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Spaces of Appearance and the Right to Appear: March 8 in Local Bodily Assemblies

As discussed in the previous chapters of the book, approaching transnational solidarity practices in various sites and types of relations involves attention to exchanges across multiple spatial scales. This chapter aims to deepen our understandings of corporeal and embodied dimensions of transnational feminist and LGBTI+ activism. In this chapter we provide an answer to the question—why in the era of digital solidarities people’s political assemblages in public space still matter and why the body remains an important instrument of queer and feminist struggles in offline as well as online contexts? The event in focus for this chapter is the International Women’s Day, and we follow this event in diverse locales in Sweden, Turkey, and Russia. By emphasizing how March 8 does not just relate to one single day, separated from other days over the year, we use the discussions in this chapter to underline the temporality of resistance and highlight a history of ongoing struggles, across and beyond March 8. We locate the body at the center of attention, to bring forth the significance of embodied forms of resistance for the (re)making of space and to illuminate the ways in which resistance flows across various scales, both individual and collective. In our approach to theorizing bodies in space,

we understand the right to appear as performative action and our discussion in the chapter is guided by the following analytical points: first, we highlight the ways in which attention to bodily assemblies reintroduces a focus on materiality as a broad socioeconomic agenda in feminist and sexual politics, within which notions of embodiment and corporeality are included in an intersectional way and we recognize that the right to appear opens up a possibility for a coalitional framework. Further, we highlight the distinct and overlapping ways in which bodily assemblies take shape and attend to the multi-scalar relationship between the individual and the collective in producing the space of appearance. Below, we give a brief introduction to how we approach these points.

Recognizing that women and LGBTI+ actors are positioned differently in multiple and diverse power relationships, we take our starting point in two ideas brought forward by Judith Butler: (i) when bodies assemble, the nature, or appearance, of public space is reconfigured; and (ii) that public spaces, such as streets, squares, and virtual platforms, could be conceptualized as part of public and corporeal action (Butler 2015). We further develop these insights as we explore struggles for the right to appear as performative action, and illuminate the ways in which resistance can create other spatialities than those defined through relations of domination (Pile 1997; Tufekci 2017; Peake and Valentine 2003). We approach the right to appear as a coalitional framework with potential to build linkages between different positionalities (Butler 2015, 27). In such a coalitional framework, the political meanings enacted are not only expressed through discourse but also through embodied and corporeal action, for example, as the discussions in this chapter will show, when coalitions are built between pious Muslim women and secular feminists involved in street action, or when activists use their bodies to protect fellow trans activists who are the target of hate speech or violence.

In our ambition to grasp the power and effect of public assemblies, we consider the initiatives that we analyze both in terms of written or vocalized political meanings and in terms of embodied and corporeal action, which may extend beyond discursive understandings of action and signify “in excess of whatever is said” (Butler 2015, 8). To this end, we recognize race and gender as lived experiences. Influenced by Linda Martín Alcoff’s (2006) phenomenology of embodiment, this approach

seeks to render tacit knowledge about racial and gendered embodiment more explicit and illuminate possible routes to transformation. While we highlight how a group's appearance through visibility can be a way to challenge the meanings ascribed to such forms of visible difference, we also recognize that visibility can take shape as a technology of power and control (see Chapter 4), facilitating strategies of state repression against groups seen to threaten the reproduction of the nation, such as irregular migrants, border-crossing queers, Muslim and feminist women (Luibhéid 2020; Sager 2018; Mayerchuk and Plakhotnik 2021; Brock and Edenborg 2020). We will bring forth ongoing negotiations around in/visibility understood as collective, multiple, and contextually constructed (Stella 2012).

The discussions in this chapter illuminate, among other things, how feminist and LGBTI+ activists in Russia as well as Sweden protest against racism, xenophobia, and capitalism; how women's and LGBTI+ rights actors in Turkey as well as Russia challenge economic inequalities and state militarism; and how broad-based feminist and queer initiatives in Sweden as well as Turkey resist police brutality and build coalitions between secular and religious feminists. In this conceptualization, we are inspired by feminist, postcolonial, and critical race scholars who emphasize the role of materiality in intersectional struggles (Young 1990; Bordo 2004; Sutton 2007; Hill Collins 2015) and highlight the interconnectivity of race, class, gender, and sexuality through an understanding of intersectionality as "dynamic, shifting, and multiplex" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Nonetheless, while the corporeal dimension of feminist and queer activism brings attention to the materialities of struggle and a possibility for building coalitions across different positionalities, we also recognize that the corporeal dimension does not exclude conflicts in the struggle. For one, as illuminated in the feminist postcolonial and anti-racist struggles discussed in this chapter, racial, and gendered embodiment may be the very space for conflicts between feminists to appear, as actors bring attention to the erasure of race or trans embodiment in feminist struggle. Further, the role of corporeality can also be excluded among activist groups who focus on written and vocalized claims at the expense of tactile or embodied forms of action, experience, and cohabitation.

Based on the performative aspect of the right to appear, and the material understanding of corporeality and embodiment in feminist intersectional agendas, we illuminate in this chapter three distinct and overlapping ways in which bodily assemblies take shape in public space: (a) as an empowering existence; (b) as an expression of resistance against the fact that authorities associate certain bodies with criminality or terrorism, i.e., feminist bodies, trans bodies, racialized bodies; and (c) as a fluid and mutually determining the relationship between the individual body and the collective body. The embodied performances of feminist and LGBTI+ activists make use of the multiplicity of space to expose, for example, aggressions that violate the integrity of the body, through online postings of police brutality in neighborhoods or demonstrations (Butler 2015). In this way, both online and offline spaces co-produce the space of appearance, allowing feminist and LGBTI+ actors to demand rights and (re)claim the very same spaces. Still, no “one” body can establish the space of appearance, but this space can only come into being through collective action. It is a performative exercise which, according to Butler (2015, 77), takes place “‘between bodies’, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another’s.” Such gatherings of bodies in public space are important because when bodies appear to express a protest, they are also expressing a bodily demand to be “recognized, to be valued, they are exercising a right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life” (Butler 2015, 26). Keeping attention to this multi-scalar, fluid and mutually determining relationship between the individual and the collective in producing the space of appearance, in this chapter, we show how feminist activists make use of the anonymity of the crowd and the multiplicity of space to be able to appear without fear of being exposed or attacked which, in return, opens up a possibility for activists to reshape the space of appearance in contexts of multiple constraints.

Using a transnational lens, we approach March 8 as a prism of analysis to explore the different ways in which struggles for the right to play out in different locales—in our chapter in Russia, Turkey, and Sweden—and to highlight what different tensions they bring up. Our discussion aspires to reach below the surface of March 8 to bring forth some of the ways in which the International Women’s day represents a history

of ongoing struggles stretching across several years. We recognize and seek to illuminate the long genealogies in struggles for gender equality and sexual rights and highlight how today's actors bring new dimensions to these genealogies. Our discussion in this chapter builds further on themes examined in previous chapters. First, it examines how spaces of resistance take shape through bodily assemblies in public space. Second, it focuses on questions of materiality in feminist and LGBTI+ struggles, which we discussed in Chapter 3. Third, it highlights the question of solidarity through attention to coalitional frameworks, which we discussed in Chapter 4. In this sense, the chapter brings together significant themes across the whole book.

Multi-Sited Ethnography in Relation to March 8

The International Women's Day epitomizes the century-long equality struggles of women. Originating in the revolutionary socialist movement of the early twentieth century, the socialist heritage of the day may easily be forgotten, when today it is commemorated by tributes to successful women or buying gifts to spouses, daughters, or girlfriends (Boxer 2009). The first women's day took place in the USA on February 23 in 1909, when U.S. socialist women organized demonstrations demanding political rights for working women. These women were commemorating a demonstration of women garment and textile workers in 1857, who took part in a protest against low wages, the twelve-hour workday, and increasing workload, which was brutally dispersed by the police. More than fifty years later, on the anniversary of this demonstration, the International Women's day began to take shape (Kaplan 1985). A year later, on August 27, 1910, German socialist Clara Zetkin together with her comrades submitted a resolution to the International Socialist Women's Conference at the meeting with the Socialist International in Copenhagen, proposing to organize an international working women's day to support the struggle for women's right to vote (Ruthchild 2010, 185). The resolution specified that "The Women's Day must have an international character and is to be prepared carefully" (Boxer 2009, 1).

The suggestion was accepted by all voters, more than 100 women from 17 different countries (FN 2006). In 1911, on March 18, the first official International Women's Day took place in Vienna with 20,000 marching protesters and similar events took place on the same day in Germany, Denmark, and Switzerland. In 1912, also protesters in the Netherlands and Sweden took part, yet, scholars argue, the day was marked as an uneasy alliance between socialists and feminists, as nation-building aspirations attempted to push aside the internationalist spirit of the day (Kaplan 1985; Chatterjee 2002; Pommerolle and Ngaméni 2015). In 1913–1914, the date was transferred to March 8. Russia first celebrated the International Women's Day on February 23,¹ 1913, focusing on making the parliament more democratic and extending the vote to women (Kollontai 1920). In Russia in 1914 the International Women's Day event received large attention, however, police intervention made demonstrations difficult, yet these tensions, according to Kollontai, underlined that the struggle for the vote in Russia by extension was an open call for overthrowing tsarist autocracy. Across the years since, the International Women's Day continued to develop through scattered celebrations in France, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Australia, Germany, England, China, and Indonesia (Boxer 2009). According to commentators, the day served to strengthen the international solidarity of workers, among others, because countries used to exchange speakers for the occasion (Kaplan 1985). By 1977, the United Nations adopted a resolution designating March 8 as an International Women's Day and today the International Women's Day is a public holiday in many countries (Gammache and Anderson 2016). The UN world conferences have had an impact on the growing international women's movement and the common work for women's rights, among other things, for the right of women to participate in economic and political development (Vargas 2003; Olcott 2017). However, recently, scholars have identified the widened popularity of March 8 marches around the world, illuminating their capitalist complicity (LeSavoy and Jordan 2013) and

¹ March 8 in the Gregorian calendar is the same day as February 23 in the Julian calendar (Gregorian calendar 2021).

their incorporation in existing political structures by mainstream feminist actors. Scholars have suggested that such attempts result in hijacking of March 8 by actors with less radical demands who invite celebrities to draw media attention to the event without challenging hierarchical structures (Mayerchyk and Plakhotnik 2021). Yet, the activist critique of such attempts has also resulted in the claiming of new or other spaces for expressing more pluralist, radical demands and bringing together the community, in particular located contexts as well as through transnationally connected actions such as *Ni Una Menos*, allowing feminism to challenge the universalized character of the “woman question.” In these movements of repoliticization, recovery, and reinvention (Segato and McGlazer 2018), actors question the neoliberal order and address the role of the state in upholding patriarchal violence, as the “space, meaning and practice of politics [is critically] rethought in light of the massive—or indeed the millennial—failure of state-centered projects” (McGlazer 2018, 148; Rudan 2018). In this chapter, we explore such alternative March 8 gatherings as well as the tensions and new alliances that appear through such events.

International Women’s Day in Sweden

Among women’s voter organizations in Sweden in the early twentieth century, questions relating to the International Women’s Day were intensively debated, not least since all men had been given the right to vote in 1909 and in Finland, women had been given the right to vote at the same time as all men in 1906. In 1912, the first year of celebrating the women’s day in Sweden, Swedish women held opinion meetings across the country. Both women in the socialist movement and women from the voter’s movement were involved as speakers at celebrations of the women’s day in an alliance across classes (Wikander 2011). If the International Women’s Day kept a slumbering presence in Sweden after women gained the vote in 1919, renewed interest for the day emerged in the 1970s, when the feminist-socialist organization *Grupp 8* [Group 8] re-awakened the celebration in 1971 with a demonstration demanding free abortion and daycare for all children. Together with

Svenska kvinnors vänsterförbund [the Swedish association for socialist women], Group 8 co-organized a meeting in 1972 and a large celebration of March 8 (Nordiska museet 2017). During the 1980s, the International Women's Day in Sweden became steadily more popular, and celebrations were organized by both social democratic women's organizations and trade union representatives. However, the discourse changed from claims rooted in a socialist-structural analysis directed to the state or to employers, to become more individualized, directed to women themselves, aiming to empower women to higher education, higher salary and higher positions in companies, and decision-making bodies. From the 1990s until today, it has become popular among companies and organizations as well as lobby organizations working to strengthen women's rights such as *Sveriges kvinnolobby* [Swedish Women's Lobby], to organize panels and events on women's day, to highlight the "woman question" and issues such as the gender pay gap or women's health, yet, these celebrations are strongly characterized by a universalized agenda and have little or no connection to the socialist or international heritage of the day. They are also rarely connected to the international spirit of the day in its early years or the broad socioeconomic agenda, carried by socialist women of the beginning of the twentieth century. Each year in the big cities, grassroots women's organizations usually co-organize a celebration with demonstrations and speeches, however, less mainstream or intersectional feminist actors or questions are seldom given space or attention during these celebrations. The turn of events in the Swedish case discussed in this chapter is one example of conflicts that can arise as the result of such forms of exclusion or agenda setting, in this case critique was expressed against the mainstream women's movement tendency to marginalize issues of race and racialization in feminist struggle.

Mia conducted participant observation on the celebrations of March 8 in Gothenburg (2018). She followed an event on the theme "The role of feminism in the hood: postcoloniality, struggle and organizing,"²

² In translation to English, we use "the hood" or the neighborhood for the Swedish word "orten," to reflect that, when based in self-identification, the denomination carries a feeling of belonging to a place as well as to a community between people living in similar marginalized residential areas of major cities over the whole country, and beyond. It may also express a

which was co-organized by a group gathering actors from civil society and the cultural and pedagogical sector in Gothenburg. This March 8 event was held at Blå Stället, a popular cultural center known for its art exhibitions and performances, and for being a stage for public debates, located in Angered, a multicultural area in the north-east of Gothenburg. Using a multi-scalar approach to connect subjects in different locations across multiple sites, Mia followed the actors from the March 8 event to a second event, *Burka Songs 2.0* in April the same year (Jakku 2018). This event was a screening of Hanna Högstedt's film *Burka Songs 2.0* from 2017 and a panel conversation focusing on questions of who can speak for whom and which subjects are considered as credible subjects and which are not (Håkansson 2018). Connections between the experiences and expressions by subjects in one location and the "fates of these same subjects in other locations" (Marcus 1995, 106) allowed Mia to explore the agendas and appearances of these struggles across various sites, from their anchorage in a single event (March 8), to illuminate linkages between diverse sites and discern deeper connections between these performances. Mia also followed some of the activists from the previous events to the Instagram account *Polisbrutalitet i orten* [Police brutality in the hood], where she conducted online ethnography. Stories posted narrated experiences of police violence specifically targeting racialized people and police violence in marginalized residential areas of major cities in Sweden.

International Women's Day in Russia

The International Women's Day in Russia has a long and ambivalent history. Alexandra Kollontai, a famous Russian revolutionary and socialist, attended the Copenhagen conference in 1910 (Ruthchild 2010, 185). In 1913 she wrote an article on the International Women's Day for

sense of connection to people living in similar areas in other countries. The direct translation of "orten" is the hood. Since the hood may be interpreted as a negative term, if used by people without connection to the place, this chapter will use the hood in direct quotes and the neighborhood in more general discussions. Throughout the chapter, we also use the term marginalized residential areas of major cities. We are grateful for the valuable input and generous reflections from Nana Osei-Kofi on this terminology and translation.

Pravda, the Bolshevik daily newspaper published in St. Petersburg. The special issue of *Pravda* appeared on February 17 and was entirely dedicated to the “woman question,” which marked the first celebration of International Women’s Day in Russia (Ruthchild 2010, 186). The festivities took place in five cities including Kyiv (the capital of today’s Ukraine) and Tbilisi (the capital of Georgia). The biggest celebration occurred in St. Petersburg (Ruthchild 2010, 186). It was organized by female textile workers and attracted speakers of various political convictions. But it also dragged extensive police force as if predicting the potential transformative power of the International Women’s Day celebrations which led to the fall of the tsarist regime in Russia in February 1917 (Ruthchild 2010; Wood 1997; Voronina 2017). However, the initial political edge of the International Women’s Day gradually faded in the Soviet Union. At first it turned into an important annual occasion for the Communist Party’s political campaigning among women (Voronina 2017, 8). Under Stalin, it was celebrated as “International Women’s Day of workers, struggle for communism and emancipation from capitalism” (Voronina 2017, 9). From the late 1950s onwards March 8 were losing its political meaning, instead turning into celebration of women. In 1965, March 8 became an official holiday in the Soviet Union (Voronina 2017, 9). With this came another discursive change, as the day became associated with traditional patriarchal femininity and women’s achievements in motherhood and household management (Voronina 2017). This understanding of March 8 still remains dominant in Russia.

However, with the rise of grassroots feminist activism and the spread of transnational feminist ideas in the country we observe the reemergence of a political, feminist, meaning of the International Women’s Day. Many feminist events are organized across the country on March 8. The day remains a free-of-work state holiday which allows feminists to gather together for various occasions. Echoing the history of March 8 in Russia, St. Petersburg still stands out as the place of most numerous public demonstrations. Olga conducted participant observation of March 8 celebrations in two sites: in the capital city of Moscow (2018) and in St. Petersburg (2019). She also followed the event online collecting material about celebrations in other cities across the vast Russian territory. In Moscow she attended multiple small-scale public gatherings on

the central streets as well as several feminist indoor events organized by various feminist groups. In St. Petersburg she took part in a public gathering on the Lenin square. She followed this gathering afterward through analyzing a publicly available video of the rally that was released in the Russian-language social network *Vkontakte* by the rally's organizers and through interviewing one of the rally's co-organizers who led a bodily performance during the gathering. The second section provides a detailed analysis of this material. Being based on the analysis of the same event across time (2018 and 2019) and space—virtual and physical—the Russian case provides the story of corporeal struggles on March 8 across and within several sites, mapping struggles over visions about “the definition of collective reality” (Marcus 1995, 109).

International Women's Day in Turkey

Compared to Sweden and Russia, the popular celebration of March 8 in Turkey has a more recent history. Until the 2000s, organizing around the International Women's Day was without a mass base, mostly confined to socialist, feminist, and Kemalist activist circles. The first known celebration was organized by the Communist Party in 1921. Until World War II, the Communist Party of Turkey raised a number of demands on the occasion of March 8 such as equal pay for equal work and the prohibition of women's employment in heavy works and night shifts (Tunçay 2009 in Akbulut 2016). Losing its appeal in the Postwar years in the context of Turkey's alignment with the First World (Anderson 2008), the International Women's Day resurfaced gender politics in 1975 as the Association of Progressive Women (*Ilerici Kadınlar Derneği*, IKD) mobilized for March 8. An organization of socialist women tied to the Turkish Communist Party, IKD raised the issues of equal pay for equal work and child care at the workplace in collaboration with the Women's International Democratic Federation³ (Akal 2003). Emerging in the political field in the early 1980s, feminist women politicized March 8 as a day for demanding full equality between the sexes in public and private

³ A brief discussion of Women's International Democratic Federation appears in Chapter 1.

spheres. Similar to socialist women they organized street demonstrations to raise their voices, but their source of inspiration was the rise of feminist activism in Western Europe and North America. From the late 1980s onwards Kemalist women integrated March 8 to their politics in line with their adoption of the UN gender equality agenda and discussed women's rights in relation to modernity, equality, and struggle against Islamism (Çağatay 2017). In the second half of the 1990s, feminist, socialist, and Kurdish women started to organize joint protests on the International Women's Day where women's sections of political parties and labor unions as well as women's organizations marched in parade in a predefined order.

The Feminist Night March (*Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü*) in Istanbul, which we explore in the Turkish case discussion, was first held in 2003 with no more than a hundred women gathered in the Taksim Square, the historical landmark for demonstrations of the social opposition of different kinds, calling attention to the relationship between patriarchy and militarism upon the US invasion in Iraq (Karakuş and Akkaya 2011). The night time demonstration differed from the day time parade in that it addressed feminists as individuals, instead of groups of women representing their respective organizations, providing room for the visibility of diverse modes of feminist existence and resistance. Adopting an intersectional view on feminist politics, this annual event became popular in the 2010s as more people joined feminist and queer struggles and occupying public spaces became an important mode of visibility in Turkey and globally. While "Feminist Night March" as a concept spread to other cities and towns in Turkey; the social profile of its participants in Istanbul diversified so as to include young women and queer people from marginalized residential areas as well as near-by cities. The many colorful, homemade placards with remarkable slogans handwritten by feminists received a lot of media attention, particularly those that related humorously to body politics and sexual rights.⁴ Increasingly motivated by the discourses and practices of transnational feminist solidarity, which we discussed in the previous chapter, the march received international

⁴ See, for example, <https://twitter.com/feministgundem/status/840080926402994176/photo/4> (accessed 31.12.2020).

recognition as well as verbal and physical attacks and smear campaigns from the government and pro-AKP civil actors. In the context of March 8's appropriation by the AKP elite⁵ and its global scale depoliticization by neoliberal structures, the Night March stands as a radical intervention that ties gender and sexual politics to broader social agendas and resists the exclusion of feminist and queer bodies from the public sphere. At the same time, it is an expression of coalition politics that is always in the making, shaped by the dynamics of transnational feminist and queer struggles, their agendas and politics of in/visibility.

The case on Turkey traces the life and times of the Feminist Night March in one site, using a reading practice which illuminates multiple or layered narratives across time shaping developments ahead. In January–March 2019, Selin conducted participatory action research with feminist and women's initiatives that mobilized around the International Women's Day, and a digital ethnography of the events and discourses around March 8 in various cities in Turkey and nationally. She has attended numerous feminist and women's gatherings and online communication toward, on, and after March 8, and took part in the organizing committee of the Night March. The case draws on field notes and observations together with interviews with feminist and queer activists and data gathered on social media (Twitter) and news websites. The analysis addresses March 8 as a historical event that is part of ongoing struggles around politics of visibility, solidarity, and the right to appear in public assembly transnationally.

Taken together, conceptualizing March 8 as a transnational phenomenon, we approach March 8 events in various contexts in relational terms, emphasizing the multiplicities and connections that “decenter hegemonic versions of feminism at varying scales” (Roy 2016, 290), as we bring forth linkages in the production and circulation of feminist praxis and emphasize sub-national cultural formations as well as

⁵ While the AKP circles treated feminism as a non-national, marginal ideology, they have also instrumentalized days such as March 8, the International Women's Day, and November 25, the [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), as well as feminist concepts of women's empowerment and agency, to claim Turkey's superior position in women's rights due to its Islamic, and therefore “more just,” societal relations, and to disseminate their counternarration on gender based on the notion of “gender justice.” See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

crossnational connections (Tambe 2010). As we approach the fieldsite as a heterogeneous network, the social phenomena in focus of our attention are the dynamics surrounding the struggles for the right to appear and spaces of appearance in various locations, including notions and practices of in/visibility, through the lens of March 8 in the contexts of our research. The fieldsite is understood as constructed by how participants enact and perceive the right to appear and spaces of appearance (Burrell 2016) and we employ a multi-sited methodology (Marcus 1995) to trace this phenomenon, its cultural formations, actors, and narratives.

Struggles for the Right to Appear

March 8 in Sweden: Agency, Visibility, and the Role of Feminism in the Hood

2018 was the first year a March 8 event was organized in Angered, an area represented in mainstream media as exposed to criminality and violence, however, inhabitants' descriptions of the area contrast this picture by expressing feelings of belonging and community (Ortens röster 2020; Atto 2019).⁶ The host of the March 8 event, Afaf, a young, Black woman, a poet and performance artist who self-identifies as Afro-Swedish, opened the event by recognizing the exclusions of Black and Muslim feminists in Swedish feminism. Explaining that she never saw women like her represented in the mainstream feminist struggle, she emphasized that this event was organized as a celebration of feminism in the neighborhood: "Today, we have our own day, our own celebration." Afaf referred to an ongoing debate around the film *Burka Songs 2.0*, which illuminates anti-Muslim racism, bringing up questions of Muslim women's right to speak. As a public screening and panel conversation of the film recently had been canceled by the municipality, Afaf said half-jokingly–half-sincerely that the organizers had been afraid that

⁶ See, for example, the Instagram account Voices from the hood (*Ortens röster*) 2020 and Atto 2019.

the March 8 day event would have had to be canceled.⁷ Then she took the opportunity to introduce one of the panelists of the evening, who also was one of the panelists in the *Burka Songs 2.0* event. The panelist was greeted with a strong applaud from the audience of approximately eighty people sitting close to each other, the majority of them young, Black and/or Muslim women but there were also older women, as well as young and older Black men, and a small number of white women of different ages, including Mia herself. All seats were occupied and people were standing along the walls. The atmosphere was relaxed with the audience focused on the activities on the stage. Some people were calmly moving around, to fetch water to drink or a cup of tea, to say hi to a friend, or arrange seats next to each other. With reference to the cancelation of the screening of *Burka Songs 2.0*, Afaf clarified that these developments have made people in the neighborhood worried about how much space Black and Muslim feminists are allowed to take in the public. These tensions, she said, put the spotlight on the necessity of getting organized in a struggle for the right to appear and to claim space.

The first point in the program was a panel with four young Black and/or Muslim feminists, engaged in a conversation on the theme: “Post-colonial feminism: struggle, organizing and resistance.” By illuminating multi-scalar linkages between the body and colonial civilizing missions, between the embedded site of protest and histories of struggle, the panelists located the body at a crossroad between resistance, power, and space (Cuesta and Mulinari 2018). In the capacity of panel chair, Afaf asked the panelists: “What does postcolonial feminism mean to you?” Upon receiving this question, Alya, a woman wearing hijab, responded that: “You see, we have a history filled with racism and colonialism. This

⁷ Originally, the film was scheduled for screening as part of a pre-EuroPride program event on March 14, 2018, organized by the municipality of Gothenburg. Yet, on March 1, 2018, the local government in Gothenburg announced that they had decided to cancel the screening of the film and the panel conversation, in response to critique from an op-ed in the local right-wing populist newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten*. The op-ed criticized the one-sided focus of the arrangement and the one-sided composition of the panel, which would be constituted by two Muslim feminists, known for their active engagement for the right to wear the veil and struggles against anti-Muslim racism (Sonesson 2018). One month later, a screening of the film with accompanying panel conversation was organized anew. This time by an independent association, *Göteborgs litteraturhus* [Gothenburg Literary House].

violence has left traces in our societies and our bodies. We have incorporated this violence.” Another panelist, Maryam, continued to explain that colonialism’s historical developments have impacted our contemporary society and personal lives on different levels, such that social class and processes of racialization appear at the center of modes of inequality:

Take for example, ownership. Who owns power in terms of money, in the context of decision making? Those areas which are the most racialized are also the poorest areas. The more Black people who live in an area, the more impoverished it is.⁸

Illuminating the unwillingness among white people in Sweden to recognize the interplay between private ownership/money and decision-making power for sustaining racial hierarchies, and demonstrating the existence of a colonial civilizing ambition in present-day discourses of Muslim women’s rights in Sweden, Alya explained that: “Everyone wants to hear about my exposure to violence, but who is the perpetrator? It is as if this country suffers from collective amnesia.” She continued to explain the ignorance in Sweden of its colonial history, its civilizing mission, and how colonial racist discourses of Black or Muslim populations as “the Other” circulate and flourish. She concluded: “It feels unfair, but I have to handle this lack of awareness, which results in an internalized oppression. Colonialism isn’t a historical event, we have a racial hierarchy today.”

A third panelist, Karima, a self-identified Muslim feminist, deepened this aspect of the significance and co-construction of class and race by giving some examples of names on such neighborhoods: “Hjällbo, Biskopsgården, Hammarkullen. There is a lot of prejudice and lack of knowledge, there are material differences and discrimination at the workplace.” Bringing the body to the center of attention, in its multi-scalar intersection with space, power, and resistance, the contributions of Alya, Maryam, and Karima in the March 8 panel expressed a certain kind of thinking through the body. A similar kind of thinking through the body has for a long time been at the center of the theoretical and political

⁸ In the conversation, the speaker referred to figures in *Afrofobirapporten* (2014).

agenda of Black and Chicano feminists (Cuesta and Mulinari 2018). Yet, the feminists in the panel on March 8 not only located the Black and Muslim woman's body but also the neighborhood as the space of struggle, at the center of attention, aspiring to reinscribe these bodies and spaces in historical and contemporary relations of power. Simultaneously, those relations of power were located within the bodies and spaces of Black and Muslim feminists. These bodily re-inscriptions were highlighted in contributions to the panel among other things through Alya's narration of colonial violence as internalized and of Maryam's description of racialized areas as impoverished. Their approach was situated in an understanding of power in terms of access to money and decision-making capacity. As they employed a thinking through the body, their contributions brought forth a focus on political agency and subjectivity, visualizing how political struggles can shift and transform the position of bodies from passive objects within relations of power to active political subjects, involved in building connections and shaping alliances between diverse, collective bodies (Cuesta and Mulinari 2018) visualized, too, in the March 8 event itself.

In the panel conversation during the March 8 event, the discussion evolved to focus on Black and Muslim women's right to speak and to claim space. On this point, the fourth panelist, Mona, who self-identified as an Afro-Swedish Muslim feminist, emphasized that:

Fundamentally, the questions brought up today are about survival. There are women who need to think about survival every day. Our struggles concern being recognized as a human being in one's own right, the right to exist and to claim space. (...) Use the position you have and stand up.

Recognizing the ambiguities of body politics, Mona illuminated the risks at stake for Black and Muslim women in the context of Swedish feel-good antiracism, within which it has become transformed from a site of political struggle to a Swedish national value, shaping the basis for a "subject position that reinforces the moral superiority of whites as antiracists" (Cuesta and Mulinari 2018, 11). In this context, Black and Muslim women are frequently victimized and deprived agency, autonomy, and voice. In this sense, their struggles for the right to speak

and to appear concern questions of survival in both literal and discursive respects.

Mona was also a panelist in the conversation after a screening of *Burka Songs 2.0*, which after its cancellation by the municipality in March was re-organized by an independent organization in April the same year. The screening was introduced by a short talk by the Lebanese filmmaker Farah Kasseem, who said that the only way to achieve change within a context of the war on terror where anti-Muslim conspiracy theories circulate is to “share stories. To share something that comes from your heart, from your experience, to connect people and help them understand how complex the situation is.” In the panel conversation after the screening, colonialism was addressed as well as the lack of interest and ignorance about the role of colonialism in present-day racial regimes in a Swedish context. With anchorage in relations and histories of colonialism, the panelists of the *Burka Songs 2.0* event engaged in a conversation around what subject is allowed to speak and on what conditions. In this panel, Mona asked: “How are the linkages to colonialism visualized in policy and society today? Developing her thoughts further, Mona suggested the need to

let practices of resistance take departure in history. It is not a coincidence that Muslim women, with an analysis of power relations, are silenced, because they challenge hegemonies. (...) But we have a responsibility, from our parents, to carry out this struggle, as a struggle for equality.

Mona’s understanding of the role of the body in struggles for rights did not suggest an ahistorical understanding of bodily needs, nor did it approach the body as a pure effect of particular historical contexts. Rather, she proposed a more open-ended approach, genealogically linked to history as felt in the body through everyday memories and experiences of trauma, while keeping open the possibility of future transformation.

After the screening of the film in the *Burka Songs 2.0* event, three women appeared on the stage to read out loud stories from the Instagram account *Police brutality in the neighborhood (Polisbrutalitet i orten)*. The admins describe the account as a place to share stories to grasp the extent of the problem of ethnic/racial profiling and to provide

a broader perspective in debates around safety in the neighborhood. Postings illuminate unprovoked, aggressive, and brutal police violence particularly targeting racialized people. In the postings, racialized groups appear simultaneously both hypervisible and invisible (Leinonen and Toivanen 2014). The stories from the Instagram account provide examples around how Swedish authorities attempt to control Black, migrant, and/or Muslim populations, in most cases by violence and aggression. The reading of these stories directed a focus on state institutions as important aspects in the struggle for claiming space, for tellability, and for the right to appear. Leily, a young, Black woman from Malmö, introduced the readings by explaining that: “[Police brutality] happens because we are located in the bodies that we have. People talk about us, to us but our stories have been hidden. Now we are going to read these stories.”

Until August 2019, the Instagram account included 78 postings and stories from Black, migrant, and Muslim individuals, sharing experiences of being violently stopped and searched by aggressive policemen without explanation, beaten and yelled at, driven out to the woods by the police in the middle of the night, and being exposed to racist speech. In the stories, the experience of being exposed to violent acts by the police emerges as an experience shared by Afro-Swedes, Roma, and Muslim populations in marginalized residential areas of major cities (Civil Rights Defenders 2017). Further, postings in the account illuminate that ethnic minorities and racialized groups are also frequently targeted in places outside of the neighborhood. In the postings, vulnerability is mobilized collectively, shedding light on a structural problem.

As we trace enactments in a struggle for the right to appear, it is time for us to move back again to the March 8 event in Angered. When we re-enter this event, the panel conversation had been wrapped up. There has been a dance performance, and information about actions against female genital mutilation (FGM). All participants were offered a generous amount of delicious couscous, vegetables, and bread. Fataneh, a young woman, poet, and artist, read out loud her poem “I know a woman in the hood,” a poem which visualizes the multiple oppression of Black women. The poem turned the gaze from the white savior-subject to the Black woman-agent and illustrated the colonial nature of the idea

of White people saving brown women from brown men, highlighting the nature of such projects as denying racialized women their agency. “The hoods where we live,” Fataneh read firmly, “are seen as risk areas but,” she asked, “what risk is it that we are exposed to? Frequently, it is said that we are exposed to violence and poverty. But actually” she continued,

we are exposed to racism. All can see the figures in the statistics, but no one recognizes that the figures visualize racism against those who live in the hood. I am a woman in the hood. The top-three problems I encounter are 1. Racism 2. Capitalism. 3. Patriarchy.

Anchored in questions of corporeality and place, Fataneh’s poem highlighted linkages between the discussions in the Instagram account, connecting the struggles against racial/ethnic profiling to hierarchical, colonial agendas, and protesting against the construction of Black and Muslim women as victims who needs to be “saved” from their histories, communities, and/or families. The poem also connected to the *Burka Songs 2.0* discussion and the panel conversation in the March 8 event by recognizing the existence of a racial regime in Sweden, being the product of intersections of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. In the poem, Fataneh employed a multi-scalar thinking through the body, connecting the individual body, with the neighborhood and the state, which transforms the position of bodies from passive objects to active subjects. Exercising a corporeal resistance, the poem challenged histories and presents of colonialism and racism, rooted in the embodied experiences of Black and Muslim women, reframing these stories from being seen as individual anomalies to collective agendas in spatially and temporally distinct struggles for the right to appear.

Taken together, these three events shaped a sub-national cultural formation by establishing linkages between each other and bringing to light questions of visibility, tellability, and the right to appear, as these emerge in the feminist movement (March 8); in the contemporary debate (*Burka Songs 2.0*); and in virtual/physical space (the Instagram account). The enactments taking place around the March 8 event “The role of

feminism in the hood: postcoloniality, struggle and organizing” illustrated how bodily acts and corporeal forms of resistance can transform the position of bodies from objects of power to subjects acting and speaking together (Butler 2015; Alcoff 2006). Further, *Burka Songs 2.0* acknowledged the significance of visibility and tellability for bringing about change. The event itself, including the debate and the many turns around the event, manifested the double-edged nature of visibility as a route to change, and as a measure of control. Finally, the sharing of the stories of police brutality, posted on the Instagram account, expressed a form of body politics in which an ambiguous relationship between bodies and power was brought forth. Here, the racialized body emerged as a target of social control but also as a site of agency, through the telling of and engagement with stories around police brutality, breaking the silence, and illuminating a wider pattern. Highlighting tensions between representation and rights, the events included here illuminated the complex move through which the body cannot be used as a mere instrument for political claims, but that it is crucial to let one’s body, and the plurality of bodies, become a “precondition of all further claims” (Butler 2015, 181). By acting together at the inter-linked events of March 8, the *Burka Songs 2.0* event, and in the Instagram account, the individual is transformed from a single body exposed to violence, to a part of an alliance of collective bodies who take action for social change. In this struggle, a broad feminist agenda rooted in the materiality of experience, embodiment, and place, sustained the development of a coalitional framework between differently positioned activists, as actors at these events entered into the negotiation of the space of appearance through collective action.

March 8 in Russia: Claiming the Right to Appear

In 2017 when Olga just started conducting her research in Russia, feminists in St. Petersburg took March 8 to the streets—they organized a non-approved rally on the Nevsky prospekt, the city’s most central avenue. This was but one public event that Russian feminists started organizing on March 8 on a regular basis in the 2010s in an attempt to

reclaim the political meaning of the International Women's Day, which was largely lost during the late Soviet period (Voronina 2017). The series of public events in Moscow on March 8, 2018 was explicitly referring to this reclamation. With the slogan "Go out! Retrieve March 8!", *Komitet 8 Marta* (March 8 Committee), the left-leaning nongovernmental organization, urged women to reappropriate the meaning of March 8 from the patriarchal "day of spring, love, and beauty" to "the day of solidarity among women in their struggle for rights" (Komitet 8 Marta 2018). These public events were sometimes challenging to organize. The organizers of the Nevsky Prospekt rally in 2017 initially planned to hold the gathering on the Field of Mars, a large square in the St. Petersburg center. When they applied for permission to the St. Petersburg municipality, their request was declined under the pretext that another mass event had already been scheduled there (V Peterburge grazhdanskie aktivisty proveli miting v chest' 8 marta' 2017). As a result, the non-approved rally on the Nevsky prospekt was suppressed by the police, and several activists were detained (Klochkova 2017). The aforementioned series of events in Moscow in 2018 consisted, among others, of single-standing pickets on Arbat, a pedestrian street in the Moscow center. The picket participants who were replacing each other in order to avoid the detention by the police held placards with requests to stop sexual harassment and discrimination of women on the labor market. While single-standing pickets did not require any formal permission, they were still closely observed by a group of policemen (Fieldwork notes, March 8, 2018). As these examples demonstrate, the right of bodily appearance on the streets is not taken for granted by Russian feminist activists. At the same time, as the slogan "Go out! Retrieve March 8!" or the urge of St. Petersburg activists that "it is time to take to the streets and to vote with our appearance for feminism" (Feminism—dlia kazhdoi 2018) illustrate, the right to appear is deemed important by Russian feminist activists in reclaiming the feminist meaning of March 8 as the site of the struggle for women's rights in a broad sense. Just as Butler (2015, 83) asserts, "political claims are made by bodies as they appear and act..."

In what follows, we analyze one particular example of such collective bodily appearance which is the feminist rally in St. Petersburg in 2019 (Sasunkevich 2021). This rally managed to unite local feminists from

the variety of the political spectrum and political organizations with a pro-feminist agenda. Unlike in 2017 when the feminist gathering was not permitted by the St. Petersburg authorities, the rally of 2019 organized by a feminist initiative March 8, 2019 got a permission to be held on the Lenin Square in front of the Finlyandsky station, located slightly away from the most central parts of the city. Navigating between solidarity with other activist groups, namely LGBTI+ activists, and caring about participants' security, the rally's organizers warned in the Russian-language social network *Vkontakte* that potential participants could be detained for bringing rainbow items to the rally. Simultaneously, they also provided information about legal assistance in case of detention (8 Marta v Sankt Peterburge 2019).

The rally's motto was "Feminism for each and one*"⁹ (*Feminism dlia kazhdoi**). The description of the event acknowledged multilayeredness of problems that women face in the contemporary Russian society—the limited access to resources such as money, time, and decision-making; sexual and domestic violence and harassment; the insufficient support of motherhood; stigmatization of prostituted women; the dehumanizing prison system; the state homophobia and increase of hate crimes; the lack of legal and social support to migrant women and their children; and the lack of accessible spaces for people with disabilities. Thus, the agenda of the rally appealed to various social actors. It departed from the woman question and women's needs but it also expanded beyond them including LGBTI+ people and people with disabilities and addressing the woman question as a broad social issue determined by economic inequality and the inefficiency of the political system. The organizers' description of the event finished with the sentence "Patriarchy and capitalism off!" Moreover, during the rally itself, this agenda was also extended by a clear stance against Russian nationalistic militarism when the feminist poet Galina Rymbu read her anti-military poem which implicitly condemned the Russian aggression in Ukraine and related it to gender violence and the dominant patriarchal order.

⁹ In Russian, "each and one" had a feminine grammatical gender, i.e., the organizers foremost appealed to women*. There was an additional note that "*" signified the inclusiveness of the space and organizers' will to include non-binary-, queer, and trans people.



Fig. 5.1 Capture: Feminist rally in St. Petersburg (Photo credit: Olga Sasunkevich)

On a sunny, springy day of March 8, 2019 from 300 to 500 people gathered around the statue of Vladimir Lenin (see Fig. 5.1). There were representatives of various political ideologies including socialist movement, communists, anarchists, and a broad feminist spectrum and identifications, notably, cis- and transgender people, lesbians, and queers. The organizers had a list of speakers who were invited to the Lenin's postament one-by-one to present their organization or movement and to speak out the most important feminist-related issues. The rally started with one of the organizers underlining the intersectional spirit of the rally once again. The person talked about *peresechenie*¹⁰ (the intersection)

¹⁰ The anglicism *interseksionalizm* to designate the intersectional approach is also used in the Russian-language scholarly literature and activist circles. However, it is important to acknowledge that activists used the Russian term *peresechenie* (literally, intersection) to speak of identity and experience overlaps.

of identities/experiences/discriminations that constructs women's subjectivity and, consequently, the multiplicity of problems women face. While naming the structures of oppression, the organizer mentioned nationalism, conservative forces, the Russian Orthodox Church, the state, and the capitalist system. The placards, which participants brought to the rally, also raised various issues—from clearly feminist questions of domestic and sexual violence, harassment, and reproductive politics to economic inequality that prevents women from deciding their reproductive behavior freely. For example, the Russian socialist movement had a placard “For the right for abortion. For the possibility not to make the abortion.”

Women who spoke out during the rally varied across age, political affiliation, and questions they raised—some considered labor, care burden, and economic rights among the most pressing issues, others talked about individual autonomy, patriarchy, gender stereotypes, and domestic and sexual violence and harassment as a part of the feminist agenda. One speaker talked about femicide as an existing but unrecognized problem in Russia. She said that, according to activists' data, more than one hundred women were murdered in Russia during the previous two months of 2019. As she continued:

The tradition is to announce a moment of silence to acknowledge those who died. We suggest not to keep silent, but to scream. To scream together those who are here now. We will have a minute of a common scream, of rage and anger caused by the powerlessness and violence against women. Please, join me (*screaming in a microphone, the crowd joins*).

The performative scream was followed by another speech about the struggle against homophobia as a part of the feminist agenda. Olga, another organizer of the rally, came to the postament with a placard stating that lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender issues belong to feminist questions, the fact that, as she mentioned, did not always find support among feminists. Her speech raised a round of applause. Enthusiasm and support were perceptible during other speeches as well. When a female-identified representative of the Russian socialist movement said that she

was nervous because this was her first speech in front of such a large number of people, the crowd cheered her with applause and sounds of support.

However, the tension arose when a transgender activist, Ekaterina, rose to the postament. At first she was also cheered by the first rows of participants, where activists known as intersectional feminists, lesbians, and self-identified queers, gathered. But then someone shouted from the crowd, “A Woman is not a costume,” putting into question Ekaterina’s self-identification as a (transgender) woman. Ekaterina got confused, the enthusiasm with which she started her speech decreased. Someone from the crowd shouted, “Go away!” “This is an intersectional rally,” one of the organizers shouted back. A short pause occurred, then four activists rose to the postament and stood on both sides from Ekaterina as literally lending her a shoulder of support. One of the activists held a placard which can be roughly translated from Russian as “A woman can mean many things, it is not your call to decide upon this meaning.”¹¹ Ekaterina managed to get back to her speech where she brought up the agenda of transgender women and the miscomprehension of their agenda in some feminist circles.

Later on, the organizers announced “practices of bodily liberation” as a rally activity. Two performance artists—Dasha and Marina—were invited to the podium. Dasha, who introduced themselves as a queer-performer, activist, and a facilitator of bodily practices for LGBTI+ community, suggested to perform some noise to make people’s presence on the square apparent. After that, Dasha suggested to shake bodies in order to get rid of oppression. Marina, who introduced themselves as a hip-hop artist, continued, “Discrimination and violence are directed to our bodies, therefore, we came here today to claim our rights, to become visible.” Dasha suggested to look around and to establish an eye contact with other participants of the rally. Then both Dasha and Marina told participants to sense their bodies in the space, to sense their groundedness and find some ease. And then, they continued, “We are here because we disagree and because we continue to struggle against oppressive structures. And we suggest now to shake away all external things that stick to

¹¹ “Zhenshchina” mozhet znachit’ mnogoe, ne vam reshat’ chto.”

our bodies. Let's start with transphobia." After that they co-ordinated people's shaking movements that were aimed at exorcizing transphobia from participants' bodies.

Dasha and Marina's performance was clearly addressing the transphobic incident that occurred some minutes earlier. As performance artists, they challenged this incident through bodily practices. Moreover, they wove transphobia into a broader narrative of oppression and discrimination which directly affects people's bodies. In this sense, their ambition can be seen as an attempt to pose questions of oppression, homo- and transphobia, and invisibility of intersectional experiences, on a level of corporeality. Their appeal to multiple individual bodies as a part of a united collective protesting body of the rally can be interpreted as an aspiration to imagine solidarity not only as a concept but also, and even more so, as a particular bodily practice of collective assemblage.

When Olga interviewed Dasha¹² a year later, they explained the importance of bodily practices in activism as follows:

For some time I wanted to develop my own bodily program. When I returned to Russia [after living in the US for 15 years as a migrant], I realized that two of my strong wishes—to work with the LGBT community and to teach bodily practices—can intertwine. It seemed to me that others have also had this strong wish—a wish to have a community [based on] some kind of bodily cohesion.

While the community was very supportive of this idea, Dasha found it difficult to secure funding for such community work. Dasha, a performer, a somatic practitioner, and movement educator, reworked their project applications many times in order to make the project more convincing:

And each time I had to say that discrimination is ongoing through our bodies, that it is directed at our bodies, but at the same time corporeality is entirely excluded from the LGBT discourse. And of course in Russia the LGBT discourse and activism are very logocentric. Everything is built

¹² The name is real. The interview quote and the following analysis are approved by the research partner.

on discussions, language, speaking groups, including therapy. But what was important in [the project] is that it gave the sense of regular presence without a necessity to position yourself somehow. We used words to say names and pronouns, to describe our experiences but then we always shifted to different somatic practices such as guided meditation, dance improvisation, and other bodily expressions, where words were still possible. I've always wanted to connect the language with physical movements, to not establish them as separate entities...

Following this, Dasha also describes how important touch and cuddling are for their bodily exercises because these bodily practices help people learn something about themselves by getting in contact with others.

Focusing on the body as a site of activist politics in the example above, we want to highlight several important aspects that the corporeal dimension can add to feminist and queer politics. First, as the feminist struggle for the right to appear in public space in Russian cities reveals, bodily assemblies remain an important political site even though the extensive digitalization of activist practices expands and reconfigures the notion of public space and the meaning of political (Fotopoulou 2016). To get together in the street and become a part of a collective bodily assemblage is a powerful political gesture in (re)claiming the meaning of March 8 as a feminist occasion aimed at the struggle for rights and against social and economic disadvantages for multiple groups of women including migrants, non-binary and transgender persons, and people with disabilities. The fact that in Russia, as in many other countries across the liberal–authoritarian divide, the right to appear is not given automatically but should be claimed through bureaucratic processes of applying for permissions, careful safety precautions, or clashes with police, manifests the acknowledgment of the political significance of bodily assemblages on the streets.

Second, bodily assemblies are not unproblematic. As we have seen in the case of Sweden and Russia, the right to appear is not equally given to everyone. As in the classical Polis, where “the slave, the foreigner and the barbarian were excluded from [the space of appearance] (Butler 2011),” mainstream progressive queer and feminist politics often exclude

particular groups (such as women of color or Muslim women in the case of Sweden or transgender persons in the Russian example) who are considered as unwanted subjects of public appearance. Yet, as the case of bodily solidarity with a transgender woman Ekaterina during St. Peterburg's rally demonstrates, the public assembly provides a space to contest exclusionist politics. Importantly, this happens beyond logocentric performativity of identity politics—the verbal promise to be intersectional and inclusive contained in organizers' invitation to the rally and in the immediate response to transphobic incident by one of the organizers (“This is an intersectional rally”) extends to the performative act when other “bodies” literally lend a shoulder to a confused person in need of support and empowerment. This powerful occurrence greatly illustrates Butler's thesis, according to which the political body is not individual, it does not act alone (Butler 2015, 77). The space of appearance is the “performative exercise [that] happens only ‘between’ bodies” (Ibid.) bringing the political dimension of the public appearance into existence.

Finally, the performative “practices of body liberation” that followed the incident only strengthened this political collectivity. The performative artists leading these practices aimed to fortify the space “between” bodies where the political action emerges from, in accordance with Butler (2015). We can think of this in terms of emerging corporeal and affective solidarity that becomes a source of empowerment. The corporeal solidarity gave Ekaterina the courage to resume her speech. The affective solidarity that occurred when the participants of the rally shook their bodies or when they screamed together out of rage at the level of gender violence in Russia turned them in to agentic subjects—instead of being subjugated to the position of victims of violence, the participants, mainly women, acted in resistance through screaming and shouting. Bringing these corporeal and affective actions to the fore, the organizers co-created the space of the political where the less powerful or those deprived of rights (such as LGBTI+, migrants, or disabled women in Russia) acquired political agency “that emerge[s] precisely in those domains deemed prepolitical or extrapolitical” such as “sexual, laboring, feminine, foreign, and mute” body (Butler 2015, 76, 86).

As we have examined activist engagements for the right to appear in relation to March 8 in Sweden and Russia by tracing the construction of an alliance of bodies across sites and mapping corporeal struggles over visions around the space of the political, further on, we turn to explore March 8 and the Feminist Night March in Turkey, with attention to layers of narratives and collective struggles over time. Situating March 8 as the overarching transnational frame for the discussions in this chapter, by way of conclusion, we will draw on these discussions to bring forth overlapping and contrastive ways in which bodies in assemblies on the International Women's Day in these three contexts are involved in coalitional struggles to perform their right to appear and, by so doing, reconfigure the materiality of public space.

March 8 in Istanbul: Struggles Over Anonymous Visibility

For many years on March 8, the Taksim Square of Beyoğlu neighborhood in Istanbul witnessed the gathering of thousands of women and queer people on the occasion of the Feminist Night March. Feminists marched through the İstiklal Avenue until the Tünel Square, taking over the space that has been the heart of culture, art, entertainment, and Istanbul's nightlife as well as home to many oppositional struggles. With its highly enthusiastic atmosphere the march gave hope to many; it was understood as the culmination of feminist mobilization toward March 8 each and every year. This was also where the diversity of feminisms came to the fore as the variety of bodies and their slogans destabilized the dominant image of feminists as uncovered (equated with secular) and female/feminine-looking. At the same time, organizers of this march had highlighted the anonymity of women as a collective political subject, for example, by signing the front banner used during the protest as "feminists" and asking participants to make their organizational affiliations invisible in their placards. In the 2010s, social media became an important factor in reaching out to different kinds of crowds; the profile of participants as well as of organizers further diversified. Over the years,

the Feminist Night March (*Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü*, hereafter FGY) grew into a spectacle, and struggles over gender politics grew around it.

FGY organizers are an ad hoc committee that forms every year on the occasion of March 8. Committee members are feminist activists participating as either individuals or part of (pro-)feminist organizations. FGY preparations start several weeks before March 8; among them are holding weekly meetings on organizational matters, putting up posters and distributing flyers in different neighborhoods, and organizing workshops for producing slogans and handwritten placards. FGY social media accounts, redundant the rest of the year, become active where organizers share calls, images, and videos to build up enthusiasm toward March 8. Since 2009, Feminist Space (*Feminist Mekan*), an apartment in a run-down building in Beyoğlu, on a street parallel to the İstiklal Avenue, serves as a backstage for the Feminist Night March.¹³ It hosts FGY meetings and workshops; it is where all the equipment, from banners and placards to sound system, is kept for the March 8 demonstration. Besides the Taksim Square, it can be considered as another, important yet invisible, starting point of the march. Following every FGY, organizers hold an evaluation meeting at the Feminist Space, already linking a given year's organizing to the upcoming one. The Space is crowdsourced by feminists, and activists who run this space serve as anonymous volunteers to ensure Feminist Space's independence, so that it is not associated with any particular organization or brand of feminism but belongs to the movement as a whole. As such, this space is a backstage also for feminist and queer solidarities and coalitions that are made, undone, and remade, throughout time, enabling the diverse and colorful assembly that marks Beyoğlu's center every March 8 (Fig. 5.2).

The first FGY committee meeting in 2019 started with one activist reading out loud the notes from previous year's evaluation meeting to tune in the current year's committee members to the spirit of March 8.

¹³ This space was established and used by the Socialist Feminist Collective between 2008–2015. During these years, it was also accessible for feminist and queer groups of different sorts (e.g., organizations, informal initiatives) that needed “a room of their own” to organize and strategize. In 2016, upon the collective's dissolution, it was taken over by a group of activists who did not wish to lose a space that had become an anchor for feminist struggle. The space was then renamed as Feminist Space (*Feminist Mekan*) and continued serving as a hotspot for different groups with agendas ranging from pro-peace activism to queer feminist literature.



Fig. 5.2 Preparations for the Feminist Night March at the Feminist Space (*Feminist Mekan*) (Photo credit: Selin Çağatay)

A discussion followed on the theme of the march that would be featured on the main banner behind which the crowd gathers. This banner would be photographed by journalists and remain in the memory of spectators as “the message” from feminists. Ideas and insights from activists followed one another: “We need to highlight the different ‘colors’ of the crowd!”, “We should formulate our message in an uplifting way!”, “We want to be reassuring, invoking courage and determination in participants!”, “We will not negotiate our rights and freedoms, we will not adapt!”, “Women are everywhere, and so is feminist resistance!”. In the end, the main theme and the slogan for March 8 came out: “We Don’t Abide by Patriarchy! This Is a Feminist Revolt!”. The theme would highlight the different ways of everyday resistance to oppressive gender norms and politics. With this in mind, feminists were invited to share on social media how they resist patriarchy with the hashtag #BuBirFeministisyandır. This was an appeal to visibility of feminists as not homogenous

but anonymous collective, a collective defined by being exposed to and resisting patriarchy as their “galvanizing condition” (Butler 2015, 9). As part of their strategy of being an anonymous collective, the FGY committee asked participants with organizational affiliation to make room for individual women. They announced on social media, that the FGY is

a space where ... no group representation or political discourse weighs heavier than that of an individual woman who joins [the march]. Of course, everyone will bring along the placards where they express their unique way of resistance; this will make the space animated, ... but we hope to not come across a situation where any woman feels like she does not belong to this space.

With this, organizers emphasized “the right to appear as a coalitional framework,” constructing the FGY as a “site of alliance among (...) people who [might] not otherwise find much in common and between whom there is sometimes even suspicion and antagonism” (Butler 2015, 27).

In recent years, feminists’ emphasis on being an anonymous collective acquired two important functions in gender politics; it is a method of resistance to state intervention and police brutality, and it allows for differential political belongings and bodily appearances to be in temporal and spatial alliances without overriding each other. Several days before the FGY, Selin interviewed Ceren, a member of the organizing committee. Ceren was known to the police as a movement leader and had charges against her for “promoting terrorism.” Before the interview, she had received a call from a policewoman who said,

‘That [Taksim] area is forbidden zone, you cannot march there.’ And I said, ‘I am not the person in charge; there is no point in you giving me this notice, I cannot accept it.’ Then the policewoman got irritated and she said, ‘You call that many people to gather [in Taksim], for sure there is somebody responsible for it!’ I said, ‘Well no. Those people gather there by their own initiative.’ Which is not a lie! If we didn’t make a

call (...) half of those people would still gather. The FGY is by now a phenomenon that is beyond us, more than the call we make.

Ceren's conversation with the police and her statement about the autonomy of FGY participants draws attention to how feminists might not only claim to be an anonymous collective but also act as one and express this publicly through discursive and corporeal means. This anonymity is what secured the Night March; since the organizers were an ad hoc committee with no leader or official form, a ban on the march could not be communicated to them and they could go around the legal framework that closed the public space to protest.¹⁴

When, on the evening of March 8, the police barricaded part of the Taksim Square and the side streets that connected to the Istiklal Avenue to block demonstrators' entry to the marching route, thousands had already gathered in the square. Diversity of their bodies stood in stark contrast to the feminists' portrayal as a uniform group of people; mothers with young children, high school students, older women, women with headscarves, LB+, and trans feminists were visible in the crowd. The police told the organizers who occupied the front line that marching through the Istiklal Avenue was banned and that they should lead the crowd through a different route if their aim was to march. This sounded like a bluff in many ways, not least because there was no alternative route where demonstrators could safely walk. With around twenty thousand feminists chanting and shouting slogans behind, organizers pressed for parading the Istiklal Avenue, insisting that they are there as "women" and women's right to appear in public could not be banned. The police then started pouring teargas on the front line and broke into the crowd at once. On its seventeenth year, the Feminist Night March was intervened.

Police brutality on feminists in 2019 became one instance through which visibility in public space shapes and is shaped by struggles over gender politics. Another instance was on March 9, when pro-AKP figures and news sources spread the claim that the crowd booed the *ezan*, the

¹⁴ Following the occupation of Gezi Park near the Taksim Square in 2013, public assemblies in this area have been banned. Feminists were the only group who still paraded the Istiklal Avenue. The government despised this, but the legitimacy and increasing transnational popularity of March 8 had so far kept the police from intervening.

Islamic call to prayer (Yeni Akit 9 March 2019). Organizers later learned that in the midst of the protest demonstrators heard the *ezan* coming from the Taksim Mosque in progress. Although it is a tradition as an expression of respect to stop action and listen quietly to the *ezan*, the sound that came from the construction site dispersed among the crowd and did not reach the front lines where demonstrators clashed with the police. While news sources alleged that this was a planned protest to the *ezan*, Erdoğan condemned the demonstrators: “A group led by the CHP (Republican People’s Party) and HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) that *pretended* to gather for the Women’s Day insulted the prayer with boos and chants” (Cumhuriyet 10 March 2019, emphasis ours).¹⁵ This caused a huge turmoil on Twitter between those who condemned feminists and those who denounced the fake news and/or defended the right to protest the *ezan*. The fake news was clearly connected to the ongoing smear campaign where anti-gender actors portrayed feminists in opposition to Islam and family values, as well as Turkish nationalism, in an aim to dissociate struggles for gender equality and sexual rights from Turkey’s new nation-building project. Prior to March 8, mosques became sites where propaganda against feminists spread. In many mosques in Istanbul, the Istanbul Convention and the 6284 Law (Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women) were targeted with prayer sessions against these legal mechanisms. In line with this campaign, “booing the *ezan*” was fabricated to scare away people, especially covered women, from joining feminist and queer struggles. A placard that said, “Are you God? Down with your family!”, obviously written by a Muslim feminist, went viral on Twitter and received a lot of hate and lynching.¹⁶

¹⁵ When in 2013 Gezi-inspired protests spread all over the country, the AKP government marked the events as terrorism staged by the Kemalist CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republican People’s Party) and the pro-Kurdish HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, Peoples’ Democratic Party) in an attempt to discredit the protestors and their demands for freedom from AKP’s authoritarian, neoliberal, populist rule. The visibility of feminist and LGBTI+ activists in Gezi protests was used by pro-AKP actors as a justification to stigmatize them as linked to terrorism (*Birgün* 14 March 2019). As a sign of dissociating the Taksim-Beyoğlu area from its historical association with alternative cultures and oppositional struggles, in 2017, the state approved the construction plan of a mosque in the Taksim Square, right in the area where protestors used to gather before they marched through the İstiklal Avenue.

¹⁶ See, for example, https://twitter.com/search?q=Allah%20m%C4%B1s%C4%B1n%C4%B1z%3F%20Aileniz%20bats%C4%B1n&src=typed_query. (accessed 31.12.2020).

For many activists and commentators there was a link between the police intervention and the visibility of covered women at the march (Sönmez 2019, Küçükırca 2019). This link was that the body of a feminist with a headscarf challenged the dominant caricature of the feminist subject as immoral and against the nation, which made it difficult for anti-gender actors to demonize feminists as unbelonging women. In return, by claiming that feminists offended the call to prayer, pro-AKP, anti-gender actors expected to discourage Muslim women from participating in a feminist alliance.

The aftermath of the smear campaign, against the expectations of anti-gender actors, strengthened the legibility and affinity between Muslim and secular feminists. Pressed to respond immediately to allegations, the FGY committee announced on social media accounts that:

The police did not listen to the *ezan* when blocking women's way, not letting them gather, and pouring teargas on them (...) Those who did not let us through the route we've marched for the past sixteen years, and kept us intentionally next to the mosque, now claim that we are against the *ezan*. No one shall manipulate our cause! Our revolt is to the police barricade, to those who want to ban March 8 and the women's parade. (Sendika.Org 10 March 2019)

Organizers had to react quickly, and they did not feel in position to claim whether anybody had or had not protested the *ezan*. Upon their response which was backed by many including women who belonged to Islamist circles, the smear campaign faded. But this triggered heated debates in feminist listservs and WhatsApp groups, around whether a response was necessary and what should have been said, considering that the mosque construction targeted feminists, queers, and the greater social opposition in the first place and perhaps, for that reason, the whole trick deserved being booed. Among the 2019 FGY organizers there were none who identified as Muslim feminist, thus the response to allegations was released without any input from Muslim feminists. At the evaluation meeting organized after March 8, however, Nur from the newly founded Muslim feminist organization Havle, was present. Sharing her reflections on the FGY and its aftermath, Nur said that she and her comrades in

Havle meant to take part in the FGY committee and expressed regret for not having done so. “But,” she said, “we were present [in the Taksim Square] as a large group [of Muslim feminists].” Considering the possibility of police intervention, they stood at the back, away from the front line. They therefore heard the *ezan* coming from the construction site: “Some people fell silent. Some people kept blowing their whistles. Some were staring at us. Some blew their whistles at us! I thought the *ezan* was really loud (...) perhaps it’s psychological.” Nur also expressed that as Muslim feminists they considered responding to the “booing debate” on social media, since they heard the whistle blows, but then gave up on this idea thinking that this would again be used against feminists. They decided that it makes sense for some people to protest the *ezan* in a context where “the abuse of religion is to such a [great] degree.”

We draw a number of conclusions from the experience on and around March 8 in Istanbul in 2019 in relation to visibility, solidarity, and the right to appear in public assembly. First, different reactions to the “booing debate” suggest that feminists’ intention to gather in the Taksim Square and march the Istiklal Avenue is an expression of not only their right to occupy public spaces but also the importance of being an anonymous collective against feminists’ association with terrorism and national unbelonging. Despite their lack of consensus about the right way of responding to the fake news, feminists stood together and politicized police brutality instead of revealing to the public their disagreement over the right to protest the *ezan*. Aware of their hypervisibility in the feminist movement, Muslim feminists especially held back from joining this debate. Similar to Ceren’s refusal of her role in organizing the March 8 demonstration when challenged by the police, Muslim feminists withdrew their individual reactions to the booing debate in order to push forward their visibility as part of the feminist collective political subject. This attitude shows the interplay between individual bodies and the collective body and reconfigures the embodied plurality in the March 8 space beyond intersectional discourses enacted by the FGY committee. Second, the collective ability to remain composed at the face of anti-gender attacks to discredit feminist suggests an understanding of March 8 beyond its significance as a single-day event, as part of ongoing struggles to cultivate solidarities and alliances between groups involved in

feminist and queer struggles. This ability is an outcome of a history of exchange, conflict, and collaboration between pious women and secular feminists. Although “Muslim feminism” is a new phenomenon in Turkey, since the 1990s, pious and secular activists came together in many platforms and initiatives and, especially in the 2010s, in those that unsettled the counterpositioning of feminism and Islam (Çağatay 2018). In this sense, the “booming debate” contributed to across the religion-secularity divide; the months after March 8, for example, saw a number of events at the Feminist Space discussing Muslim feminism, where Muslim feminists expressed their desire to be seen as equal constituents, not allies, in the feminist movement (Feminist Mekan’da Cuma Buluşmaları 2020a, b). Last but not least, by featuring the Feminist Space as a backstage for the FGY, the Turkish case points at the “multi-layered constructions of spatiality” (Liinason 2018) of March 8 in the form of a continuity between different spaces of resistance across time, namely the Taksim Square and the Feminist Space. Whereas the former space features “feminists” as an anonymous political collectivity, the latter is where face-to-face encounters take place, differences are negotiated, alliances are forged through “developing forms of becoming legible to one another” (Butler 2015, 38). Understanding how each other are “exposed to differential forms of living gender violence, and how this common exposure can become the basis for resistance” (Ibid.), in return, strengthens the idea of collective subjectivity that marks the spirit of March 8 gatherings.

Conclusion

Taking our departure in the International Women’s Day as the transnational frame of this chapter, we used a multi-scalar approach to connect subjects across different places of struggle, to map struggles over visions, and to illuminate the temporal multilayeredness of narratives of struggle. As we conceptualized the field as a heterogenous network, we sought to embrace the liveliness of events as they were unfolding to trace embodiment and corporeality in feminist and LGBTI+ struggles rather than limiting our scope within place-bound limits of a particular site or group of people. Following our understanding of resistance “in the grey zone,”

that is, composed by mutually determining and fluid exchanges between large-scale struggles in transnational social movements and in/visible resistant tactics on a micro-scale, the discussions in this chapter took interest in exploring these fluid relationships between individual bodies and the construction of collective spaces of resistance against dominant powers.

Through the lens of March 8, we traced the claiming of space performed in variegated struggles for the right to appear, be listened to, and heard in situated locales in Turkey, Russia, and Sweden and highlighted the various and overlapping spaces and scales on which these struggles take place, at the same time as the multiple temporalities of struggle were recognized through individual memories of previous protests and collective remembrances of histories of struggle. Within a broader context of attempts at appropriating March 8 by neoliberal or neoconservative elites, the events analyzed in this chapter present forceful interventions into existing efforts at universalizing questions of women's or sexual rights and de-linking questions of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality from broader socioeconomic or intersectional agendas. The performances in this chapter express a broad-based refusal, in various locales, to accept such attempts to curb the open-ended struggles for justice and rights, through police violence, or expressions of hatred underpinned by racism or transphobia.

As we kept attention to the multi-scalar, fluid and mutually determining the relationship between the individual and the collective in shaping space of appearance, our empirical examples brought to the fore how a focus on political agency and subjectivity, through individual narratives and appearances on a stage in Angered, at a rally in St. Petersburg, through the sharing of posts at a digital platform, or by carrying a slogan at a placard on the streets in Istanbul, can shift and transform the position of bodies from individual expression to collective agendas. Demanding the right to take space and to appear in public space, the many bodies of protesting individuals become part of a collective, protesting body. However, as highlighted in this chapter, the conditions for expressing such a right to appear are not automatically given to these groups or established without effort, but characterized by complicated bureaucratic processes of applying for permissions, by

staying patient through taxing ambiguities of bureaucracy when permissions get canceled because of unfounded or unclear reasons, by carefully thought through safety precautions, or by more or less violent clashes with the police.

The narratives collected here visualize some of the challenges and hopes inherent in the broad coalition politics in feminist and sexual struggles. While, in the Turkish example, these broad coalitions were part of a strategy of being an anonymous collective that generated a protection for the march itself, as well as for the individuals involved, in Russia, the broad coalition gathered people who otherwise might not have much in common, connecting different topics in the struggle, suggesting the possibility to imagine and express solidarity beyond the conceptual level but as a particular bodily practice of collective assemblage. However, as seen in the cases of the attempts at excluding certain categories of people from the right to appear in space, such as transgendered people in the Russian example, and Muslim feminists in the Swedish case, these bodily assemblies were not unproblematic but brought particular challenges to the coalitions as well as to the gathering itself. Yet, also here, as illuminated by our examples, the bodies of others could give literal protection, strength, and support to persons under attack, as fellow activists in the Russian case put their bodies on the line, to give shelter and support, and in the Swedish case, the participation of actors from other Swedish cities and from transnational feminist networks gave strength to the local community in Gothenburg, who under uncertain circumstances re-organized the canceled film screening. We conceptualize these dynamics in terms of emerging corporeal and affective solidarities, within which the body is not only an object of oppressive powers but also a site of resistance.

Further, as illuminated in the cases discussed throughout this chapter, struggles for the right to appear also brought problematics of visibility and hypervisibility, as actors could risk to be interpreted within broader political discourses, such as when Muslim feminists refused to join the “booming debate” in Istanbul, aware of their hypervisibility in the debate and cognizant of the risks of statements being hijacked by actors with other aims. A similar hypervisibility was experienced by Muslim feminists in the Swedish context, who shared stories of racial profiling and

police brutality. Within a context of such attempts at controlling the movements and relationships of groups of people, we recognize the key role of embodiment in struggle as corporeal action can signify more than what is said with words, and in other registers. In this way, we argue, bodily assemblies can take shape simultaneously as an individually empowering experience and a collective, political expression of resistance against the exclusion and violence of hegemonic actors and authorities who associate certain bodies with terrorism or criminality, such as feminist bodies, trans bodies, and racialized bodies.

Through the scale of the body, this chapter has examined the role of corporeality in resistance and traced core questions in feminist and LGBTI+ political work, such as invisibility/visibility, silence/speech, and exclusion/inclusion. Engaging with the ambiguities of embodied resistance through attention to the simultaneous exposure and agency of the body, this chapter visualized the potential of corporeal modes of resistance to shift from the individual to the collective. We noted that the space of appearance, as a political space, does not happen in “one” body but takes place between bodies claiming space. Building further on discussions in the previous chapters, this chapter attended to questions of materiality in feminist and LGBTI+ political work (see Chapter 3), highlighting the broad, socioeconomic agenda that appear in feminist and sexual politics when questions of embodiment and corporeality are brought to the fore. The discussions in this chapter addressed resistance *through* the body, as well as protests against the hypervisibility, respectively, invisibility *of* certain bodies, illuminating that resistance in the corporeal register opens up possibilities for a coalitional framework between differently positioned activists (see also Chapter 4). By approaching resistance as a relation between bodies claiming space, in this chapter, we have shown that attention to multiple scales of resistance can provide more fine-grained understandings of the constraints within which feminist and LGBTI+ struggles are located. In the next chapter (Chapter 6), we bring together all these dimensions and offer a contrastive discussion focused on the key findings of this book, as

we address the multi-scalar transnational methodology that formed the point of departure for our work.

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