Intersectional power struggles in feminist movements: An analysis of resistance and counter-resistance to intersectionality

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Abstract
This article develops an analytical framework to study the power struggles between majoritized women and minoritized women within feminist movements in relation to the adoption of intersectional practices. It employs a multi-sided concept of power that takes domination and both individual and collective empowerment into consideration. The analytical framework encompasses the informal norms that foster resistance to intersectional practices by majoritized women, as well as the strategies and actions undertaken by minoritized women in order to challenge their subordination. The empirical analysis illustrates the mechanisms that create positions of marginalization among women, it stresses the role of the emotional dimension in transforming feminist practices, and it shows the importance of the intersectional wound. Moreover, in focusing on the processes that create difference, it avoids essentializing minoritized women. Building on interviews with activists from the Catalan feminist movement, the examination of intra-movement power struggles considers multiple axes of inequality, including race, gender identity, sexuality, and ability.

KEYWORDS
feminist institutionalism, feminist movements, intersectional wound, intersectionality, resistance

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In the late 1970s, the Combahee River Collective (CRC) issued a statement that articulated the notion of multiple oppressions. Drawing on the experiences of Black women, the CRC statement offered an analysis of inequality that encompassed race, gender, sexuality, and class oppression. Most crucially, it conceived of oppression as the result of the joint effect of major systems of subordination that together form a complex social structure of inequality. While the key ideas that deal with the complexity of inequality developed within the political activism of Black women, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term “intersectionality.” In her study on how the interplay of gender, race, and class impacts areas such as gender-based violence and social movement strategies, she developed the concepts of structural and political intersectionality. First, structural intersectionality refers to the intersections that are relevant to people’s experiences in society. For instance, gender-based violence is experienced differently by white women and Black women. Second, political intersectionality refers to how political strategies regarding one axis of oppression cannot ignore other inequalities. For example, feminist movements fail women of color when they do not acknowledge issues of racism.

Although the concept of power is crucial for intersectionality theory, most scholarly research has focused on the ways intersectionality is employed by social movements and how privileges may still be in place in their practices. Hence, limited attention has been given to the interaction between structure and agency, namely, to how disadvantaged groups exercise power and negotiate the meaning of their social location (Severs et al., 2016). Research on feminist movements has taken different approaches to studying how movements address differences. One strand of research focuses on how political contexts, along with inequality structures, differ in the way they shape the identities of intersectional groups, such as Black women or white women (Predelli et al., 2012; Roth, 2004). Another line of inquiry has studied how feminist movements use intersectionality, either as a collective identity, a repertoire for inclusion or to create coalitions, or to expose cases where privilege needs to be contested (Evans & Lépinard, 2020). In addition, some scholars have examined affective solidarity as a means to work on within-movement differences and build stronger feminist movements (Smolović Jones et al., 2021; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019).

This article investigates how a movement’s internal dynamics might facilitate or hinder the translation of intersectional discourses into actual intersectional practices that could help transform the movement itself. In doing so, the article develops an analytical framework to conceptualize and empirically examine the power struggles underpinning intersectional practices within movements and builds on existing feminist works that put power at the center of their analysis (Tildesley et al., 2021; Verge & de la Fuente, 2014). Specifically, I argue that the complexity of intersectional practices can best be explored by considering a multi-sided conceptualization of power, one that allows resistance and counter-resistance to be examined at the same time. Since resistance to intersectionality may not be something that is pursued actively, it is necessary to examine resistance through the lens of the informal rules that hamper intersectional practices. Moreover, the key emotional dimension added into the equation must be considered, as feelings have an important role in reproducing power dynamics and in providing opportunities for political transformation. In brief, this analytical framework permits the development of a more accurate account of how to challenge and dismantle privilege within progressive movements such as the feminist movement.

The empirical analysis considers the interaction of multiple systems of oppression, mainly the interplay of gender with race, sexuality, gender identity, and ability while considering other axes of inequality such as class, age, and national identity in a cross-cutting fashion. The framework is applied to the Catalan feminist movement, which offers an intriguing case because of its early development of an “intersectionality-like thought” in the 1970s in which struggles related to gender, class, and national identity were connected (Rodó-Zárate, 2019). In addition, over the last decade, the feminist movement in Catalonia has exhibited a great capacity for mobilization (Grenzner, 2020).

Semi-structured interviews with activists from several organizations involved in the feminist movement are analyzed using thematic content analysis. The empirical analysis exposes the actions and practices that majoritized women employ to maintain the status quo, and in particular, to maintain their epistemic, institutional, relational, and productive privilege. It also identifies the strategies that minoritized women use to subvert positions of oppression and to create alliances with critical majoritized friends or through self-organizing.
The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The first section develops the analytical framework for investigating intersectional struggles. The second section presents the case and the methods used in the empirical analysis. The subsequent two sections explain the strategies of resistance and counter-resistance to intersectionality within the feminist movement. The last section discusses the theoretical and empirical contributions made by this article.

2 | INTERSECTIONAL STRUGGLES IN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Feminists of color have long been challenging the idea of "common oppression" as it has contributed to universalize white women's experience while overlooking the complex and varied social realities of other women (hooks, 1986; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Hence, ignoring racialized and classed micro- and macro-relations (Carastathis, 2008). In order to create a movement based on solidarity, it is necessary to both include other women's issues and experiences, as well as to individually and collectively contest dominant power structures to transform feminist practices (Carastathis, 2008; hooks, 1986).

The intersectional framework has been described as a research paradigm and a political strategy (Hancock, 2007), which offers a critical account on the dynamics of power that provide the basis for the creation of more inclusive political practices. Research on intersectionality usually focuses on four elements of political life: identity, categories of difference, processes of differentiation, and systems of domination (Dhamoon, 2011), and discussions revolve around the relationship between categories, on the axes of inequalities that should be examined, and on the levels of analysis (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; Winker & Degele, 2011). Oftentimes research conflates the different elements studied under the intersectional framework, which obfuscates the distinct roles they play in the creation of power relations (Dhamoon, 2011).

On the one hand, the focus on identity or categories of difference risks essentializing those at the intersection of multiple marginalities while not contesting existing power relations between groups (Carastathis, 2008; Dhamoon, 2011). On the other hand, studies tend to focus on the actions of the marginalized groups and not on those of the powerful (Walby et al., 2012). To overcome such issues, analysis should focus on those processes that create difference and/or the systems of domination, which provide a better understanding of how the interaction of power operates by offering context on the construction of identities and categories of difference (Dhamoon, 2011) and the formation of the agency (Bilge, 2010).

Therefore, intersectionality provides a dynamic understanding of power, by highlighting that both privileged and disadvantaged groups exercise power simultaneously. This notion of power indicates that power relationships are unstable, thus offering opportunities for resistance. Hence, there are power struggles embedded within political processes that take place between privileged and disadvantaged groups. Celis and Lovenduski (2018: 153) note that "power struggle(s) capture both feminist strategies and actions, and the resistance that they encounter." A way to examine how power dynamics operate productively is to focus on Allen's (1998) multi-sided concept of power; this includes both domination (power over), as well as individual (power to) and collective (power with) resistance.

Whilst this approach based on power struggles has been studied in organizations, such as political parties (Verge & de la Fuente, 2014) and universities (Tildesley et al., 2021), and with a focus on gendered structures, it can also enrich the study of feminist movements, which "are a type of women's movements that challenges patriarchy, and contests political, social and other power arrangements of domination and subordination on the basis of gender" (Beckwith, 2007, p. 314). On the one hand, feminist movements provide an important venue for the representation of women, as they are a crucial mechanism for the articulation of women's interests, needs, and political demands and provide an arena where women interact as women to define their priorities (Weldon, 2002). This notwithstanding, interaction between women may entail conflict since feminist movements, like many other social movements, are divided along the lines of race, sexuality or class (Weldon, 2006). On the other hand, while most feminist movements...
have enthusiastically adopted the intersectional discourse, research shows how a desire for intersectionality does not translate into actual intersectional practices that effectively challenge privilege within movements. Instead, white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied women still predominate the movements (Erevelles, 2011; Evans, 2015; Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016).

Furthermore, since resistance to intersectionality is not easily captured, it is often silent. As Ahmed (2006) notes in her study of institutional commitments to racism, declarations acknowledging that racism exists are not enough to challenge it. When commitments are merely announced and not converted into actions, the outcome may have the reverse effect of contesting racism. As for feminist mobilizations, the non-performativity of intersectionality may be seen as an attempt to secure the centrality of whiteness as a privilege both as an institutional privilege—that is, institutions uphold norms and values that favor certain social groups over others—and as an epistemic privilege—that is, who produces the knowledge and about whom—within the feminist project. Privilege can also appear to be productive—meaning it reproduces systemic forms of oppression—or relational—in the sense that privilege is contextual due to the interaction of social relations in particular contexts. These four types of privilege are not mutually exclusive (Evans & Lépinard, 2020, p. 13–16).

Research on feminist movements illustrates how privilege is upheld regardless of whether or not activists decide to engage in intersectional activism. For instance, the failure to engage with intersectionality may result in others minoritizing women (Lépinard, 2020). However, at the same time, the adoption of intersectionality, as a way of building a collective identity to guarantee inclusion, does not contest epistemic privilege when privileges are just assumed in an individual dimension; therefore, structural inequalities are disregarded (Quéré, 2020). Moreover, even if intersectionality is present in discourse, as in women’s marches, participants differ in how they recognize intersectionality on the ground (Moni, 2020). Feminist movements still fail to engage thoughtfully in organizing intersectional strategies and in improving accessibility, while minoritized women are frequently included in a tokenistic manner (Evans, 2020). Thus, quite often, minoritized women are not present in discourse and are excluded from movements.

Applied to the study of intersectionality in feminist movements, power over refers to majoritized women’s actions that have the capacity to undermine intersectional practices, as this type of power “constrain[s] the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a non trivial way” (Allen, 1998; p. 33). As a result, the participation of minoritized women is curbed. Here, it is fruitful to examine the feminist movement\(^2\) from an institutionalist approach to identify the rules that sustain intersectional power dynamics.

Feminist institutionalists have revealed how displays of power over are embedded in formal (written) and informal (unwritten) rules, such as norms, practices, conventions, and rituals, which constitute “the rules of the game” (Chappell & Waylen, 2013) that sustain male, class, and race privileges (Acker, 2006) and that institute a gendered/raced/class “logic of appropriateness” (Chappell, 2006). Even rules that may on the face of them seem neutral can reflect, structure, and reinforce an asymmetrical allocation of opportunities, resources, and recognition between privileged and underprivileged groups (Kenney, 1996; Lowndes, 2020). Furthermore, rules can also be about feelings, as the emotional dimension is important in structuring social relations (Connell, 2002). Emotional work was defined in the workplace context (Hochschild, 1983), but this emotional dimension is also central to the organization of social movements because it provides a place for people to gather and explore emotional responses to personal and political events (Reger, 2004). Feeling rules depend on one’s position in a social structure and play a role in defining the emotional regime of an organization (Calderaro & Lépinard, 2021). For instance, studies on how feminist groups address anti-racist strategies show that emotions can reproduce power relations and impede discussions about race (Calderaro & Lépinard, 2021; Srivastava, 2006). Moreover, denying emotions such as anger contributes to the reproduction of oppressive dynamics (Quéré, 2020), and particular emotions—such as nostalgia from white feminists—hinder the adoption of intersectional practices (Evans & Bussey-Chamberlain, 2021).

To understand how resistance is countered, other facets of power should be examined. First, power to refers to “the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends” (Allen, 1998, p. 34), representing the actions undertaken by minoritized women to subvert structures of domination. Second, minoritized women may articulate strategies and alliances, that is, power with, which refers to the “ability of a collective to act together for the attainment of a common
or shared, or series, of ends” (Allen, 1998, p. 35). Feminist movements present longstanding traditions of articulating alliances across different social groups within the movement and with other social movements, but they must always stay vigilant about the possibility of excluding multiple-marginalized groups (Ciccia et al., 2021). In fact, scholars suggest that the challenges faced by people who belong to at least two subordinate groups might be best addressed when members of society have a sense of intersectional solidarity, which is defined as “a disposition that can be exhibited by anyone who has awareness of their own positionality in reference to marginal subgroups regardless of race, gender, or sexuality; it requires awareness and anguish over the unique challenges that various marginalized groups face” (Crowder & Smith, 2020, p. 491). Intersectional solidarity demands recognizing each other’s specificities and opposing those who would oppress others. This implies the importance of being alert to the power differences within and among diverse groups of women (Mohanty, 2003).

Intersectional solidarity and its emotional dimension provide a form of feminist politics that integrates the necessity of making an ongoing commitment to questioning privileges and biases while recognizing other social inequalities. In addition to the ways in which feminist movements engage with other social movements to strive to attain social justice goals (Townsend-Bell, 2011), research on political intersectionality focuses mainly on examining how ideas, practices, and repertoires of actions adopted internally by feminist movements confront processes of marginalization (Luna et al., 2020) and employ intersectional solidarity. The first task is to comprehend that difference and plurality are intrinsic to society and must constitute a normative goal. The second task is the provision of organizational structures and practices of deliberation that include spaces for participation in order to empower participants and that allow expression of dissent and mediation procedures (Ciccia et al., 2021). The third task is sharing resources, including funding, institutional access, and networks (Ciccia et al., 2021; Dwidar, 2021; Townsend-Bell, 2021).

The role of emotions also needs to be included in the understanding of feminist collective mobilization (Hemmings, 2012; Luna, 2010). In her analysis of the emotional dimension of intersectional solidarity, Whittier (2021) illustrates how emotional cultures and histories of trust across diverse inequalities are factors that enable or inhibit the sustainability of coalitions. While emotional work can transform feminist movements, it can also reproduce power relationships between groups (Srivastava, 2006). In order to avoid reproducing inequalities, Rodó-Zárate (2021) introduces the concept of the “intersectional wound,” which captures the complexities of working on one’s own privilege when one feels pain from other axes of oppression. For example, when a lesbian woman overlooks the experiences of a disabled woman because of able-bodied privilege. Yet, when located on the side of the oppressor, she may feel that painful experiences she has gone through, because of being a lesbian woman, are being ignored. Hence, the concept points to a crucial element of intersectionality that one can be situated simultaneously in positions of privilege and oppression (Collins, 1990; hooks, 2015). To navigate the intricacy of the intersectional wound, Rodó-Zárate (2021, p. 107–108) identifies two types of discomforts in relation to power and place. Systemic discomforts are feelings of distress that emerge when a person is located within an axis of oppression, for instance, structural racism, while ethical discomforts derive from political consciousness. Such discomforts may arise when acknowledging unjust situations and may create the necessary paths for building alliances.

3 | CONTEXT AND METHODS

The analysis of intersectional struggles in political representation focuses on the Catalan feminist movement, which emerged in the early 1970s, amid the anti-Franco struggles, neighborhood movements, the labor movement, and with a fierce critique to the capitalist system. The first Catalan Women’s Conference, organized in 1976, was attended by approximately 4000 women (Palomares & García, 2012). That year marked a phase of growth in the movement, with multiple feminist organizations being created. A characteristic of the movement at that time was the political pluralism of the activists involved, which resulted in the movement not defining a unified and precise strategy of action. This led to the emergence of various currents of thought and allowed the exploration of different forms of action (Ferré, 2018). In addition, the Catalan feminist movement has been traditionally skeptical of the institutional arena (Alonso, 2018), resulting in an autonomous movement (Htun & Weldon, 2012).
Between the 1970s and 1980s, Catalan feminists developed an “intersectionality-like thought,” connecting gender, class, and national identity through real experiences, struggles against multiple axes of oppression, and political activism (Rodó-Zárate, 2019). In the 1980s, lesbian feminists were very active within the movement and enriched the movement’s demands with their criticism to heterosexism. Since then, several debates have taken place on the need to incorporate the heterogeneity of women within the movement. During the 1990s, migrant women gained a greater presence in the movement and demanded more visibility and recognition of their contributions to the movement. At approximately the same time, younger feminists were making similar claims (Palomares & García, 2012).

In Catalonia, the feminist movement has become the movement with the largest capacity for mobilization; this is also the case with the Spanish feminist movement (Portos, 2019). Since 2011, the feminist movement has mobilized mainly around two issues: reproductive rights and gender-based violence (Campillo, 2019). Moreover, due to the gendered nature and impact of austerity policies that resulted in the emergence of networks such as “Vaga de Totes” (all-women strike), a strike with the aim of making reproductive work more visible was held in Catalonia in 2014 and 2015, mobilizing approximately 600 feminist organizations. The strike helped forge intergenerational networks and platforms with the capacity to organize massive mobilizations, such as the 8M Commission, which in 2018 organized a 24-hour women’s strike on the occasion of International Women’s Day under the slogan “if we stop, the world stops” and in 2019 under the slogan “We stop to change everything. Not one step backwards” (Campillo, 2019). The strike was repeated in 2020, but due to COVID-19, not in 2021.

To uncover intersectional power struggles and better capture how intersectional dynamics of inclusion and exclusion shape relations between activists, it is necessary to hear the voices on whose behalf intersectional claims are being made. Furthermore, it is fundamental to consider multiple axes of oppression at the same time (Evans & Lépinard, 2020). Hence, the empirical analysis builds on 25 semi-structured interviews with activists from women’s organizations that organize just around gender (7) and from women’s organizations that organize at the intersection of gender and race (8), sexuality (5), gender identity, (4) or disability (1). The activists interviewed are key members of the most relevant and active organizations engaged in feminist struggles in Catalonia. Some of these organizations participate in shared spaces, such as the one that organizes the International Women’s Day mobilization, while other feminist organizations have decided not to participate in such spaces. The activists interviewed hold diverse occupations including students, care workers, third sector workers, public servants, pensioners, or researchers; and their ages range from 20 to 75 years old. Other markers of identity, such as class, age, and national identity, are considered in a cross-cutting way. The interviews were conducted between October 2020 and July 2021, either face to face in Barcelona or online due to COVID restrictions. The interviews are referenced using pseudonyms.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic content analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). I used the NVivo qualitative data analysis software for data coding and analysis, with all interview transcripts imported into, coded, and analyzed in that software. The data were coded using both deductive and inductive approaches, and the analysis was performed in two phases (Saldana, 2013). In the first phase of coding, two main codes were generated to identify instances of resistance and counter-resistance to intersectionality. The second phase captures the two main theme codes that have been identified in considerable detail above, following existing research on social movement intersectionality and feminist institutionalist analysis. I coded the informal norms that uphold privilege (epistemic, institutional, productive, and relational)—practices of stereotyping, tokenism, practices of ignorance, patronizing solicitude, characteristics that award status, informal networking, and time availability—and the actions that challenge privilege at the individual or collective levels, in relation to intersectional solidarity—alliances with key critical friends, self-organizing strategies—and the intersectional wound—systemic discomforts and ethical discomforts.

4 | RESISTING INTERSECTIONALITY

Majoritized women point to the diversity that exists within the women’s movement; in fact, they contend that the recognition of women’s heterogeneity is at the core of the Catalan feminist movement. They argue that an
"intersectionality-like thought" has been present in the movement since the 1970s, when activists proposed an analysis that connected different forms of oppression, linking gender, class, and national identity (I.3, I.4, and I.5). Moreover, the activists interviewed stress the diversity in political thought and experiences present at the first Catalan Women's Conference in 1976, as well as the demands made to preserve this pluralism and the need to create a network to connect all women across the country (I.3, and I.5). Indeed, as one interviewee stated, "Intersectionality is regarded as a basic presupposition. Perhaps not naming it as such, but rather as a practice" (I.2). Even if not explicitly named, intersectionality is considered one of the necessary organizing principles of the movement. Certainly, a concern for representing the women's diversity is displayed around March 8, International Women's Day, and November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, with calls made by the organizers to many diverse groups of women to participate in preparing those days' mobilizations. These calls to participate are the outcome of the desire expressed at the first Catalan Women's Conference to maintain the plurality of the movement and to stress the importance of building a network between women (I.3, and I.5). In addition, the manifestos and posters for those two days include images of and demands made by different subgroups of women.

Whereas majoritized women acknowledge the need to reflect upon and address their own privileges (I.1, I.2, I.3, and I.4), this does not translate into assuming the collective dimension of those privileges. As a racialized woman noted, "in the 8M strike, everyone chanted: 'We are not all here, live-in domestic workers are not here, seasonal workers too.' But then the strike ended, and each one returned to her place in society" (I.8). In this vein, making intersectional claims or recognizing that women are a heterogeneous group is not enough to challenge majoritized women's positions within the movement. As a matter of fact, minoritized women are aware of the movement's efforts to be inclusive; nonetheless, they believe that this is done for aesthetics, as a racialized woman explained:

So, the movement includes black women, women in wheelchairs, and migrant women. But they are not really included. I mean, those people are not actually there. What I mean is, they try to represent us so that we can feel that we are there, but our voices are not there. There is a figure that represents us, but those are not our voices, those are not our demands. I know there is a will to include us, but what's missing from the discourse is the part where the migrants, the nonstandard people, all those other people are asked what they want. That way you get beyond the symbolic figure.

(I.14)

Even though the movement is committed to intersectionality, such pledges fail to materialize in daily practices and actions. In the following subsection, resistance (power over) is illustrated in relation to the informal rules that sustain epistemic, institutional, productive, and relational privileges.

4.1 | Informal rules that sustain privilege

Epistemic privilege may obscure differences between women and make it harder for minoritized women to engage in feminist spaces. In what follows, I outline the informal norms that sustain epistemic privilege in the movement.

First, the consideration of minoritized women as cognizant subjects is diminished through practices of stereotyping. As one racialized woman stated, "I believe that one falls unconsciously into the folklorization of migrant women in the sense of the diversity of the food and cultural aspects you encounter on a day when you are included" (I.14). Likewise, racialized women feel there is a tokenism approach to minoritized women (I.8, I.11, I.14, and I.15). Such practices reveal an instrumentalization of minoritized women, guaranteeing their visibility, albeit from the margins and with limited participation granted to them. For instance, racialized women express discomfort when some spaces consider that the representation of racialized women has been achieved when there is one of them present in the discussion, as this ignores the existing diversity within racialized women (I.12). In contrast, lesbian women voice that while their own issues may not have much visibility within the general issues put forward by the movement, they still
participate actively within it, and they also call for self-reflection regarding whether they should prioritize their own issues more (I.17).

Second, there are practices of ignorance that are deployed, regarding two different but interrelated issues. On the one hand, racialized women denounce majoritized women disregard for the epistemologies and knowledge produced by Global South feminists (I.8 and I.14). This is the result of not seeing minoritized women as capable subjects for creating knowledge or recognizing different ways of engaging with each other (I.14). In this vein, minoritized women are asked to behave in a certain way and fit into a certain model (I.13). Hence, minoritized women are required to assimilate to dominant rules in order to be included. On the other hand, racialized, lesbian, and disabled women express that their issues are overlooked, which means that their experiences and needs are not always recognized or understood (I.9, I.15, and I.25).

Moreover, when minoritized women express their demands, racialized andtrans women explain that they encounter condescending attitudes, that is, acts of patronizing solicitude (Lépinard, 2020) in which they are seen as vulnerable and as victims in need of help (I.9, I.15, and I.21). Hence, lesbian women point out the difficulties they encounter in making their demands visible, especially around days such March 8, International Women's Day, when many different claims are put on the table at the same time (I.16). Furthermore, minoritized women contend that a politics of presence is needed for their claims to be recognized. Lesbian and disabled women feel their attendance at meetings is fundamental for guaranteeing that minoritized women's issues are included on the agenda (I.16 and I.25), although even when their demands are acknowledged, racialized women explain that this may still occur in a relatively superficial way (I.14 and I.11).

Consequently, the informal norms that uphold epistemic privilege reveal how the adoption of the intersectional discourse is not enough to transform political practices and shows that the failure to engage in a process of self-reflection impedes to engage in intersectional activism. Privilege also works in different non-mutually exclusive ways. Indeed, several informal practices limit the participation of minority women in relation to institutional, productive, and relational privileges. These three types of privilege operate together within the movement, reproducing dominant frames and therefore securing the positions of the most advantaged women. First, minoritized women contest claims that the movement is organized in a horizontal, non-hierarchical manner. In fact, racialized andtrans women explain that activists achieve recognition within the movement as a result of possessing a set of characteristics that award status, such as age, prestige, years of militancy, being well-spoken, or possessing political capital (I.11 and I.22). In that regard, such recognition being awarded to some individuals may generate power relationships among activists that generate hierarchies. While this fact is attributed to being socialized under a patriarchal system, feminist activists do not escape from prevailing societal norms, suggesting that an active attitude toward transforming privilege is something that is much needed. For instance, one young activist noted that "older women often speak very directly and in aggressive manner to each other, forgetting about care" (I.2). She explained that many of her young colleagues had left mixed organizations to avoid attitudes that they considered toxic and not based on the ethics of care and had looked for kinder and safe political spaces in which to participate. Thus, even in all-women spaces, she was shocked to see behaviors that reminded her of what she had experienced in mixed organizations.

Second, the women's movement is structured through informal networking. As one interviewee stated: "Feminist movements depend a lot on bonds. That is, it is difficult to participate in the organization of things if you do not know people. In addition, I think the feminist movement can be non-inclusive. If you don't know anyone, it can be hard for you to feel comfortable" (I.2). Thus, relationships based on political and social capital may present barriers to new activists joining the movement.

Third, there are time availability factors that hamper the participation of minoritized women. Indeed, the triple shift—paid work, unwaged care and domestic labor, and activism—has generally posed a difficulty for women's participation in civil society. The situation is aggravated for migrant and racialized women who work in the care sector, which is characterized by long shifts and precarious labor conditions. Holding meetings in the early afternoon means that only women with flexible work arrangements or who work in the third sector can take part in activism (I.9). Therefore, this third shift is only guaranteed to women who enjoy a privileged economic or work status.
Likewise, disabled women face difficulties regarding accessibility issues, and it may not be easy for them to travel to certain locations. Moreover, some of these women need help from a personal assistant who they need to coordinate with. That is, they will only be able to participate when the assistant is working. Hence, the movement fails to self-reflect on organizational practices that may facilitate the participation of minoritized women. For their part, minoritized women may see their participation constrained by the time they are available. When people are located along at least two axes of subordination, they have to split their political energies between two sometimes opposing groups, which results in their disempowerment. One lesbian woman noted the following:

When I say that we are in two places, we really are in two places, and therefore you have several things on the same date, and trying to be in two places at the same time was awful. In fact, on June 28, Pride Day, our participation fell, and quite a lot. However, then, on March 8, International Women’s Day, there came a time when we couldn’t take it anymore and we just stopped altogether. On November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we went because we participate in all mobilizations, performances, etc.; and then we’re present, but not specifically as a lesbian movement.

(I.16)

Lastly, while only a few racialized women expressed feelings of anger and distress when participating in the movement (I.12 and I.14), they consider that at times these feelings have been disregarded by majoritized women. Indeed, racialized women explain while one majoritized woman noted feelings of sorrow when minoritized women communicated such emotions, she also questioned the motives of minoritized women when they voice these emotions (I.9). Hence, feeling rules, which depend on one’s social position structure power asymmetries within organizations, in denying people the right to feel certain emotions make the adoption of intersectional praxis more challenging.

5 | CHALLENGING SUBORDINATION

Majoritized activists recognize that women live within a variety of social structures (I.1, I.3, I.4, and I.6); this recognition is a necessary first step for exercising intersectional solidarity. However, it is insufficient, as other issues are required to help actual intersectional solidarity materialize, such as organizational structures that create spaces and enable the participation of minoritized groups, allowing them to express disagreement and providing a place for their voices to be recognized or the sharing of resources.

Majoritized women point out that they invite and encourage minoritized women to participate in organizing mobilizations, such as March 8, International Women’s Day, or the Catalan Women’s Congress (I.1 and I.2). However, minoritized women bemoan the fact that they are never part of the core group that organizes these mobilizations or events—that is, the group that makes decisions about the issues to be considered or the activities that will take place (I.10, I.11, and I.12), a point acknowledged by majoritized women (I.2, I.3). Instead, minoritized women participate in different working groups or committees that are set up for these occasions, for instance, ones in charge of creating content or communication activities (I.9 and I.10). One majoritized woman reflected on how fundamental it is to incorporate minoritized women within the core organizational group in order to avoid reproducing dynamics of oppression and to avoid microaggressions (I.2), meaning small actions that contribute to sustaining privilege. In addition to preventing this reproduction of inequalities, it is essential to provide spaces in which minoritized women can express dissent; if not, they can only express their discomfort when any actions that generate unease have already taken place, as racialized women have experienced (I.10 and I.12). The creation of such spaces is fundamental to generate relationships of trust among activists that allow to work within differences by interrogating one’s own social location and its own complicity with dominant power structures.

In the following section, the strategies that minoritized women use to subvert domination in response to the informal norms that help maintain majoritized women privilege position in the feminist movement are explained.
The strategies elucidated are mainly in relation to their collective agency, as many of the actions put forward by minoritized women are performed as a group. I also show how the emotional dimension can play a role in challenging subordination, by discussing how the intersectional wound operates. In this way, the following section addresses the actions, both individual (power to) and collective (power with), undertaken by minoritized women to resist their subordination.

5.1 | Individual and collective agency

One key strategy was identified as both an individual strategy and a collective strategy used by minoritized women. This strategy is the creation of alliances with majoritized women who are perceived as critical friends. These women are seen as individuals who are constantly revising their own privileges, who attend activities and protests organized by minoritized women, and who are open to new ways of engaging with others (I.14). Minoritized women also point out that when their majoritized peers have sought to adopt anti-racist practices in their organizations, they have faced resistance to such practices being adopted and that this has generated feelings of empathy and solidarity in the majoritized women toward, in particular, racialized women who have experienced similar grievances (I.10). Furthermore, critical majoritized friends show a disposition to actually listen to minoritized women’s specific demands and to work on building affective bonds to ensure a horizontal non-hierarchical relationship with them (I.4 and I.10). Thereby, when intersectional solidarity is put in practice and hence majoritized women recognize their engagement in the politics of domination and develop a conscious regarding minoritized women’s challenges, feminist political practices can begin to transform to dismantle the structures of domination.

In terms of collective resistance, minoritized women challenge the status quo through their organization within their own spaces. While majoritized women may employ intersectionality as a repertoire for inclusion, their approach acknowledges the specific needs and interests of minoritized women, but such recognition is constructed from the margins. In that regard, racialized women contend that for them to be able to organize in shared spaces with majoritized women, there must be a recognition that structural inequalities affect women differently, and there must be a focus on issues that are specific to minoritized women (I.11 and I.13).

In addition, minoritized women see this self-organizing strategy as a way to create safe spaces for their communities, which have different objectives. The first objective is to be able to determine their needs and demands as a group. The second objective is to define their own strategies to challenge their subordination within the movement. The third objective is to empower fellow activists to participate in the broader movement when they are ready to do so (I.13 and I.24). The last objective is to engage more actively in creating alliances with other organizations that are focused on similar struggles, particularly with those belonging to the anti-racist movement, in order to strengthen the fight against racism. The hope is that this strategy may be more productive than engaging in the feminist movement as it is currently (I.10).

A related issue is the lack of spaces available where conflict can be mediated. Minoritized women explained that when mediation has been attempted in order to resolve a conflict with majoritized women, this has never actually taken place, since some of the majoritized women involved have not attended the mediation session (I.11). The non-use of such spaces, or even their contempt, narrows the possibilities to engage with intersectional solidarity; therefore, processes of marginalization remained intact.

Furthermore, emotions play a key role to subvert domination and enable political transformation. Here I mainly focus on the relationship between racialized women and majoritized women, a sphere in which the emotional frame is very prominent. I show instances for when each group of women feels uncomfortable. First, racialized women express feelings of discomfort when they participate in majoritized women’s spaces (I.8 and I.14). In particular, they express they feel out of place and that they are only able to participate from the margins (I.9, I.10 and I.11). This is an example of systemic discomfort, which is the material consequence of being located in a position of oppression, that is, structural intersectionality. Moreover, the acknowledgment of feeling ill at ease can cause political
transformation if such discomfort is understood as political (Rodó-Zárate, 2021). For instance, racialized women demand that majoritized women examine their own privileges and engage in ongoing anti-racist education so they can build a feminist movement together (I.10 and I.15).

Second, when some racialized women have decided to stop sharing the same space as majoritized women due to unresolved conflicts between some of them (I.8), majoritized women have felt ethical discomfort, and expressed sadness about the situation (I.3). Such feelings of discomfort which emerge from political consciousness, ideology or empathy, can enable alliances among women by transcending identity categories (Rodó-Zárate, 2021). Last, in relation to claims of racial privileges made by racialized women, one interviewee remarked, “When they attack you for that and you say ‘Wait, we’re Catalan, we’ve been through this too, eh? Aren’t we a colonized nation?’ It’s funny, because when they say this to us, we understand perfectly what they mean” (I.3). This exemplifies the concept of the intersectional wound. While racialized women express their anger and call them out for their racist attitudes; other groups of women feel pain, as a majoritized and lesbian women explained that they belong to a national minority and have experienced themselves discrimination for speaking a minoritized language (I.1 and I.17). Thus, the intersectional wound stresses the fact that one is never just privileged or oppressed, and such an acknowledgment can serve to simultaneously facilitate working across differences, and to emphasize minoritized groups’ capacity to object. Moreover, it highlights how crucial emotions are to transform political practices as they can either bring together or can create further barriers among groups.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the power struggles between different groups of women within feminist movements through a multi-faceted concept of power allows us to capture the productive aspects of intersectional power. In focusing on the actions of both privileged and underprivileged activists, the study shows how power is exercised simultaneously, and at the same time it stresses the formation of agency of the marginalized groups in a particular context. Moreover, since intersectionality is not openly resisted, it becomes fundamental to include an analysis of the informal rules that underpin resistance in order to unveil the power relationships that exist within different groups of women.

The analytical framework developed in this article contributes to the literature on feminist movements, feminist institutionalism, and intersectionality in several ways. In relation to feminist movements, the article incorporates an examination of the informal norms that are in place in movements’ practices and focuses on multiple axes of discrimination at the same time, highlighting the similarities and differences of mechanisms of subordination between different subgroups of women. In particular, the results show how processes of marginalization are strongly experienced by racialized women. Regarding feminist institutionalism, the study researches all-women spaces and expands on the emotional dimension of the regimes of inequality that operate within organizations and institutional spaces. Moreover, in relation to intersectionality, the article focuses on those processes that maintain privileges and generate the marginalization of underprivileged groups. In doing so, the proposed analytical framework distances itself from the focus on identities in order to avoid essentializing groups of women and focuses, instead, on how power operates.

Still, the proposed framework presents several limitations, in relation to the allocation of women to the majoritized and minoritized categories. While such categorization is analytically useful to interrogate power relationships among different groups, it overlooks the heterogeneity that exists within those groups. Especially, the category of majoritized women, albeit it is characterized by their ability to define the rules, it encompasses a diversity of women who are situated in positions of inequality because of their sexuality, age, or national identity. Thus, such categorization fails to acknowledge that women are simultaneously in positions of domination and oppression.

Future research could apply intersectional power struggles to different combinations of systems of oppression and to feminist movements, as well as to intersectional movements, in order to capture how resistance and counter-resistance is deployed and to shed light on how regimes of inequality may work in different contexts. Furthermore, while the article shows specific instances on how emotions pose barriers and facilitate work on power
relationships among women, future research needs to further investigate how and which emotions, as well as what are the practical steps that activists develop to work on the intersectional wound that make it possible to transform feminist practices.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES
1 I employ the terms “minoritized” and “majoritized” women following Gunaratnam’s (2003) understanding that minorities are socially constructed. She argues for the use of “minoritized” because it stresses the processes of racialization that operate in certain contexts in designating particular characteristics of groups as being a minority. In addition, she underlines that the term “majoritized” highlights the constitution of the majority by its ability to define the rules. Moreover, minoritized and majoritized positions are constituted in relation to each other.

2 While movements are not formal institutions, informal rules may also be embedded within their organizations (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

3 This research considers an intersectionality-plus framework (Weldon, 2008), which allow to consider other social structures that may be salient in different contexts. Yet, it recognizes that the roots of intersectionality are found in the works of Black women in the United States.

4 Interview pseudonyms are referenced with a number.

5 The category of majoritized women is formed by women who hold a role in organizing the mobilization for International Women’s Day, as well as the Catalan Women’s Conferences.

6 Racialized women is used as a synonym of non-white women because it is the term used by an anti-racist activist in Catalonia, as well as in Spain, in order to challenge its meaning in order to create a political racialized subject with the aim to promote structural change (Diagne Sy & León Salvador, 2021).

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