Post-crisis, post-feminist: Reading Ada Colau as female Celebrity Politician in *Alcaldessa* (Pau Faus, 2016)

Abigail Loxham, University of Liverpool

Crisis, economic and then social, has not only altered the political landscape in Spain but, as a result, has also profoundly intervened in the structure and representation of politics in the media. The new political movements have proven themselves acutely aware of the power of the multiple media available to them and the influence of the various cultural discourses that are at play in this affective and public medium. The 15M movement, from which this new form of politics is understood to originate was organised through the spaces of new media that then spilled out into the spaces of cities and towns all over Spain. This represented for many a move away from what were deemed to be the ‘old’ politics of corruption and the maintenance of elites, towards a purportedly new politicised public that rejected the structures that had allowed this crisis to unfold (Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz 2018). This democratic revolution played out in the new online spaces of participation leading to what Castells has called a ‘rhizomatic revolution’ the physical mobilisation of large groups of people into the public space of towns and cities all over Spain (in what came to be known as el movimiento 15M) was precipitated by a concomitant virtual mobilisation: ‘While the occupation of public space was essential to make the movement visible, and to provide support to the key organizational form of the movement – the local assemblies –the origin of the movement and its backbone throughout the protest can be traced back to the free spaces of the Internet.’ (Castells 2012, 119) Despite this apparently progressive space of participation it has certainly been the case that new leaders have emerged; personalities required to bridge the gap between the expectations of a public schooled to expect charisma and personality and the ideologies of citizens’ movements for whom participation and democracy was a genuine goal. This essay addresses one such personality through the media prism that refracts a specific version of a very public persona and a documentary that emphasises the intimate access to Ada Colau as she experiences this media attention for the first time. In general this change in tone has been ushered in by young fresh faces at home in the confrontational environment of the Spanish TV *tertulia* or invoking HBO television as a cultural prism through which to engage with a disenfranchised and sceptical generation.[[1]](#footnote-2) This is one of the most visible after-effects of crisis in the public life of Spain: activists, protestors and other marginal figures have migrated into the mainstream and emerging, and established, forms of screen media have granted them a platform through which they can, to a degree, control their new-found cult of personality and, by extension, their political message. Analysis, in both domestic and international media, of the movements that produced these new leaders frequently focuses on Podemos and its leader Pablo Iglesias as a key exemplar of this conflation of personality politics and astute media handling, in their accounts of his rise to power as ‘one of Spain’s most polarising personalities’. (Kassam 2014) His background in political science has seen him transform this understanding of the theory of the political power of the media into practice, positing that ‘people no longer engage politically through parties but through the media’ (Iglesias 2015, 14). Iglesias stresses the affective engagement that the Spanish public have with television, an engagement that he cites as a major factor in shaping identities, creating publics and constituting loyalties in this altered post-crisis political landscape. According to Iglesias television ‘conditions and even helps manufacture the frameworks through which people think – the mental structures and their associated values – at a much higher level of intensity than the traditional sites of ideological production: family, school, religion.’ (2015, 16) In other words, this new politics must conform to and co-opt ‘old’ media at the same time as it identifies other avenues for the dissemination of its new political ideologies, ideologies that as I shall examine further, work within a curious mix of conventionally understood media discourses at the same time as they create new means of access to democracy. One of the pivotal modes of this access has been through the creation of new political personalities, personalities who rely on screen (and other) media in order to galvanize their public support.

The democratic digital revolution that mobilised the 15M movement in Spain has been replaced, although not entirely overridden, by a new politics of media in the aftermath of crisis. The hegemony of traditional public forums for debate in Spain is being tested and adapted to allow the new politics in, these radical figures of populism are performing to the (media) politics of neoliberalism that their organised protest was a reaction against. In doing so the discourses of personality, populism, politics and – in my case study of the representation of Ada Colau – postfeminism are put to the use of a leftist, democratic movement that might at first glance disavow such categories as the pernicious side-effect of a pervasive culture of individualism and neoliberalism, the roots of the crisis that are now being superseded. Pablo Iglesias is perhaps the most visible example of this blurring between the politics of the media and the new ‘left’ in Spain, and the construction of his mediatised image is a large part of this. Celebrity culture, embedded as it is within all forms of media, grants a platform for personality that in turn provides access to politics, or to a version of political discourse with which certain groups identify because of their affinity to the person who functions as its main representative, affinities which, as I will explore further, are often as much felt and experienced as they are cognitively and intellectually considered. Although the reaction from a traditionally conservative media in Spain on Television channels such as TVE or newspapers like El mundo has been to run a counter campaign that denigrates populist politics, there is no doubt that image plays into this new media environment, in sometimes ambiguous ways. (Seguín 2015, 23; Kioupkiolis 2016, 103)

In this essay, through a close reading of the documentary film *Alcaldessa* (Pau Faus 2016), and with reference to a selection of media texts and interviews, I examine the ways in which Ada Colau, the Mayor of Barcelona, occupies this ambiguous space of personality through the screen media that represent her. With reference to the discourses of celebrity and reading these Catalan and Spanish texts as part of a global media and political landscape I examine the ways in which the (contradictory) discourses of neoliberal postfeminism are challenged when a female politician seeks an autonomous political power and continued social activism which threatens to undo the structures of neoliberalism that have ‘granted’ her this platform in the first place. In following this process and attempting an alternative point of view, this documentary creates an affective and intimate relationship with her that imitates the form and function of popular media in its creation of (female) celebrity. These textual and visual strategies underscore the fact that the responses to crisis that claim to seek social change still battle with the conservative views of gender that appear so entrenched within screen (and other) media discourses, and by extension the subjects that are inscribed into these cultural representations of post-crisis femininity. The discursive construction of Ada Colau is one which creates a platform on which to contest the narratives of individualism, choice and neoliberalism which undergird the female emancipation that is the supposed hard-fought gain of postfeminism, nonetheless, her personality is constructed and maintained by those same structures. As she negotiates this image creation and construction, a process we follow in this documentary, we see that this particular brand of political personality is still confined by ‘the codes and conventions of media representations of women’. (van Zoonen 2006, 291)

Ada Colau came to prominence as a result of her social justice work for the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) a grassroots organisation that was involved in campaigning against and attempting to prevent the numerous evictions that came about as the result of the financial crisis and the resulting austerity measures made by the government (Colau Ballano and Alemany Salafranca 2012). Practical, legal and logistical support was provided by this organisation as it became, typical of other emerging movements, a stand-in for state support at a time when none was forthcoming, a feature of ‘the 15M that emphasizes a non-elitist, horizontal approach to collaborative culture that short-circuits neoliberal ideology (shaped by competition and individualism) in favor of a collective model’ (Cameron 2014, 2). Post-crisis culture produces tensions that grapple with the integration of these collective movements into an existing political structure and, as I extrapolate here, the return of the individual in the pursuit of collective benefit.

The documentary *Alcaldessa* (*Alcaldesa/Ada for Mayor*) was made in 2016 and won the *premio de la mejor dirección* at the Malaga film festival in the same year, the director Pau Faus had already collaborated on a project with Ada Colau, *Sí se puede: 7 días en PAH Barcelona* (2014). The documentary seems to offer an attempted riposte to the public image that those working closely with her encouraged and enabled and by the media reporting on these unusual political events that saw an activist take her place at the centre of the Catalan political elite. The style and tone of the piece are clear in the teasers available on YouTube. One of these takes the form of a piece to camera, an intimate conversation with the viewer in which the protagonist of this ‘fly on the wall’ documentary intervenes in the main narrative to give us her personal perspective. Against a dark background, Ada Colau’s head and shoulders are framed and the close up of her face sees the exhaustion etched upon it. The confessional and intimate nature of the scene is one we recognise as the framing of the authentic, the pause between the recorded footage of her life during which she is evaluates that life and comments on the personal, the intimate. She expresses her frustration at the contradictory nature of her position referring specifically to feminising politics and her status within a group that have reluctantly accepted the need for a leader in order to challenge the political system that they had initially hoped to overturn: ‘Yo no puedo ser la Ada que he sido siempre […] cuando hablamos de feminizar la política hablamos de eso, de que se puede hacer política sin ser un hombre fuerte, arrogante.’ Alert to the conventions of the Internet teaser which is always carefully curated for maximum emotional impact, sometimes controversy and of course, its principle objective, that it should leave us with a desire to see the film, this particular excerpt epitomises the ways in which the first female mayor of Barcelona is represented, mediated and ‘packaged’ not just through this piece but through the optics of a media which still constructs women in public life as women first and politicians, experts, and public figures second. Visibly emotional as she outlines the tensions and contradictions of her role, this short videodiary encapsulates the representational tensions at play in this documentary and in other media texts that participate in our mediatised consumption of public figures, and of female public figures in particular (fig 1).

One of the notable consequences of crisis and subsequent austerity measures in Spain has been the ways in which existing material inequalities based on gender have been exacerbated and how the depiction of this gender-based inequality is then reformulated and contested through the debates pertaining to this economic crisis. This extends to screen media and the ways in which certain female subjectivities are articulated and made visible through different forms of media. If media presence is a measure of power and visibility and a marker of influence then figures such as Ada Colau must be considered now, as she recognises in the documentary one of these ‘*personas mediáticas’*. This personality inflects her politics, her reception, her representation and as a result marks her life as a public actor. She is overburdened with the multiplicity of meanings that are inscribed upon her by these mediatised accounts -- Catalan, woman, mother (pregnant with her second child during her time in office), dissident political figure who has now become part of the establishment -- her subjectivity is both mediated and constructed by these discourses but also lived and performed by her. The documentary enables this performance, and our access to it, while emphasising that her participation in politics is one that is rooted in the grassroots movement that she was instrumental in (la PAH) and which is refracted through a gendered version of politics that she asserts as different from the mainstream, in part through its recourse to feminism or at least a discourse that she claims as feminine.

The documentary opens with a montage in which the radical politics of the PAH are traced though footage of occupations, resistance to evictions and then critically, the moment in which Ada Colau became the public face of those affected by the housing crisis in Spain, a televised appearance at the Initiative presented to the Spanish Congress on 5 February 2013 during which she faces down Javier Rodríguez Pellitero, Deputy General of the Spanish Banking Association, and, once more visibly emotional, accuses him of being a criminal. This televisual spectacle was the reason that she was thrust into the spotlight; her activism was ongoing but it took a media event for her to take shape as a force to be reckoned with. The appeal of this moment and its transmission by television, understood as vehicle of everyday emotion, is significant in the ways in which we understand her as a public personality. It is these emotional and affective responses that encourage political participation at the same time as they shape the affections and processes of our everyday lives.

Following this montage we are moved into the ‘present’ of the filming journey, the montage having established the background through ‘found footage’ edited for storytelling by this director. Here we move into the real Ada and the story of Guanyem/Barcelona en comú, through documentary techniques that clearly established the proximity of the director to his participants with all the assumptions of veracity that entails. These first scenes are of Guanyem meetings during which she is accompanied by her young son, the sound is insistently concentrated on her words (while the political discussion is relegated to background) as she whispers to her son and asks him if he’s had enough and if he wants her to call his grandmother so that she can come and collect him. This decision to foreground personality is unsurprising given the focus of the documentary and the political phenomenon as I have analysed above is inevitably imbricated in this personal rise to prominence. The film charts the negotiation of this clash between the media optics and the personal and in doing so privileges access to the person, as contrasted to her public persona, mobilising affective responses in the service of political action. However, in doing so it also falls into some of these gendered discourses of personality and female politicians that it seems intent to expose, complicit in creating her as a personality of the new politics seen here in her first appearance rendered as mother and, seemingly, distracted by that role from the serious discussion of the meeting.

Celebrity studies has emerged as a significant branch of enquiry within cultural studies, concentrating on the many and meaningful ways in which personalities are created, sustained and also undone by the strategies of contemporary media but more importantly our participation with those media and by extension those celebrities, which ‘shapes, in profound and meaningful ways, social and everyday life for the great many touched by its mediagenic fingers’ (Redmond 2006, 27). If we understand the mediatised presence of Ada Colau now as that of celebrity then we must, I think, interrogate this unique version of political celebrity and its intensely local iteration here in Spain. Her journey from the voice of a collective to that of a political personality has been unusual, and in what follows I unpick the ways in which this celebrity has emerged from her activism. I focus on the documentary as it both deconstructs and colludes in this perception of her femininity as a critical part of that public persona that is exploited to political advantage, employed in the pursuit of her political aims and, at times, functions to produce a limiting mediatised discourse that -- especially given her recent second pregnancy and childbirth -- reinscribes her embodied female subjectivity in ways that take precedence over serious political debate.

This is a complex process which negotiates a highly specific, media and political landscape, in a moment of flux, designated specifically as post-crisis. Documentary as a genre is positioned as complicit and constructive in its participation and observation of the emergence of these new movements. As the documentary progresses we see Ada Colau and Barcelona en comú (the organisation which began life as Guanyem) working to establish a new version of politics in which the collective and the material reality of post-crisis Spain addresses us through a politics of affect and emotion that might challenge the masculine mode of political discourse. In the pursuit of this, the documentary form resonates through the words of Ada in her stated attempt to change the nature of political debate. The film echoes and amplifies this political intent by mobilising her unexpected and unsolicited mediatised persona to underscore the proximity of that celebrity to everyday life and ‘authentic emotion’, a feature that Faus exploits through form and editing and which is the key facet of the mediatisation of Ada’s public self. She is presented as an ordinary person, emotionally available and in possession of feminine attributes that mobilise emotion in a politics of care and compassion. This mediated version of her is of course supported by the exploration of the collective action with which she has always been involved and which works to enact significant material change to the lives of those most affected by crisis. This confluence of radical politics, documentary and celebrity represents an apparent contradiction in terms of the representational strategies that we might expect from this type of media which reflect a similar contradiction (briefly outlined earlier in relation to Pablo Iglesias) in terms of the ideological and cultural construction of celebrity and the way in which it functions through frameworks that would not usually be identified with the politics of the left. In part this must be attributed to the prevalence and accessibility of screen media in the creation of what political scientists believe to be a shaping of a new hegemony of the left (Seguín 2015, 21). Populism and media culture coalesce in the figure of the celebrity activist turned politician. Ordinariness has become a crucial feature of celebrity culture in recent years as Graeme Turner has explored in some depth (2016). Ada Colau embodies a contradiction surrounding this understanding in that like many of the celebrities explored by Turner her ordinariness continues to be a key part of the discursive construction of her personality. Unlike the ordinary people of Turner’s work who are constructed as celebrities by the media who then, after the fact, might seek a social function for this new persona Colau’s social activism preceded her move into the public sphere. The media have been forced to grapple with these contradictory facets of her personality, in a media context that preferences soundbites and easily distilled versions of celebrity her position as ‘ordinary female’ has facilitated this understanding of her. Turner’s work informs this reading as he recognises the power of the media in their construction of celebrity but also because ordinariness has become a feature of that fame that enhances feelings of intimacy and amplifies their affective presence (a presence used here to the benefit of her activism) (2011, 11).

This ordinariness is presented through the documentary medium and the specifics of its presumed access to authenticity, and the social understanding of female celebrity (broadly understood) as configured in opposition – particularly in the political sphere – to the aggressive male confrontational style. Unlike the reality TV star-turned- celebrity though, here the performance of this authentic persona, the emotional accessibility of Ada and her persistent references to helping those who had been disadvantaged by the austerity politics of a post-crisis Spain allow for the emergence of a celebrity who is able to consolidate popular support for a new regime of social justice in Spain. Her position as a social actor for change creates celebrity, and creates tensions – representational and actual – as that public figure must perform within the limits of the established media. *Alcaldessa* takes charge of this and explores how different media forms might both limit and enable the emergence of collective action and perhaps, optimistically, challenge the dominant modes of framing women in the public eye. It does so by employing the formal and aesthetic strategies that we would expect from this type of documentary it advertises itself as a ‘crónica en primera persona’ and utilises talking heads, intimate pieces to camera with Ada Colau, shots in her home with her family and meetings with her inner circle, the campaign team from Guanyem/Barcelona en Comú. This aesthetic focuses on the didactic nature of the recorded image before creativity and stylistic innovation. In this it echoes the televisual documentary as a pedagogic, informative project. Other documentaries that have examined the moments of Spanish crisis have done so through more experimental techniques, incorporating the crisis into a crisis of comprehension and aesthetics and unsettling spectators.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Documentary is frequently the medium utilised to explore times of political and social change. The availability of equipment that can produce quality recordings without the need for lavish expenditure means that it is a mode that lends itself to times of economic restrictions particularly as expectations of veracity from the medium allow for a less polished style than might be expected of fiction/narrative films. Pau Faus is an architect who began making films with the PAH as a form of activism, and his first film made with them foregrounds this privileged access as he narrates the evictions and the material and emotional support provided by the PAH in a rudimentary fly on the wall style but one which has a clear intent to expose the injustices of the banks’ actions and to persuade and convince a spectator of the benefits of the social activism engaged in by the PAH. *Alcaldessa* is not a documentary that plays with form in order to challenge the conventions of representation but it performs its authenticity and access to its protagonist in a style familiar to first person or ethnographic filmmaking, and in doing so emphasises its intention to allow unmediated access to the real Ada. The access to her throughout this process means that we are also privy to a remediated version of the creation of this media persona, we witness first-hand her uncertainty as she moves to the forefront of this organisation and the image construction that she eventually accepts, reluctantly, as pivotal to success in a media environment that is intrigued as much by the success of this activist movement as they are by the apparently non-media savvy woman at the forefront of it she resigns herself to this and during the film she sums it up thus, *‘Tu imagen pasa a ser una cuestión importante y colectiva’.*

Throughout the documentary the interest in her image and self-presentation is a major focus, in particular the way in which the media concentrate on that developing image. From its opening scenes the documentary foregrounds this personal transformation as it presents a chronology of her emergence into public life that begins with the protests and *desahucios* which present her as a member of a collective movement to the consultative process that precipitated the decision of that movement to take part in representational politics. The conclusion of the documentary demonstrates that although this political and media environment in Spain has authored a certain version of individual celebrity focussed on Colau, in doing so they have ensured the success of the collective that she represents.

This production is just one object in a plethora of screen (and other) media that offer platforms for negotiation, reinterpretation and even participation in the construction of public figures. This means that we always read these figures as informed and staged by the numerous texts which offer these accounts of them. In a feature interview with Colau that appeared in La Vanguardia’s Arts and Fashion supplement in February 2017, the questions that open the interview address the significance of the political impact that her administration has had in Barcelona before a move to her personal life and upbringing takes precedence. Large photographs of her, all in black and white that dominate the space on the page and its reproduction in the digital edition astutely appeal to the cultured middle classes of Catalonia, the likely consumers of this article. The first picture at the top of the page is a double shot of her, back-to-back with herself, holding her pregnant stomach and then in the second shot facing the camera. In the next photograph there is a close up of her face, not even her hair is in the frame and the caption beneath the photograph reads *‘Ada Colau no utiliza perfume, no tiene posesiones ni debe nada a los bancos. Dice tener únicamente sentido de la propiedad con sus libros.’* In the opening photograph and the caption underneath the second we recognise the strategies and staging of what might be understood as discourses of postfeminism in the media’s representation of women, not just in the surprise about her choice not to wear perfume but also in the professed lack of interest for consumerism.

The framing of personality in this documentary, and in many of the media texts that engage with Ada Colau, focuses on her emergence from a place of activism and a site of politicised struggle which privileges the collective. Postfeminism is often understood as that which, in line with the neoliberal economy and its focus on the individual, empowers women as autonomous subjects of neoliberalism whilst simultaneously disempowering the women’s movement as a collective (Galt and Scharff 2011, 3-4). Stephanie Genz describes these contradictions as ‘undercutting the strategic weight of politicised feminist collectivities. Postfeminism is condemned not just for being apolitical but for producing, through its lack of an organized politics, a retrogressive and reactionary conservatism’ (2006, 336). *Alcaldessa* does not deal with her feminist politics, but in the subtle framing of certain events we are acutely aware of her place not just as marginal to the political mainstream in ideological terms but sidelined, literally in one scene, by her male political opponents. (Fig 2)

Media culture contributes to a gendered version of crisis and austerity in specific ways: ‘Just as postfeminist culture suggests that it is individual women (rather than systems of gendered hierarchy) that require modification, recessionary media culture implies that the management of the self can effect positive change’ (Negra and Tasker 2014, 2). Collective identities were forged and made more visible in Spain as a result of the 15M movement, and a new variety of politics was lauded for resisting the dominant tendency of corrupt power. Nonetheless, in line with the ways in which ‘the cultural storytelling associated with the mass media’ (Negra and Tasker 2014, 2) functions, personalities have emerged as central to the success and cohesion of these newly powerful collectives. This process is possible because we recognise celebrity as a category that, in the popular imagination, is attractive precisely through a discursive construction of ordinariness. If the emergence of populism marks the post-crisis political stage in Spain then it might be unsurprising that this goes hand in hand with an alternative type of political citizenship that understands the cultural capital of the celebrity but co-opts the supposed ordinariness of these constructions for political gains. Van Zoonen terms this the ‘personalization of political culture’ (2006, 289) underlining ‘how the presence and representation of female political leadership in celebrity politics articulates new dimensions to societal inclusion and exclusion.’ (289)

To return to the framing of Ada Colau and, in particular the emotion that she frequently embodies in this documentary, what we appear to witness is the emergence of a reluctant celebrity. Faus, in his documentary, underlines this role of Ada as celebrity who might effect political change in line with Sean Redmond’s definition of celebrity as a person who: ‘offers ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ people the chance of a heightened level of intimacy, an intimacy that potentially, perhaps inevitably, destabilizes the borders and boundaries of identity, and which energises or electrifies ones experience of the world.’ (2006, 27) This affective response is shaped by our recognition of the direct address and confessional moment that popular culture has popularised as the numerous strategies of reality television that encourage the hand held video testimonial as the route to motivation and the unmediated access to the individual psychology of the social actors involved. Yet in the content of Colau’s intimate moments we find that the electrification of our experience of the world resonates with an ethics of care and a political motivation stirred by emotion such as that described in Sara Ahmed’s work on the cultural politics of emotion, in which she claims that we are moved and thereby mobilised by the public demonstrations of emotion and our affective responses to them in ways that highlight the ‘role of emotions in the politicisation of subjects’ (2014, 171). It is not just in Spain that this emotional register has been recognised for its politicised impact in the media:

A key part of Colau’s appeal is that, unlike many politicians, she is not afraid to show emotion. The famous 2013 parliamentary hearing was by no means the only time she has cried, or been close to tears, on camera. (Hancox 2016)

Ada Colau utilises this emotional register and performs a subjectivity which embodies those contradictions, contradictions which include: the limitations and expectations of her gender (which she frequently links to the material effects of post-crisis on the day to day lives of women); the emotional work of the movement and the ways in which anger and pain are part of her call to action; and the demands for self-work and presentation as integral to her continued visibility, and her acceptance that this visibility entails a degree of power that she must put to good use. This work on the self that sees her emerge from part of a collective to a persona is part and parcel of the individual, usually consumer based cosmetic, work on appearance that the neoliberal media demands of women in their rise to positions of (economic) power and public prominence which have been examined in the Anglophone contexts in cultural studies (Gill 2007). She consents to a degree of publicity and image work (understood as self-work which is essential to the postfeminist project) and in doing so exemplifies the ways in which our understanding of female subjectivities in the public sphere and the mediasphere both complicate and enable her political position. Furthermore, this depiction of her personality and appearance are also foregrounded by the documentary, although there are attempts to deconstruct this. We see her having her hair blow dried for television appearances, her make up done and after this makeover we witness the emergence of Ada Colau as public figure through the photos of her face produced for her mayoral campaign (Fig 3). The schizophrenic nature of this celebrity is underscored by a meeting at which she discusses her image, which one should be chosen and how it should be used in order to best promote the movement, to see the many faces of her surrounding the subject herself point provides a neat visual synthesis of the polyvalence of her public image. In one of the videodiary sections we see her face resting on her hand which partially covers her mouth, her voiceover is played for a few minutes before we switch to (as we are accustomed) the synchronous and diegetic sound and image that characterise the deliberately simple aesthetic and in doing so concentrates on her words, face and voice. In this stylistic interruption the commentary on the janus-like personality that she embodies is fleetingly captured.

Ada Colau’s desire to see a feminization of politics is reduced at times to a micropolitics and management of her own situated daily gendered struggles: in the article in Arts and Fashion this is manifest in a discussion of the physical difficulties of pregnancy and her work in politics. It is encapsulated by her acceptance that she has not done as much as she should to make the town hall an easier place for women to work, and in several other media interviews she has spoken of sexual harassment and given accounts of machismo and harassment encountered through her work (Riveiro 2016). If Ada Colau is a product of the post-crisis moment in which there was a shift in the structures of power in Spain then she is not the only woman to find herself in the spotlight, both personally and politically. Manuela Carmena, mayor of Madrid representing Ahora Madrid, has also attracted comment for being a woman in a powerful role and is compared to Colau frequently because of shared political ideologies, although it is the shared gender that is frequently takes centre stage. The way in which contemporary media position women in power in certain ways speak to broader cultural fears about powerful women more generally and are overlaid in this case with fears about a new and radical political order. In attending to the emotional side of the political through this documentary Pau Faus is alert to the dangers of undermining the political import as Sara Ahmed says this is the feminised side of emotion which culture reads as ‘less than’, less capable of the serious work of politics (a strategy we witness in the documentary rendition of some of her more confrontational media appearances):

To be emotional is to have one’s judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous. Feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body (Spelman 1989; Jaggar 1996). Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement. (2014, 3)

Ada Colau’s visibility allows her to render visible other forms of being that are not always granted the spotlight in a media environment seeking specific versions of femininity. Her insistence on the material conditions of different women’s lives in this post-crisis environment means that her voice and individual agency work through this mediated visibility to create new forms of politicized ways of being in contemporary Spain/Catalonia, ways of being which consistently negotiate the ‘uneven visibilities of feminism’ of contemporary media culture (Gill 2016, 615). At the end of *Alcaldessa* the political and personal journey that it has traced ends in her election to mayor and her acceptance speech in which she foregrounds this female subjectivity as she thanks the assembled crowd ‘como mujer, madre, hija, compañera y amiga’. The combination of empathy and intimacy that coalesce through the documentary version of her at this significant moment in her career unite the representational tensions that I have traced throughout this essay.

The post-crisis environment in Spain is one which sees the intersection of activism and politics, and has enmeshed personality into a discourse of politics that utilises affect and social responsibility in order to mobilise relationships with these personalities and garner support for the political movements that they represent. The tensions that arise do so through the depictions of mediatised femininity and fame and the private/personal and space contrasted with the political as always gendered by the media but also by the way in which Ada Colau is portrayed in this film. Her movement from the margins into the mainstream relies on a carefully curated image but her continued political work has also found that this affective and intimate image work is what maintains her political and personal appeal. She sets out to disrupt the politics of neoliberalism, individualism and the market place that have caused the crisis but ends up to a degree, conforming to them in order to continue to hold a degree of political power. It would seem that in an age of understanding celebrity precisely through the emotional and affective bonds that they create, their imitation of ‘ordinariness’ has also enabled a powerful political process to take shape. A process that has not entirely cast off the shackles of the neoliberal/postfeminist aesthetics of the media but has learned to work within it in order to try to effect change. At the end of the Arts and Fashion supplement of La Vanguardia interview there is a disclaimer, common to these types of interview, which states:

Ni Ada Colau ni su jefe de prensa pidieron leer este texto antes de ser publicado. Su única petición fue no aparecer embarazada en la portada de ‘Fashion&Arts’ ni en la de ‘La Vanguardia’. Esta entrevista se realizó en dos tardes de viernes. Ada Colau bebió un vaso de agua.

Asserting agency and autonomy, to a small degree, over this mediatised image, Ada the subject is foregrounded one more as empathetic, caring and ordinary despite her new political office.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Cameron, Bryan. 2014. "Spain in Crisis: 15M and the Culture of Indignation."  *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15 (1-2):1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/14636204.2014.1002601

Castells, Manuel. 2012. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Charnock, Grieg, and Ramon Ribera-Fumaz. 2018. "Barcelon en comú: Urban Democracy and the Common Good."  *Socialist Register* 54: 188-201.

Colau Ballano, Ada, and Adrià Alemany Salafranca. 2012. *Vidas Hipotecadas. De la burbuja immobilaria al derecho de la vivienda*. Barcelona: Lectio Ediciones.

Dyer, Richard. 1980. *Stars*. London: BFI.

Galt, Rosalind, and Christina Scharff. 2011. "Introduction" in *New Femininities Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.1-17.

Genz, S. 2006. "Third Way/ve: The politics of postfeminism."  *Feminist Theory* 7 (3):333-53. DOI: 10.1177/1464700106069040

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility."  *Journal of European Cultural Studies* 10 (2):147-66.

Gill, Rosalind. 2016. "Post-postfeminism?: new feminist visibilities in postfeminist times."  *Feminist Media Studies* 16 (4):610-30. DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2016.1193293.

Hancox, Dan. 2016. "Is this the world's most radical mayor?" *The Guardian*.

Iglesias, Pablo. 2014. *Ganar o morir. Lecciones políticas en juego de tronos*. Madrid: Akal.

Iglesias, Pablo. 2015. "Understanding Podemos."  *New Left Review* 93:7-22.

Kassam, Ashita. 2014. 'Yes he can!' How Pablo Iglesias aims to use a wave of protest to build 'a decent country'.' *The Guardian*

Kioupkiolis, Alexandros. 2016. "Podemos: the ambiguous promises of left-wing populism in contemporary Spain."  *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21 (2):99-120. doi:10.1080/13569317.2016.1150136.

Negra, Diane, and Yvonne Tasker. 2014. "Introduction" *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*. 1-30. Durham, NC: Duke Universtiy Press.

Redmond, Sean. 2006. "Intimate Fame Everywhere." In *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*, edited by Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, 27-43. London: Routledge.

Riveiro, Aitor. 2016. "Ada Colau desvela que sufrió acoso sexual cuando ya era alcaldesa." *El diario*.

Seguín, Becquer. 2015. "Podemos and Its Critics."  *Radical Philosophy* 193 (Sept./Oct.):20-32.

Turner, Graeme. 2010. *Ordinary People and the Media. The Demotic Turn*. London: Sage.

Turner, Graeme. 2016. *Re-Inventing the Media*. New York: Routledge.

van Zoonen, Liesbet. 2006. "The personal, the political and the popular."  *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 (3):287-301. doi:10.1177/1367549406066074.

1. Pablo Iglesias has made political allegory of HBOs hugely successful Game of Thrones (Iglesias 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Films such as *Cuitat morta* and *Mercado de futuros* are more exploratory and less explicitly linked to emerging political movements. The activist website El salmon contracorriente has produced a list of six documentaries about the crisis found here http://www.elsalmoncontracorriente.es/?Seis-documentales-sobre-la-crisis [↑](#footnote-ref-3)