranational bodies of governance. By definition, the efforts to increase the quantitative level of participation of women within existing political, social, and economic structures do not go hand in hand with a radical critique of current gender and social relations. Some examples of past interventions that were based on such an understanding of gender democracy include the initiative "250 Million Women in the EU. And Not One of Them Is Good Enough?"³ (This initiative was concerned with leading positions on the Council of Europe, in the European Parliament, and the European Commission, as well as with high-ranking positions in the offices of EU Foreign and Security Policy), or the initiative "A Thousand Women for Peace"⁴ (In this instance, a thousand women active in the international peace movement were unable to outweigh a single male representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who ended up getting the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize).

¹ A more precise conception of gender grassroots democracy will be developed in my doctoral dissertation.

² <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschlechterdemokratie> (accessed May 20, 2008): "Gender democracy is a term related to the term 'gender mainstreaming.' It concerns the intent to create democratic relations between men and women in society as a whole, as well as in business and organisations. To achieve this goal, gender training programs are often employed, which are designed to create in participants an awareness of existing inequalities, and to point out ways to make the democratization of gender relations a reality."

³ http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/F6ETTA.0.Geschlechterdemokratie_im_europ%E4ischen_Kontext.html (accessed June 16, 2008). Beate Hoecker (2000): "Geschlechterdemokratie im europäischen Kontext. Die Konzepte der Europäischen Union zur Förderung der politischen Beteiligung von Frauen." Politik und Zeitgeschichte (B 31-32/2000).

⁴ <http://www.femalesinfront.eu/default.asp?view=front&lang=de> (accessed on September 26, 2008).

2.2 The feminist and gender-theoretical dimension of gender democracy

The second dimension of the term 'gender democracy' consists of comprehensive critiques of the institutions associated with EU gender equality policies. As Beate Hoecker notes:

1. The goal of EU policies for gender equality must be a fundamental transformation of existing social relations. It is not possible to democratize gender relations by implementing a few minor 'corrections'; on the contrary, what we need is comprehensive social change. A successful gender equality policy must aim to combat the existing structures of gender inequality themselves, because a situation of equal opportunities—in politics and society—will only become a reality if the social conditions for men and women are the same.⁵

Here, Beate Hoecker articulates a demand that goes far beyond merely asking for equal opportunities in terms of formal equality of the sexes. Rather, she demands that the real, material social conditions that enable political work be equal for men and women. It goes without saying that in order to achieve such a "fundamental transformation of existing social relations," there will have to be concerted efforts that work on multiple levels, addressing multiple issues: relations of production, property relations, social hierarchies, decision-making processes, and so forth. In a similar fashion, Birgit Sauer also understands the true project of gender democracy to necessarily exceed the effort to merely integrate women into existing political structures and frameworks. For instance, she critiques both heteronormativity and the structures that mark the nation state as well as representative democracy. Moreover, she raises questions regarding the boundaries between the private and the public sphere⁶. In what follows, my thoughts on gender grassroots democracy will take such wide-ranging critiques into account. It will not be sufficient to point out the contradictions in the existing model of gender democracy. Rather, it will be crucial to go beyond existing models and frameworks by considering alternatives that include elements of utopic thought.

3 Contradictions of gender democracy

The range of demands posed by present-day feminist gender theorists exceeds the limits of constructs like representative democracy and the nation-state. However, the term 'gender democracy' has proved to be unsuitable to make explicit the full range of those demands. In fact, gender democracy has been caught up between, on the one hand, the claim for emancipation and democracy for all, and, on the other hand, the promotion of the formation of female elites. This problem emerges in the form of four key contradictions:

⁵ http://www.peacewiki.uni-klu.ac.at/index.php/1000_Frauen_f%C3%0BCr_den_Friedensnobelpreis (accessed on September 26, 2008).

⁶ Beate Hoecker: "Geschlechterdemokratie im europäischen Kontext. Die Konzepte der Europäischen Union zur Förderung der politischen Beteiligung von Frauen." *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B 31-32/2000). http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/F6ETTA,0,Geschlechterdemokratie_im_europ%E4ischen_Kontext.html (accessed on June 16, 2008).

[3.1] Contrary to its own claim for emancipation for all women, gender democracy promotes the formation of female elites (i.e. promotion of "F-class" women⁷ and "Alpha girls"⁸). In order to illustrate the nature of this contradiction, I will refer to two key texts: Alice Pechriggl's "Basisdemokratie oder: Räte wider den Ver-rat der Ver-tretung" (Pechriggl: 122pp.), and Anna Clar's "Parlamentarismus und Frauenbewegung. Ansätze einer anarchafeministischen Kritik" (Clar: 34pp.).

[3.2] Gender democracy systematically disregards the interdependencies and the interplay between various systems of domination. I will make this argument using Claudia Bernhard's text, "Kritik der historischen Demokratie" (Bernhard: 201pp.).

[3.3] Gender democracy weakens the argument for a "plurality of gender identities," it undermines critiques of identity, and it helps to establish the notion of unambiguous identities. I will flesh out this argument by discussing the problem of dual and multiple membership, as presented in Eva Sängler's text, "Zur strukturellen Repräsentationsproblematik bei der Vertretung von Fraueninteressen am Beispiel des 'Experiments' Unabhängiger Frauenverband" (Sängler: 95-113).

[3.4] Gender democracy ignores the disparate economic and political dependencies that arise with regard to the distribution of global resources. Due to the fact that it still allows itself to be limited by the conceptual framework of the nation-state and the supra-state, gender democracy is ill-equipped to consider, for instance, the relations between "gender in the global north" and "gender in the global south," let alone to articulate new perspectives that aim to democratize these relations.

3.2 Gender democracy promotes the formation of female elites

In its explicit orientation toward the context of representative democracy, and the nation- and the supra-state, gender democracy includes a tendency to promote the formation of female elites. By definition, representative democracy functions in and through hierarchical institutions, and it is within these institutions that gender democracy has pursued its goals, such as a sense of gender equality that is purely quantitative (i.e. 50% women and 50% men in all leading positions, and across all income levels). However, this type of demand implicitly legitimizes oligarchies, elites, hierarchies, classes, and disparities of income. As a result, it also serves to legitimize the formation of female elites. I shall further clarify this critique in the course of a reading of the two previously mentioned essays.

⁷ Thea Dom: *Die neue F-Klasse. Wie die Zukunft von Frauen gemacht wird*. Piper: 2006.

⁸ Meredith Haaf, Susanne Klingner, Barbara Streidl: *Wir Alphamädchen. Warum Feminismus das Leben schöner macht*. Hoffmann & Campe: 2006.

3.2.1 "Basisdemokratie oder: Räte wider den Ver-rat der Ver-tretung" (Alice Pechriggl)

As for the issue of representation, not only is the structure of representative democracy always already hierarchical, i.e. pyramidal; but it also presumes the subsumption of the individual under the rubric of a generality that can be represented. (Pechriggl: 123p.)

The struggle over that generality can be regarded as the flipside of the "struggle over difference" that took place within women's movements and feminist/gender discourses of the 1990s. Which person, which woman gets to speak for another? Wouldn't this imply, in any given case, that many irreducible differences must be ignored? Gender democracy assumes the existence of an absolute difference, of a clear-cut line that separates men from women, and it thus tends to work toward achieving a "just" (in purely quantitative terms) distribution of power between the two sexes. Within the political philosophy of gender democracy, it does not register as problematic if, for instance, a small minority of women gets to represent the large majority of women, or if women of a particular background and way of life get to represent a multitude of other women of radically different backgrounds and ways of life. But it is precisely through such processes that female elites emerge, and the same processes also create hierarchies and competition "within a gender group," especially within the group of women. Can the promotion and legitimization of hierarchy formation among persons fighting for emancipation be the goal of emancipatory movements? Does emancipation mean "emancipation toward the elite"? Current debates around the "new feminism" in the German-speaking world (F-classes, alpha girls) seem to be based on just such an understanding of emancipation.

The mechanisms that constitute representative democracy tend to systematically produce oligarchical structures. Enabled by a seeming lack of alternatives, a minority of women and men can continually reproduce itself within the institutions of democracy, and have itself democratically legitimized at regular intervals:

Thus the acting of all, which is always linked to both the individual and to a collectivity, is being evacuated from the political realm. As a consequence, acting is not only severed from the public sphere that constitutes and changes it, but rather, it gets associated either with the fussy farce of the parliamentary show—which no longer interests anybody, anyway—or with the exchanges of trade and commerce. (Pechriggl: 124)

The contradictions between autonomous and integrationist women's movements ("march through the institutions"), and between reformist and transformationist political practices become apparent as soon as one considers their attitudes toward parliamentary matters. Another axis of difference concerns the extent to which various political discourses discuss structures of domination within women. The deconstructivist debates of the 1990s are a case in point, as they strongly emphasized differences, inclusions and exclusions, hierarchies, invisibilities, erasures, and structures of domination within gender groups. Deconstructivists attempted to make

visible those individuals, groups, traditions, and identities that had been erased by discourses of representation and processes of generalization. At the same time, they sought to question the construction of identities that takes place in a field of tension between choice and coercion. Gender democracy, on the other hand, actually helps to increase structures of domination among women, because it refuses to question the central axes (economic, social) of identity construction:

If we in fact intend to conceive of a radical form of democracy, then a failure to extend that conception to all aspects of society will appear contradictory, even pointless. And if we consider that the current subjugation of individuals is indeed (if not only) economic in nature, then we cannot but articulate, at the same time, the demand for a radical democratization of the economy, which includes the question of private property. (Pechriggl: 128)

Economic and social structures of domination not only create hierarchies and inequalities between gender groups, but also within them. This fact, however, is often ignored. As a result, it is not possible, in any EU member state, to file a lawsuit in cases of class-based or income-based discrimination. By necessity, questions of the sexual division of labor—salaried work vs. unpaid care—, as well as questions regarding the unequal distribution of income are usually being raised in relation to the binary gender difference between men and women. However, the existing inequalities within gender groups (e.g. the formation of a new ethnic underclass in the care sector, consisting almost exclusively of migrant women) are rarely interrogated. If gender democracy is conceptualized mainly as the "emancipation" of white upper- and middle-class women, i.e. a process that takes place on the backs of women of low income and education levels, as well as migrant women who have to take over all the care work that remains, then such a supposedly emancipatory movement clearly fails to question both the hierarchy between men and women, and the hierarchy between women and women. Consequently, this type of gender democracy appears to be based on a self-contradiction, as it is unable to reconcile a general emancipation concept, which is meant to include all people, with a more "careerist" emancipation concept, which is limited to individual, classical career paths. As it is put into practice, an emancipatory project that is limited to specific groups and individuals will have to face its own hierarchical nature. It will in fact weaken social movements like the women's movement by provoking a process of further fragmentation in competing groups and identities. How credible are demands for equality, emancipation, and empowerment, if at the same time they systematically create more structures of hierarchy and domination within a gender group? How credible is the demand for gender equality between men and women, if this is to be achieved through the creation of conflict and competition among women?

3.2.2 "Parlamentarismus und Frauenbewegung. Ansätze einer anarchafeministischen Kritik" (Anna Clar)

To be represented is particularly disastrous for women; against any and all tendencies to centralize and dominate, women need to insist on self-determination. (...) However, any woman who supports parliamentarianism will only reinforce the popular, illusory belief that radical change can be accomplished through this route. (Clar: 36)

Gender democracy promotes the illusion according to which it is legitimate that a minority of women gets to represent, within hierarchically organized structures, the majority of women. But how, exactly, is a small group of white, heterosexual, able-bodied women qualified to speak for the great majority of women, who are marked by a multitude of differences? What kinds of qualifications do they have, aside from the fact that they belong to a privileged group, and that they have the skills and abilities to accept, adopt, and perpetuate a set of traditions and practices of domination? Is it even possible, within the context of democratic practices, to evoke the criterion of "qualification" without, at the same time, supporting the preservation of existing power relations and structures of oligarchy?

If the objective is in fact participation and self-determination for all people—which should be the case for any democratic structure—then there cannot be any women, any men, any gendered individuals who aren't considered to be qualified to determine their own circumstances in every department. What needs to be avoided whenever structures of representation are created is the impression that only certain individuals or groups have the ability (based on e.g. questions of qualification, religion, knowledge, wealth, military power, and so forth) to make decisions that affect all aspects of society (e.g. gender relations, financial affairs, education, commerce, defense, etc.). Due to the large number of persons that comprise today's societies, the formation of structures of representation is both necessary and welcome, as is the creation of small, specialized, and problem-oriented task forces. None of these structures, however, should be populated exclusively with long-standing expertocrats. The most fair and equitable method to fill the positions in these representational structures seems to be sortition. Through the drawing of lots, we can make sure to involve the greatest number of people possible in the democratic processes, while keeping a small group of people from grabbing, reproducing, and perpetuating oligarchic power. Thus, on the one hand, all democratic societies need to support the extensive self-determination of individuals and groups, and, on the other hand, they must seek to establish first and foremost those types of representational structures that aren't based on some kind of "selection" (for whatever reason: qualification, eloquence, appearance, etc.), but that are constituted by the arbitrariness of chance, and that therefore allow for the equal treatment of all people. But in order to collectively encourage self-determination as the main goal, it needs to be constantly and collectively re-learned, re-articulated and conquered, as Anna Clar puts it. Otherwise, we will have to grapple with problems such as certain people, having gotten selected for public office by lot, being unable to execute that office because they are afraid to speak in public:

Women can learn this strong sense of self not in the act of voting, but only in the course of a ceaseless practice of exercising the self, e.g. in forms of "direct action" or in certain free and safe spaces that were carved out against the power of the state. These spaces are based on the understanding that each individual must be in control of the course of action at all times, and that a becoming-independent of the means is to be avoided. (Clar: 36)

Such anarcha-feminist critiques, whose beginnings can be traced back to the 19th century, confront head-on the problems and contradictions of present-day gender democracy, which become manifest in programs for the advancement of women, in policies of gender equality, and in various approaches to gender mainstreaming. In spite of all the efforts that are made in its name, gender democracy's real goal isn't to promote self-organization and self-determination for all, but rather the integration and emancipation of only a select few persons. Gender democracy shows no willingness to conceptualize, support, and try out practices that will allow all individuals to exercise fundamental control over all the social processes that affect their lives.

3.3 Gender democracy disregards the interdependencies of structures of domination

As has become clear by now, gender democracy shows little regard for, and pays little attention to the interdependencies that mark all existing structures of domination. The wealth of interdependencies between various structures of domination, such as heteronormativity, class, race, gender, locality, ability, ethnicity, anti-semitism, capitalism, and antiziganism, is all but reduced to the binary opposition of men and women. If what's at issue is just the statistical equality of men and women, then all other co-existing differences and oppressions are of marginal importance at best. In fact, the inclusion of multiple discriminations, triple oppression, and so forth must be seen as a threat to gender democracy, as it would be ill-equipped to deal with such complex matters. Work around the issue of anti-discrimination has proved valuable by creating awareness of a series of offenses that are in fact actionable, but the problems associated with multiple discriminations, or comprehensive claims for self-determination, or the insights of interdependency theories, cannot be integrated into the framework of gender democracy. Further, gender democracy fails to consider the social divisions and oppressions triggered by conditions of poverty, insufficient income, lack of property, or inferior social status. As they exist today, the social infrastructure and the methods of representative democracy are too weak and too contradictory to give equal rights and opportunities to those who are constantly being disenfranchised by the very same system designed to empower all people. Very early on in its formation, the discourse of anarcha-feminism has addressed the multiplicity of systems of domination, as well as the necessary interdependencies that characterize all of them:

They can be traced back to the anarchist tradition of anarcha-feminism, and they occur both in more recent theoretical texts, and in the work of Louise Michel, Emma Goldmann, and the Mujeres Libres: Women's liberation cannot be achieved in isolation from other social realities. In fact its

condition of possibility is the liberated society, i.e., the abolition of all systems of domination. (Lohscheider: 166)

In her "Kritik der historischen Demokratie," Claudia Bernhard demonstrates how the failure to consider interdependencies (of systems of domination) can have devastating effects on social movements. Using the women's rights movement and the US civil rights movement as examples, she argues that social movements have often been pitted against each other, according to the "divide and conquer" principle. The same mechanism is at play when proponents of gender democracy dismiss the importance of interdependencies: focusing on the fight for integration and inclusion within the institutions of representative democracy, the nation-state, and the supra-state, this social movement systematically ignores the irreducible dependencies that link it to other social movements and potential allies.

3.3.1 "Kritik der historischen Demokratie" (Claudia Bernhard)

With its seeming diversity, the democratic state supplies the prerequisites for the struggle over participation, which then plays out among the groups of lesser privilege, or no privilege. This situation of permanent competition, which is constituted by the oppressions of race, class, and gender, actually helps to stabilize democracy. (...) The disputes over slavery and women's rights that took place between the US North and South in the mid-19th century must be seen as a prime example: via properly selective possibilities of participation, i.e., through processes of democratization, the forces of racism and sexism got turned against each other, thus actively preventing solidarity and the formation of alliances among the oppressed. (Bernhard: 203)

As this historical example shows, there is great danger in the failure to include interdependencies in analyses of—and resistant action against—systems of domination. And it is equally dangerous to be too quickly appeased and satisfied with winning some concessions for one's "own group," regarding one's "own particular predicament"—because this always comes at the price of losing the links of solidarity with others. This, however, is precisely what gender democracy has been doing all along. Within gender democracy, it is important to maintain the so-called "equality of opportunity" between the sexes in hierarchical and unjust societies, so that underprivileged groups can start to compete against each other. In post-bellum America, reactionary forces were able to drive a wedge between the emerging black civil rights movement and the women's movement, both of whom were interested in forming an alliance in order to win the franchise. In 1866, they founded the Equal Rights Association, which represented the demands for emancipation of both social movements. In 1868, black men were promised the right to vote by the Republican party, who then used black support to land a big victory in Congress. This victory took place on the backs of women, who had been promised the franchise by the Democratic party. Of course, the latter strongly resisted the enfranchisement of black people. Thus, the Equal Rights Association fell apart in 1869, largely because the women's movement and the black civil rights movement had allowed themselves to be pitted against each other:

A common liberation struggle had become impossible. Three factors led to the neutralization of the solidary power of the alliance: the inability to recognize sexism and racism as key components of one and the same social order; the inability to understand the mutual dependencies between the two social movements; and a general overestimation of the power of the franchise. (Bernhard: 206)

Bernhard mentions several other historical examples to illustrate this unfortunate tendency of social movements, i.e., the tendency to weaken themselves by privileging their own narrow, identity-based objectives over the efforts to practice a politics of solidarity and alliance with others.

3.4 Gender democracy promotes unambiguous identities

In terms its efforts to influence EU policy, gender democracy assumes the self-evident fact of the duality of the sexes, men and women, and tries to remedy the statistical inequalities that have put women at a disadvantage. Within these political interventions, the critique of heteronormativity only takes place in a very limited way, i.e., in the context of attacking negative gender-related attributions such as "women don't have an affinity for technology." However, problems concerning the social production of gender identities, or the strict duality of these constructs, are hardly ever addressed. To be sure, programs like "Women in technology and the sciences" provide incentives to women to question their own identities, and to possibly widen and extend their identities to include additional elements. These integration attempts also lead to a series of social and psychological contradictions that remain unresolved: for instance, the practice of recording binary gender identities in passports, ID cards, and official documents continues. The fact that gender identities are in fact multiple and provisional must not be acknowledged, as that would undermine the efficacy of the administration, control, and domination of the people. One could also ask whether one is a citizen, as an unambiguously gendered person, of this or the other nation, or of no nation at all. Through the techniques and procedures of the nation-state, modern gender identities are systematically being refashioned as "cultural" and/or "national." Thus, gender identities can no longer be separated from their own instantiations, as created by the institutions of the nation-state. In the course of social struggles, unambiguous identities are being created, but also questioned. Through these kinds of common collective processes, the exercise of domination over individuals becomes possible. And in case a single person dares to question their unambiguous identity, this often gets subsumed under the rubric of "craziness."

In what follows, I would like to use Eva Sanger's essay to argue that the political framework of representative democracy and the nation-state is designed to prevent the ambiguation and multiplication of identities. Sanger's example is a women's association called UFV (Unabhangiger Frauenverband), which found it impossible to conduct its parliamentary work while allowing members to have multiple memberships in several

associations and parties, i.e., to have "ambiguous" identities. UFV fell apart trying to implement its progressive notion of connecting non-representative practices of grassroots democracy with traditional political work in the parliamentary and party contexts.

4.4.1 "Zur strukturellen Repräsentationsproblematik bei der Vertretung von Fraueninteressen am Beispiel des 'Experiments' Unabhängiger Frauenverband" (Eva Sängler)

In the parliamentary realm of political advocacy, the imperative to explicitly speak "in the name of" was especially powerful—which led to an "electoral-political dilemma" for the UFV. The mandate to firmly locate members in a political party, and to exclude women who maintain multiple memberships from the pool of candidates for political office, contrasted with the political self-conception of a large part of UFV's constituency. These concerned members advocated plurality and multiple memberships as a key component of a decentralized, open-ended feminist politics, while fearing the establishment of a hierarchical structure in case a political party was to be founded. (Sängler: 108)

UFV was founded in 1989, at a crucial moment in GDR history, with two goals in mind: first, it was supposed to be an independent, non-partisan, grassroots organisation for the purpose of exchange and networking among feminists in the GDR; second, it demanded to be included in the full range of institutionalized decision-making processes. An association that included autonomous women's groups, initiatives, projects, and individual women, UFV explicitly welcomed multiple memberships, as well as a multiplicity of identities, world views, and so forth. In similar fashion, UFV tried to give space to contesting, even contradictory political strategies, such as parliamentarianism on the one hand, and council-based, grassroots types of political organisation, on the other. As a result, no clear, univocal "message" was ever articulated in order to communicate with the "outside world." Rather, all members of UFV, having their own standpoints and opinions, were regarded as legitimate spokespeople for the association. UFV aimed to create spaces, networks, and synergies for a multitude of different political rationalities and fields of engagement. Further, as the conflict between "proper" party requirements and grassroots practices became apparent, UFV chose not to enforce a single standard or party line. Individual UFV members had gotten themselves elected into parliament on various party tickets, and went to take up a number of vastly different positions there. This fact led to the question of representation within UFV, and to the problem of advocating for a unitary policy:

UFV's "electoral-political dilemma" resulted from the incompatibility of two of its major claims: on the one hand, they sought to integrate a multitude of political worldviews (formally, through multiple memberships), and on the other hand, they sought to represent, in solidarity, "women's interests" across all lines of party politics and political differences. This was prevented by one of the basic tenets of liberal democracy, i.e. the mandate to "speak for," and the compulsion to unambiguously represent the positions and interests of women within a field that was always already structured by the logic of party politics and its power struggles. (Sängler: 103)

As a networking tool that linked diverse contexts within the women's movement, UFV was quite successful. However, it failed in all those contexts that, like parliament, function according to a strict logic of representation, and that require all its actors to play by its rules. Following the events caused by these structural antagonisms, in 1998 UFV decided against reconstituting itself as a women's party. Instead, it chose to disband, because the gulf between its grassroots philosophy and the requirements of parliamentary democracy seemed insurmountable. This historical example demonstrates the extent to which unambiguous identities—against critiques of identity, and against the push for multiple identities—are being enforced within the logic of traditional representative democracy; a fact that cannot be reconciled with the claims of grassroots democracy.

3.5 Gender democracy ignores worldwide relations and dependencies

Since gender democracy conceptually locates itself within the context of the nation-state and the supra-state, it generally does not take into account the activities of social movements that operate globally, e.g. protesting against the systemic inequalities in the distribution of resources. To be sure, topics like the so-called "women's poverty," or the economic situation of female retirees and single parents, are selectively being thematized—usually within the borders of the nation-state. But international activities like the six-million strong "World March of Women" (Dackweiler: 2006) have largely been ignored, throughout the German-speaking world, by both the mainstream media and within the discourses of gender studies and queer studies. Debates in the latter fields have also rarely been focused around the economic and political problems that constitute the stark divide between women of the "Global North" and women of the "Global South"—such as the rerouting of resources like energy and food. German debates have so far only adopted a select few theoretical approaches that take these issues into account, e.g. Nancy Fraser's "trans-national feminism" (Fraser 2006), or Regina-Maria Dackweiler's "transversal feminism" (Dackweiler 2006), which is based on the work of black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins. However, such ideas rarely get discussed within the concept of gender democracy or other equality-related discourses of the state.

I have tried to articulate four key contradictions that are embedded in the concept of gender democracy:

- a) Gender democracy promotes the formation of female elites
- b) Insofar as it puts itself in the service of national and EU-related policies, gender democracy disregards the interdependencies that mark all structures of domination
- c) A concept of gender democracy that does not go beyond the boundaries set by the nation-state and the EU necessarily strengthens and promotes unambiguous identities
- d) The same concept of gender democracy ignores worldwide relations and dependencies

In order to account for, and emphasize, the demands that have been articulated by grassroots and social movements, I would like to propose the term "gender grassroots democracy" in addition to traditional concepts of gender democracy. In what follows, I will discuss five specific demands for a queer politics, which will serve to

characterize the kinds of social, political, and gender-related ideas that I associate with gender grassroots democracy as a new political project.

4 Gender grassroots democracy: five demands for a queer politics

The concept of gender grassroots democracy lends itself to addressing the aforementioned contradictions that haunt gender democracy, and it allows a more comprehensive discussion of a set of possible demands for a queer politics. It starts from the assumption that emancipatory projects cannot be realized exclusively within representative democracies, nation-states, and supra-states. Among other things, gender grassroots democracy adopts current demands that have emerged out of social movements, recontextualizing them within a critical discourse on gender democracy in order to articulate proposals for a queer gender politics and a queer politics of alliance. Held in Vienna in 2008, the sixth edition of the "International Queer-Feminist Days" conference hosted a workshop entitled "Anarchafeminism—Queer Politics—Solidarity-based Economics." As a participant in this workshop, I introduced the five possible demands for a queer politics that I will elaborate on below, and put them up for debate. Most of the 40 workshop participants found these demands interesting and thought-provoking. Especially the notion of "demarchy" proved to be stimulating and generative of wide-ranging discussions. For instance, it was suggested that we abandon the "star principle" by using sortition to select a "person of the week" who should receive our focused attention for this time period. One participant said that such demands go too far, but she didn't further specify her critique.

Containing elements of utopic thought, my five suggestions toward developing demands for a queer politics incorporate the strategies that Antke Engel has termed "de-hierarchization," "de-normalization," and "ambiguification" (Engel: 204pp.). In what follows, I will offer a rough sketch of my conceptual framework that is informed by what Gudrun Perko calls a "politics of autonomy," and that I consider to be crucial for the discursive and political project to "abolish the hierarchies that divide societies along the lines of power holders and non-power holders, 'high' and 'low' status groups, enfranchised and disenfranchised people, and so forth" (Perko 2004: 42). The notion of the blurring of identities is at the heart of all five examples of a queer politics. They all emerge out of thought experiments that employ utopic ideas, and that grapple with the question of how to connect various social aspects, how to make them livable without recurring to the trials of identity. For instance, the demand for a global, unconditional basic income for all is being discussed within a number of social movements, and thus constitutes a particularly good opportunity to question the seeming lack of alternatives embedded in current arrangements of power. These kinds of discussions epitomize what Gudrun Perko and Leah Carola Czollek have called the "pleasure of thought/thinking." At the same time, these debates also aim to broaden and diversify the conversation by

welcoming different groups within social movements into the fold, and by facilitating exchanges between them. What's more, these utopic proposals for a queer politics are supposed to make us rethink what we think we know, and to revise and reimagine our political claims.

4.1 Strengthening demarchy

Traditional types of democratic governance cause voter fatigue, because they systematically create feelings of powerlessness with regard to effecting change through the electoral process. Thus, the concept of gender grassroots democracy proposes to increase the deployment of sortition-based alternatives following John Burnheim's theoretical work on what he terms "demarchy" (Burnheim 1985). This would mean that persons no longer get voted into office based on their identity; instead, they get selected by some form of lottery to hold a given office for a single period. Thus, demarchy creates a situation in which any and all persons can hold any office for one period, without ever having to go through various processes of elimination, and the trials of identity. This helps to prevent the formation of oligarchies, elites, as well as the emergence of systemic-legitimized types of domination within gender groups. For instance, persons with higher levels of education, higher incomes, more property and capital could exert their influence on various committees only indirectly, i.e. through lobbying and the deployment of expert knowledge. This method would lead to a significant increase in both active and passive electoral rights across all political offices, which would bring those offices much closer to the people's everyday life realities. In contrast to our present system of democratic governance, the requirements for persons who get selected for office by sortition would neither be unrealistically high, nor grotesquely low, since all people would need to be prepared, in concrete terms, to find themselves tomorrow in the very positions where important decisions have to be made. Any complaints about the alienating and distant character of large, centralized administrations would thus lose credibility. It would no longer be necessary to form female elites or to implement a quota system, because the lottery selection process would ensure gender diversity. It would no longer be necessary to justify structural domination within the group of women, because there would no longer be a legitimate mechanism of power that is oriented toward creating gender-based justice. If the claims of leadership and domination can be minimized, then we can successfully and collectively grapple with the complexity of decision-making processes, which everybody then would be able to comprehend and actively influence as well. Questions of eligibility and the retention of power would no longer be relevant, because every person would have the right to hold any public office exactly once. Due to the fact that decisions would no longer be made by elected officials that are marked by their fixed identity, but by persons selected by lot from amongst the population, there would be significant changes in the ways in which social power operates. That is to say, the entire strategy of creating structures of domination based on rigid identity constructs

that are permanently set against each other, deadlocked in the aggressive play of inclusion and exclusion, would make no sense any more.

4.2 Abolishing gender designations in passports, and enabling worldwide, free movement of people without identity check

"Queer" argues for equality among people's plural ways of living and being, and it promotes a democratic understanding that includes all humans. What is to be preferred is for all humans to be able to 'be' the way they want to, and for all subjects to make autonomous decisions regarding the ways in which they present themselves, name themselves or define themselves, if and whenever they choose. It is important to "be seen the way you want to be seen," as one protagonist said in the documentary, Venus Boyz. Autonomous decision-making as a political category has become crucial, i.e. the right to self-determination, self-positioning, and self-definition (especially regarding sex, gender, and desire) is increasingly being claimed. (Perko & Czollek 2004: 40)

Following from the insights of queer theory and queer activism, which include the critique of unambiguous, binary gender identities, we should demand that all unambiguous gender designations be removed from passports, ID cards, and administrative data bases. Moreover, since questions of identity and gender identity cannot be separated from cultural contexts, it would seem self-evident that all cultural and national designations should be removed from passports, ID cards, and administrative data bases, as well. But if we eliminate all cultural and national references from passports, ID cards, and administrative data bases, all such documents would be reduced to absurdity. In principle, then, technologies such as fingerprinting could still allow for the control of the worldwide movement of people. But that technology, too, would lead to the creation of identity-based designations by public authorities, who claim the right, and the power, to control people's mobility and their freedom of movement. Ultimately, if this particular demand for a queer politics is to be consistent with the insights of queer theory, it must have as its goal the free, worldwide movement of people that takes place in the absence of any and all identity checks.

4.3 Strengthening the link between part-time work and parenting

The politics of autonomy does not assume that a (unitary) concept of identity is required in order to be capable of acting. It does not presuppose that, if we want to be active in the political field, we need to be either "x or y," or that we need to have an "x or y (cultural) background," or that we need to belong to "group x or y." To the contrary: The idea of acting according to this politics of autonomy is based on the assumption that humans act because they have a political concern (for whatever reasons), and because they want to effect a change of the status quo: for others, as well as for themselves. All this without subscribing to the divisive position that to act for others automatically means to not act for the self. (Perko & Czollek 2004: 40)

Through a stronger linking of part-time work and parenting (care) for all, the heteronormative division of labor—part-time work and care for women, full-time work for men—could be abolished. Labor associated with

parenting, care, and politics should not be figured as a series of specialized tasks connected to specific social groups, but rather as an important component of everyday life realities and experiences, in which all can participate. Active involvement in parenting or care should not be rooted merely in immediate and personal life circumstances. Instead, it should be animated by an interest in the other. An increase in the diversity of people's life experiences will facilitate their participation in important social decision-making processes, as well as in the sharing of collective social burdens—while helping to steer clear of the pitfalls of expertocracy. And, conversely, an increase in people's level of involvement in political decision-making processes will significantly contribute to their life experiences.

4.4 Free goods and services of general interest without identity check

According to the demands of solidarity-based economics, which were adopted by many current social movements, the public needs to be provided with free goods and services of general interest, such as public spaces for the practice of sexuality, print shops and radio stations that can be used without submitting to identity checks, free accommodation, free food, and so forth. Access to these resources must not be limited through identity checks.

4.5 Introduction of a worldwide, unconditional basic income for every person without means test, without identity check, and without work requirement

As promoted by BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network), the introduction of a worldwide, unconditional basic income without means test or work requirement would enable individuals to live a self-determined life and to inhabit a plurality of identities, while eliminating any looming fears of economic sanctions. In the words of BIEN, "[a] basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement." Until recently, the debate concerning the economic and international dimensions of queer politics has unfortunately been neglected. The introduction of an unconditional basic income without identity check and work requirement would make it possible to minimize the coercive economic forces that generally compel individuals to develop unambiguous gender identities.

Translation: Gerwin Gallob