

Feminist Deliberation as Practice: Reconfiguring Democratic Mechanisms Across Space, Time, and Digital Arenas

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ABSTRACT

This article examines feminist deliberation as an evolving democratic mechanism that reshapes deliberative democracy across spatial, temporal, and epistemic dimensions. First, it offers a multilingual, cross-regional analysis of feminist scholarship from the Global North and South, showing how diverse epistemic traditions redefine deliberation. Second, it proposes a temporal framework with four phases: early feminist critiques of participation and legitimacy (1980s-1990s), relational and affective expansions (2000s-2010s), insurgent and territorial practices (2010s-2020s), and conflictual, spatial, and digital extensions (2020s). Third, it identifies feminist deliberative practices operating across scales, from everyday interactions to collective and digital action. Using a qualitative interpretative methodology, the study treats feminist theory as both conceptual and empirical material. It finds that feminist deliberation goes beyond institutional dialogue, functioning instead as a distributed, relational process embedded in everyday life, care, and political struggle. It thus emerges as both a methodological lens and a political practice for transforming democratic life.

1. Introduction

Deliberation is commonly understood as a democratic process that facilitates collective decision-making by opening spaces for diverse publics to reflect on collective needs, identities, and actions, while accounting for multiple actors and power asymmetries (Coleman et al., 2015). Within deliberative democratic theory, it has been conceptualized as a model grounded in open discussion and mutual communication through which preferences, values, and interests are articulated, weighed, and transformed into collectively agreed policies (Bächtiger et al., 2018, Young, 2000). However, feminist scholarship has long challenged the neutrality of these processes, revealing how deliberation is structured by relations of power that shape who speaks, how, and under what conditions their contributions are recognized as “legitimate”.

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Rather than treating feminist interventions as marginal critiques of an otherwise stable model, this article argues that feminist scholarship fundamentally reconfigures deliberation as a democratic mechanism. Across different contexts and traditions, feminist theorists and practitioners have expanded deliberation beyond institutional dialogue, revealing it as a dispersed, relational, and materially grounded process embedded in everyday life, social reproduction, collective action, and spatial struggle (Mansbridge, 1983, Molyneux, 1984, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Gago, 2019). In doing so, feminist approaches shift the analytical focus from procedural norms toward the conditions that enable or constrain participation, including inequality, embodiment, affect, and territoriality.

This article advances a threefold contribution to the study of feminist deliberative democracy through an interpretative and thematic analysis of literature. First, it develops a multilingual and cross-regional analysis of feminist scholarship, drawing on literature produced in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish from both the Global North and Global South. This approach highlights how deliberation has been theorized differently across linguistic and geopolitical contexts, revealing the epistemic diversity that underpins feminist democratic thought (Mansbridge, 1983, Molyneux, 1984, Fraser, 1990, Benhabib, 1994, Young, 1996, 2000, 2001, Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007, Squires, 2008, Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Femenías & Vidiella, 2017, Gago, 2019, Monica & Colen, 2020, Díaz Lozano, 2021, Endo, 2023, Ibarra Melo, 2024, Mehan, 2024, Pain, 2024, Candón-Mena et al., 2024).

Second, it proposes a temporal analytical framework that traces the evolution of feminist deliberation through four overlapping phases, capturing processes of critique, expansion, territorialization, and digital transformation. Third, it identifies a set of feminist deliberative practices that operate across multiple scales, from embodied and everyday interactions to collective mobilization and hybrid digital spaces.

By integrating these three dimensions, epistemic diversity, temporal transformation, and practical enactment, this study positions feminist deliberation as both a methodological lens and a political practice. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on democratic innovation by demonstrating that deliberation is not a fixed institutional procedure but an evolving and contested process through which democratic life is continuously enacted and redefined.

2. Methodological Approach and Analytical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology and employs an iterative, inductive research design based on a literature-driven analysis. Rather than applying predefined theoretical categories, the analysis proceeds through the systematic identification of key concepts, critiques, and interventions across feminist political theory and empirical studies. The literature is treated not only as a theoretical foundation but also as empirical material through which feminist deliberation can be reconstructed as an evolving field of practice.

The corpus consists of a purposively selected body of foundational and contemporary works published between 1983 and 2024, including theoretical contributions, empirical studies, and interdisciplinary feminist analyses drawn from political theory, sociology, anthropology, law, urban studies, and feminist scholarship (Mansbridge, 1983, Molyneux, 1984, Fraser, 1990, Young, 1996, 2000, 2001, Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007, Squires, 2008, Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Femenías & Vidiella, 2017, Gago, 2019, Monica & Colen, 2020, Díaz Lozano, 2021, Endo, 2023, Ibarra Melo, 2024, Mehan, 2024, Pain, 2024, Candón-Mena et al., 2024). The temporal scope spans four decades, allowing the analysis to trace continuities and transformations in feminist approaches to deliberation across different historical contexts.

A central methodological contribution of this article lies in its multilingual and cross-regional scope. The corpus includes works produced in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, enabling a dialogue between feminist scholarship from the Global North and Global South. Sources were identified through multilingual searches conducted in EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, ProQuest Ebook Central, university library catalogues and databases (including those of the Universidad de Monterrey and the University of Coimbra), as well as through complementary bibliographic tracing of references across relevant works. Search terms included combinations of concepts such as “feminist deliberation,” “deliberative democracy,” and “feminist democratic theory” in the four different languages. By engaging with multiple linguistic traditions and academic contexts, the study moves beyond Anglophone biases and highlights the importance of translation, interpretation, and epistemic plurality in feminist knowledge production.

Inclusion criteria required that selected works contribute either theoretically or empirically to debates on deliberation, participation, democratic legitimacy, or feminist political practice. Studies focused exclusively on electoral representation, descriptive representation, or institutional gender quotas without a deliberative dimension were excluded. The analysis treats feminist deliberation not as a subsidiary component of democratic theory but as a democratic mechanism in its own right, examining how feminist actors and practices reshape the conditions, meanings, and boundaries of democratic deliberation across different contexts.

Although the analysis is informed by insights from intersectional and decolonial feminist scholarship (Crenshaw, 1989, Mohanty, 2003, Lugones, 2010), it does not seek to provide a systematic engagement with these frameworks. Instead, they serve as a contextual lens that underscores how deliberative practices are shaped by historically situated relations of power, inequality, and exclusion. This perspective reinforces the article’s emphasis on feminist deliberation as an emergent and context-dependent democratic practice.

The analytical process unfolds in three interconnected stages. First, key concepts and theoretical interventions are identified inductively across the selected literature, focusing on recurring themes such as participation, discourse, inclusion, legitimacy, care and insurgent arenas. These elements are then grouped into broader thematic clusters that reflect shared concerns within feminist debates.

Second, these clusters are examined diachronically to identify patterns of continuity and transformation, leading to the construction of a temporal framework structured around four overlapping analytical phases: early feminist critiques of participation and legitimacy (1980s-1990s), relational and affective expansions of deliberation (2000s-2010s), insurgent and territorially grounded practices (2010s-2020s), and conflictual, spatial, and digital extensions (2020s). As illustrated in Figure 1, this periodization does not represent linear stages but an analytical mapping of overlapping processes of transformation.

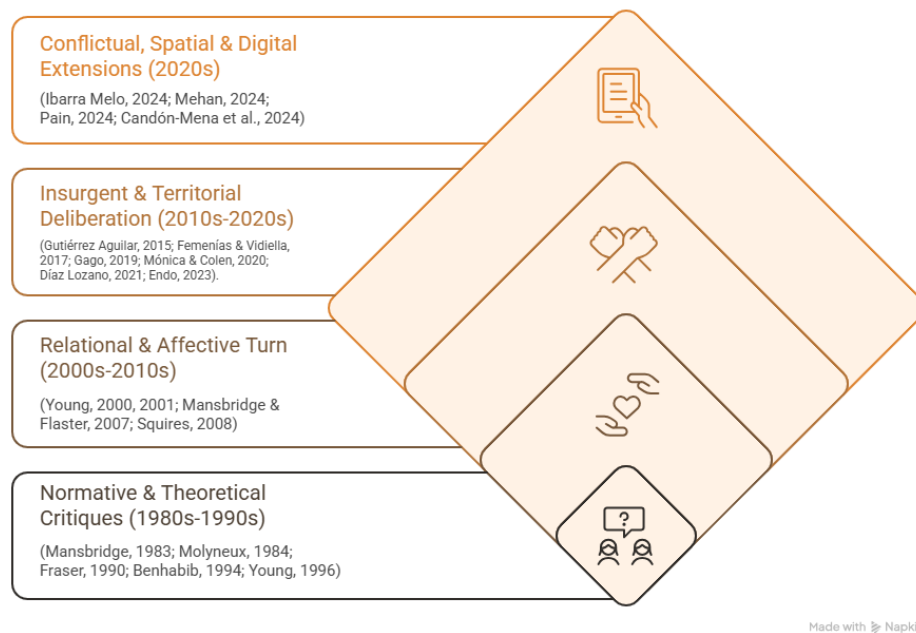


Figure 1. Analytical divisions of feminist deliberation

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Mansbridge (1983), Molyneux (1984), Fraser (1990), Benhabib (1994), Young (1996, 2000, 2001), Mansbridge & Flaster (2007), Squires (2008), Karpowitz & Mendelberg (2014), Gutiérrez Aguilar (2015), Femenías & Vidiella (2017), Gago (2019), Monica & Colen (2020), Díaz Lozano (2021), Endo (2023), Ibarra Melo (2024), Mehan (2024), Pain (2024), and Candón-Mena et al. (2024).

Third, the study identifies and systematizes feminist deliberative practices across time and space. Drawing from the same body of literature, these practices are extracted and categorized according to their material, relational, symbolic, and spatial dimensions. This process enables the construction of a practice-based framework which captures how feminist deliberation is enacted across different scales, including bodies, households, communities, territories, and digital infrastructures.

By combining multilingual analysis, temporal mapping, and practice identification, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding feminist deliberation as both a conceptual and empirical phenomenon. It allows for the integration of diverse feminist perspectives while maintaining sensitivity to context, thereby offering a nuanced account of how deliberation is continuously reconfigured through theory and practice.

3. Genealogies of Feminist Deliberation

3.1 Early Feminist Critiques of Participation and Legitimacy (1980s - 1990s)

The consolidation of deliberative democracy in the 1980s emerged in the aftermath of the worldwide crisis of participatory democracy and the decline of mass social movements (Florida, 2018). Within this context, early feminist scholars began to interrogate foundational assumptions of deliberative theory, asking who participates? whose voices are recognized as legitimate? and under what conditions is political speech valued? (Mansbridge, 1983, Molyneux, 1984, Fraser, 1990, Benhabib, 1994, Young, 1996). These interventions revealed

that deliberative spaces were never neutral, but deeply structured by gendered, classed, and racialized power relations.

American political scientist Jane Mansbridge's (1983) study of Helpline, a workplace democracy in New England, constitutes one of the earliest feminist critiques of deliberative participation by demonstrating that formal inclusion does not guarantee deliberative equality. By her own observations of decision-making processes, she identified that women had as much "power" as men, but they perceived they didn't, and therefore exercised it behind the scenes (Mansbridge, 1983).

Her data showed that women had lower verbal self-confidence, a weaker career orientation, greater interest in caring people than in administrations and organizations, no model for leadership other than being "pushy", and even more gratified by providing nurturance than by status (Mansbridge, 1983). Therefore, she showed, since the 1980s, how gendered power relations shape who speaks, how often, and with what perceived authority, even within explicitly feminist organizational settings (Mansbridge, 1983).

This attention to the material and social conditions under which participation becomes possible provides a bridge to gender and development perspectives, particularly in the work of British-Pakistani sociologist Maxine Molyneux. Molyneux (1984) analyzed women's collective action in Nicaragua, where participation is similarly understood as shaped by necessity, inequality, and lived conditions rather than by normative democratic ideals alone.

Through her concept of "practical gender interests", Molyneux (1984) showed that women's mobilization often emerges from unmet needs related to social reproduction, such as access to food, housing, and basic services. Participation, in this account, is not a normative democratic ideal but a survival strategy shaped by structural deprivation, positioning women as central political actors within grassroots struggles (Molyneux, 1984).

A complementary structural critique was articulated by American philosopher Nancy Fraser. Fraser's (1990) intervention challenged the universalist premises of Habermas's public sphere. She identified four exclusionary assumptions embedded in deliberative theory: the idea of a single public, the bracketing of social inequalities, the restriction of legitimate public issues, and the rigid separation between state and civil society (Fraser, 1990). Her concept of "subaltern counterpublics" legitimized alternative deliberative arenas where marginalized groups formulate oppositional interpretations of their needs and identities (Fraser, 1990). For Fraser (1990), democratic legitimacy centers on parity of participation, which cannot be achieved without confronting structural inequalities.

Turkish philosopher Seyla Benhabib (1994) complements these critiques by reconstructing the normative foundations of deliberative democracy through what she calls a "deliberative model." Building on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concern with the gap between rationality and legitimacy, she argues that democratic legitimacy emerges from procedures of public deliberation among free and equal individuals, which not only ground legitimacy but also secure a degree of practical rationality in collective decision-making (Benhabib, 1994). She further expands the boundaries of inclusion by insisting that the demos cannot be fixed in advance, as those potentially affected, including non-citizens or marginalized groups, may hold legitimate claims to participation (Benhabib, 1994).

Extending this shift from idealized consensus to inclusive and revisable democratic practices, American philosopher Iris Marion Young (1996) interrogates the communicative norms that govern deliberative exchange. She argued that deliberation privileges dispassionate, formal, and abstract forms of speech, thereby marginalizing those whose political expression takes narrative, embodied, or affective forms (Young, 1996). In proposing "communicative

democracy”, Young (1996) expanded deliberation to include storytelling, rhetoric, greeting, and embodied expression as legitimate political practices. This marked a foundational shift in feminist deliberation theory: democracy is no longer defined solely by rational argumentation, but by the inclusion of plural voices and modes of communication (Young, 1996).

3.2 Relational and Affective Expansions of Deliberation (2000s-2010s)

From the early 2000s, feminist scholars highlighted that inclusion is not merely a matter of access but also of recognizing diverse voices across every day, activist, and institutional arenas (Young, 2000, Young, 2001, Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007, Squires, 2008). This shift marked a move away from institutional presence alone toward a concern with the social and relational conditions under which participation becomes meaningful. Building on this expansion, research in the 2010s emphasized that deliberative equality depends on relational and affective dynamics, including attentive listening, care, trust, and authenticity (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014, Paperman, 2015).

Central to this reorientation is Young’s (2000) argument that political inclusion requires openness to a plurality of communicative modes. For Young (2000), a deliberative process is inclusive not simply by formally incorporating all potentially affected individuals, but by attending to the social relations that differently position people and condition their experiences, opportunities, and knowledge. In this view, equality in deliberation cannot be presumed, it must be actively produced through differentiated forms of communication that account for structural inequality (Young, 2000).

Carrying on this argument beyond institutional settings, Young (2001) conceptualized activist practices as integral to deliberative democracy rather than as its failure. Protest, disruption, and symbolic action such as marches, sit-ins, and acts of civil disobedience function as communicative practices that contest dominant deliberative norms and force excluded issues into public debate (Young, 2001). These interventions expand deliberation by making visible forms of injustice and knowledge that cannot be articulated within conventional deliberative forums, thereby linking inclusion directly to conflict and collective action.

Extending deliberation into everyday life, American researchers Jane Mansbridge and Katherine Flaster (2007) demonstrated how ordinary conversations operate as consequential deliberative sites. By tracing the circulation of feminist concepts such as “male chauvinism,” they showed how political meanings are negotiated across informal networks, households, and activist sites (Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007). Their work underscores a feminist insight central to this chapter: deliberation operates across multiple scales, linking intimate spaces with broader political transformations (Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007).

British political theorist Judith Squires (2008) further advanced feminist critiques by highlighting the corporeal, contextual, and affective dimensions of democratic participation. She argued that deliberative democracy has historically privileged masculinized norms of rationality while devaluing expressive, emotional, and aesthetic forms of political engagement (Squires, 2008). Importantly, Squires (2008) bridged critique and institutional design by emphasizing that inclusion depends not only on norms of speech but also on the material and spatial conditions under which deliberation takes place.

Empirical research by British scholars Christopher F. Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg (2014) demonstrated how gendered interaction styles shape deliberative outcomes. Despite advances in education and formal rights, women continue to participate less and speak less authoritatively in competitive and adversarial deliberative settings (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Their findings show that deliberative equality depends on affective and relational

conditions such as social warmth, mutual recognition, and cooperative norms, rather than on access alone (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014).

This relational turn is deepened through feminist ethics of care. French sociologist Patricia Paperman (2015) reframed care as an epistemic and political practice structured through unequal power relations, rather than as a private moral disposition. Central to her intervention is attentive listening, understood as a condition for the emergence of marginalized knowledge (Paperman, 2015). Speaking in an embodied and situated voice becomes politically meaningful only within dialogical spaces that enable reception, recognition, and non-hierarchical exchange (Paperman, 2015). In this sense, care and listening function as relational infrastructures that make inclusive deliberation possible (Paperman, 2015).

3.3 Insurgent and Territorial Feminist Deliberation (2010s-2020s)

From the mid-2010s onward, feminist scholarship, particularly from Latin America, reconceptualized deliberation as an insurgent, territorially grounded, and spatially situated practice (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Femenías & Vidiella, 2017, Gago, 2019, Monica & Colen, 2020, Díaz Lozano, 2021, Endo, 2023). These contributions shift deliberation away from institutional dialogue toward collective practices rooted in social reproduction, resistance, and conflict.

Mexican philosopher and activist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2015) conceptualized assemblies as sites of “*política en femenino*”, where deliberation redistributes voice, pluralizes power, and generates political intelligence from below. Assemblies operate as autonomous and territorially embedded spaces in which communities collectively debate, defend, and reproduce the commons (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015). Deliberation, in this account, becomes an insurgent practice of social reproduction rather than a formal mechanism of consensus-building (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015).

Building on this relational perspective, Argentinian researchers María Luisa Femenías and Graciela Vidiella (2017) argued that deliberation must be grounded in substantive and sensible equality, as well as in recognition understood through multicultural feminist principles. They stressed that recognition must be approached in its positive sense, valuing difference, while simultaneously addressing the material deprivations and exclusions that difference can entail (Femenías & Vidiella, 2017).

Extending Young's critique beyond institutional arenas, Argentinian researcher and activist Verónica Gago (2019) theorizes feminist assemblies, strikes, and street-based mobilizations as alternative deliberative spaces in which political agreements are produced outside formal institutions. Through practices of “economic disobedience” such as interrupting reproductive labor, resisting household indebtedness, and occupying public space, feminist movements generate collective diagnoses, affects, and strategies from below (Gago, 2019). Deliberation thus emerges as a process of collective sense-making embedded in embodied struggle rather than institutional dialogue (Gago, 2019).

A critical re-engagement with deliberative democratic theory is offered by Brazilian lawyers Eder Fernandes Monica and Karen de Sales Colen (2020), who revisit Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere through feminist critique. Drawing on Fraser and Benhabib, they expose the persistent gendered, racialized, and sexualized exclusions embedded in institutional deliberative spaces (Monica & Colen, 2020). Importantly, they argue that public institutions such as universities, can become transformative democratic arenas if reconfigured to include heterogeneous publics and politicize issues historically relegated to the private sphere (Monica

& Colen, 2020). In this account, the public-private boundary itself emerges as a central site of feminist contestation (Monica & Colen, 2020).

Empirical studies further illustrate how these dynamics operate at the local level. Argentinian anthropologist Juliana Díaz Lozano's (2021) ethnographic research on neighborhood weekly assemblies in Villa Argüello shows how sustained participation in collective decision-making transforms women's political subjectivities. Assemblies function as pedagogical spaces where leadership is negotiated, confidence is built, and male dominance is contested through everyday practice (Díaz Lozano, 2021). Deliberation, here, is learned, embodied, and reproduced through ongoing collective engagement (Díaz Lozano, 2021).

Moving beyond assemblies, Japanese political sociologist Chikako Endo (2023) conceptualizes "grassroots organizing" itself as a deliberative democratic practice. Through repeated everyday interactions, local movements generate norms of equality, solidarity, and accountability (Endo, 2023). Deliberation emerges not as a discrete event, but as an ongoing relational process sustained through collective practices of coordination, mutual aid, and proximity over time (Endo, 2023).

3.4 Conflictual, Spatial, and Digital Extensions (2020s)

In conflict-affected contexts, feminist deliberation emerges through vulnerability, memory, and resistance (Ibarra Melo, 2024). Colombian sociologist María Eugenia Ibarra Melo (2024) shows how women's movements carve out political spaces amid armed conflict through diverse deliberative modalities, including: storytelling, public performances, symbolic acts, ritualized mourning, and strategic uses of maternal discourse. These practices transform victims into political agents, democratize institutions, and redefine peace by bringing intimate experiences of grief into the public sphere (Ibarra Melo, 2024).

Research from the Global North shows how feminist assemblies actively reshape deliberative norms from within. Spanish journalist José Candón-Mena, sociologist Sandra Arencón-Beltrán, and communication scientist Salomé Sola-Morales (2024) expose how members of the Unitary Feminist Assembly of Seville collectively renegotiate deliberative rules to counteract exclusion, identifying economic inequality as the primary barrier to participation. Their analysis highlights how feminist critiques of deliberative democracy are operationalized in everyday decision-making practices (Candón-Mena et al., 2024).

Finally, spatial constraints extend feminist deliberation into hybrid physical-digital arenas. Irani architect Asma Mehan (2024) analyzes how Iranian women create digital counterpublics through protest art, social media, and virtual demonstrations under authoritarian conditions. These digital spaces operate as extensions of feminist urban struggles, enabling deliberation and visibility where physical organizing is dangerous or impossible, while remaining vulnerable to surveillance and infrastructural precarity (Mehan, 2024).

A related dynamic can be observed in South Asia. Examining online debates following the acquittal of journalist Tarun Tejpal in India, Indian media scholar Paromita Pain (2024) argues that Twitter functioned as a space of feminist deliberation and democratic engagement. Through the circulation of testimonies, legal critiques, and collective advocacy, digital participants generated public discussion around sexual violence, challenged patriarchal narratives, and expressed support for survivors (Pain, 2024). Her findings suggest that social media can operate as a deliberative arena in which feminist activism, public reasoning, and counterpublics formation intersect under contemporary digital conditions (Pain, 2024).

4. From Theory to Practice: Feminist Deliberation as a Multi-Scalar Field

4.1 Temporal Synthesis of Feminist Deliberation

The first phase, emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, is characterized by foundational feminist critiques of participation, legitimacy, and discourse. These critiques demonstrated that deliberative spaces are not neutral but structured by gendered, classed, and racialized power relations (Mansbridge, 1983, Molyneux, 1984, Fraser, 1990, Benhabib, 1994, Young, 1996). Mansbridge's (1983) study of workplace democracy showed that formal inclusion does not ensure equal participation, as women's perceived lack of authority limited their visible engagement. Similarly, Molyneux (1984) emphasized that women's participation often emerges from material necessity rather than normative democratic ideals, framing participation as a survival strategy rooted in social reproduction. Benhabib (1994) reconceptualized "democratic legitimacy" as emerging from inclusive and procedurally regulated deliberation among free and equal participants, while also expanding the boundaries of the demos to all those potentially affected. Fraser (1990) challenged the universalist assumptions of the public sphere, introducing the concept of "subaltern counterpublics", while Young (1996) expanded deliberation by legitimizing narrative, embodied, and affective forms of communication.

The second phase, spanning the 2000s and 2010s, reflects a relational and affective expansion of deliberation beyond institutional settings. Scholars highlighted that inclusion depends not only on access but also on the social conditions that shape participation (Young, 2000, 2001, Mansbridge & Flaster, 2007, Squires, 2008). Deliberation was reconceptualized as embedded in everyday interactions, activist practices, and informal networks. Research further demonstrated that equality in deliberation is contingent upon relational dynamics such as trust, care, and attentive listening (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014, Paperman, 2015). In this context, deliberation becomes a socially situated and affectively mediated process rather than a purely rational exchange.

The third phase, emerging in the 2010s and 2020s, is marked by the development of insurgent and territorially grounded feminist deliberative practices. Particularly within Latin American scholarship, deliberation is reconceptualized as embedded in collective practices of resistance, social reproduction, and territorial struggle (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Femenías & Vidiella, 2017, Gago, 2019, Monica & Colen, 2020, Díaz Lozano, 2021, Endo, 2023). Assemblies, strikes, and grassroots organizing function as deliberative spaces where political meaning is collectively produced. These practices emphasize embodied participation, conflict, and the redistribution of voice, situating deliberation within lived experience and material conditions.

The fourth phase, emerging in the 2020s, extends feminist deliberation into conflictual, spatial, and digital domains. In contexts of violence and political instability, deliberation takes place through practices of memory, storytelling, and symbolic action (Ibarra Melo, 2024). At the same time, feminist assemblies continue to reshape deliberative norms within institutional contexts (Candón-Mena et al., 2024). Crucially, digital technologies have enabled the emergence of hybrid deliberative spaces that combine physical and virtual forms of engagement (Mehan, 2024, Pain, 2024). These digital counterpublics facilitate new forms of visibility and participation, while also introducing challenges related to surveillance, algorithmic control, and infrastructural inequality. Together, these four phases demonstrate that feminist deliberation operates across multiple scales and modalities, from intimate interactions to global digital networks.

4.2 Feminist Deliberative Practices Across Space and Scale

Building on the temporal and conceptual synthesis presented above, Table 1 systematizes feminist deliberation not as a singular process but as a heterogeneous field of practices operating across multiple spatial, relational, and material scales. Rather than emerging exclusively within institutional arenas, deliberation is produced through the articulation of embodied, relational, economic, territorial, symbolic, and digital practices that collectively sustain democratic life.

Table 1. A Multi-Scalar Typology of Feminist Deliberative Practices

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Deliberative Function</i>	<i>Representative Reference</i>
<i>Marches and strikes</i>	Collective public mobilization and disruption.	Public space/City	Agenda-setting, visibility, and collective claim-making	Young (2001), Gago (2019)
<i>Occupation of public space</i>	Asserting presence and visibility in urban areas.	Urban scale	Visibility and contestation	Young (2001), Gago (2019)
<i>Social media demonstrations</i>	Use of digital platforms for activism and advocacy.	Digital	Counterpublic formation	Mehan (2024), Pain (2024)
<i>Interrupting reproductive labor</i>	Suspension of care and domestic work to politicize social reproduction	Household/Community	Politicizing invisible labor and exposing structural inequalities	Gago (2019)
<i>Resisting household indebtedness</i>	Collective resistance to financial dependency and debt regimes	Household/Community	Collective diagnosis of economic inequalities and empowerment	Gago (2019)
<i>Assemblies</i>	Formal gatherings for discussion and decision making	Community	Collective decision-making	Gutiérrez Aguilar (2015), Díaz Lozano (2021), Candón-Mena et al. (2024)
<i>Grassroots organizing</i>	Mobilizing communities for collective action	Community/Territory	Trust-building and coordination	Endo (2023)
<i>Attentive listening</i>	Active and empathetic engagement with diverse voices	Interpersonal	Recognition and inclusion	Paperman (2015)
<i>Embodied expression</i>	Use of narratives, emotions, storytelling, and bodily performance	Individual/Collective	Communicating situated experiences and expanding legitimate forms of speech	Young (1996), Ibarra Melo (2024)
<i>Maternal discourse</i>	Strategic deployment of maternal identities and experiences	Symbolic/Public	Legitimizing political claims and mobilizing empathy	Ibarra Melo (2024)

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Deliberative Function</i>	<i>Representative Reference</i>
<i>Protest art</i>	Use of creative expression to raise awareness including symbolic acts and ritualized mourning	Symbolic/Public	Alternative communication	Ibarra Melo (2024), Mehan (2024)
<i>Social media demonstrations</i>	Use of digital platforms for activism and advocacy.	Digital	Counterpublic formation	Mehan (2024), Pain (2024)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Young (1996, 2001), Paperman (2015), Gutiérrez Aguilar (2015), Gago (2019), Díaz Lozano (2021), Endo (2023), Ibarra Melo (2024), Cándon-Mena et al. (2024), Mehan (2024), and Pain (2024).

A first cluster of practices centers on visibility, disruption, and spatial intervention. Marches, strikes and occupations of public space relocate deliberation beyond formal forums and into arenas where political presence itself becomes a form of argumentation (Young, 2001, Gago, 2019, Mehan, 2024, Pain, 2024). These practices challenge the assumption that deliberation depends primarily on verbal exchange by demonstrating how collective action can communicate grievances, generate public attention, and force neglected issues onto political agendas. In this sense, visibility functions as a deliberative resource through which marginalized actors claim recognition and contest exclusion.

A second cluster highlights the material conditions that sustain or constrain democratic participation. Practices such as interrupting reproductive labor and resisting household indebtedness reveal that deliberation is deeply embedded in the organization of everyday life (Gago, 2019). By politicizing domestic work, care responsibilities, and economic dependence, these practices expose how inequalities in social reproduction shape who can participate, when participation becomes possible, and what forms of collective action can be sustained (Molyneux, 1984). Deliberation thus extends into domains traditionally considered private, demonstrating that democratic engagement is inseparable from material conditions of survival and care.

A third dimension consists of relational infrastructures, including assemblies, grassroots organizing, and attentive listening (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Paperman, 2015, Díaz Lozano, 2021, Endo, 2023, Cándon-Mena et al., 2024). These practices do not merely provide venues for expressing opinions, they actively generate the conditions under which deliberation can occur. Through repetition, proximity, reciprocity, and collective coordination, they cultivate trust, recognition, accountability, and shared political understanding. Deliberation, from this perspective, emerges as an ongoing relational process rather than a discrete decision-making event.

The table also reveals the importance of symbolic and affective forms of political communication. Embodied expression, protest art, symbolic acts, ritualized mourning, and maternal discourse expand the boundaries of legitimate political speech by incorporating emotions, memories, narratives, and corporeal experiences into democratic exchange (Young, 1996, Ibarra Melo, 2024, Mehan, 2024). These practices challenge the rationalist assumptions of classical deliberative theory and demonstrate that political meaning is often produced through affective resonance and shared experiences rather than through argument alone.

Finally, digital practices introduce a hybrid deliberative dimension that transcends territorial boundaries while simultaneously creating new forms of dependency on technological

infrastructures. Social media demonstrations and digital counterpublics facilitate the circulation of alternative narratives, the formation of transnational solidarities, and the visibility of marginalized voices (Mehan, 2024, Pain, 2024). At the same time, these spaces remain conditioned by algorithmic mediation, surveillance, platform governance, and unequal access to digital resources, highlighting that technological expansion does not eliminate power asymmetries but reconfigures them.

Taken together, Table 1 demonstrates that feminist deliberation is a multi-scalar and distributed process operating simultaneously across bodies, households, communities, territories, public spaces, and digital infrastructures. What connects these diverse practices is not a shared commitment to consensus, but their capacity to generate political engagement through care, conflict, visibility, resistance, collective learning, and meaning-making. Feminist deliberation therefore appears less as a bounded institutional procedure than as an emergent democratic practice embedded in the social relations through which political life is continuously negotiated and transformed.

4.3 Epistemic Diversity and Global Feminist Knowledge Production

Beyond identifying practices, the analysis reveals a crucial epistemic dimension: feminist deliberation is produced through the intersection of diverse intellectual traditions, geographic locations, and disciplinary fields. The authors examined in this study span activism, anthropology, law, philosophy, political theory, sociology and urban studies, and are situated across the Global North and Global South. This diversity is not incidental but constitutive of feminist deliberation itself.

Scholarship from the Global North has primarily focused on critiquing deliberative norms, particularly the exclusionary effects of rationalism, neutrality, and formal equality (Fraser, 1990, Young, 2000, Squires, 2008, Karpowitz & Mendelberg 2014). In contrast, contributions from the Global South have emphasized the material, territorial, and conflictual conditions under which deliberation emerges, grounding it in struggles over survival, violence, and social reproduction (Molyneux, 1984, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Gago, 2019, Ibarra Melo, 2024, Pain, 2024). Rather than representing separate trajectories, these perspectives are analytically complementary.

A key finding of this research is that the integration of these bodies of literature requires not only theoretical synthesis but also linguistic and epistemic openness. The corpus analyzed spans multiple languages, primarily English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, each of which carries distinct conceptual vocabularies and political traditions. This multilingual dimension shapes how deliberation is theorized and practiced, as key concepts such as care, territory, reproduction, and counterpublics acquire different meanings across contexts (Paperman, 2015, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015, Fraser, 1990).

This linguistic and geographic diversity reveals that feminist deliberation is not a universal model but a situated and evolving field of knowledge. It is precisely through the articulation of these heterogeneous perspectives that broader patterns become visible, including the centrality of embodiment, the persistence of inequality, and the expansion of deliberation beyond institutional boundaries. In this sense, feminist deliberation emerges as a product of transnational knowledge production, where theoretical innovation depends on the ability to read across contexts, disciplines, and languages.

5. Discussion: Reconfiguring Deliberative Democracy

The findings of this study invite a reconsideration of deliberative democracy not as a stable theoretical model, but as a historically contingent and politically contested field. Rather than simply expanding existing frameworks, feminist deliberation destabilizes some of the core assumptions upon which deliberative theory has traditionally been built, including the primacy of rational consensus, the boundedness of political arenas, and the neutrality of communicative norms.

First, the analysis suggests that deliberation should be understood less as a procedure and more as an emergent property of social relations. Across the cases examined, deliberation does not precede political interaction as a predefined set of rules, instead, it is continuously produced through practices embedded in unequal material conditions. This challenges the proceduralist bias of deliberative democracy by shifting attention toward the infrastructures, relational, economic, and spatial, that make participation possible or impossible. In this sense, feminist deliberation aligns more closely with a practice-based understanding of democracy, where political engagement is shaped by lived experience rather than institutional design alone.

Second, the temporal framework developed in this article reveals that feminist deliberation evolves through processes of layering rather than replacement. Early critiques of exclusion and legitimacy are not superseded by later developments, instead, they persist and are rearticulated within relational, territorial, and digital contexts. This challenges linear narratives of democratic progress and suggests that inequalities identified in earlier phases continue to structure contemporary deliberative spaces, including digital environments often assumed to be more open or inclusive. As such, feminist deliberation introduces a historically grounded perspective that foregrounds continuity alongside transformation.

Third, the integration of Global North and Global South scholarship highlights an epistemic asymmetry within deliberative theory itself. While canonical approaches have largely emerged from Northern academic traditions, this study shows that many of the most innovative conceptualizations of deliberation as practice, particularly those grounded in social reproduction, territorial struggle, and collective survival, originate in Southern feminist thought. This does not imply a simple geographical division of theory and practice, but rather reveals how different contexts generate distinct analytical priorities. The dialogue between these traditions demonstrates that feminist deliberation is not a universalizable model, but a situated and relational field of knowledge shaped by geopolitical conditions.

A related implication of this epistemic diversity is the central role of language in shaping democratic theory. The multilingual corpus analyzed in this study underscores that concepts such as care, territory, and counterpublics are not semantically stable across contexts. Their meanings shift through processes of translation and interpretation that are themselves embedded in power relations. As a result, the production of feminist deliberative theory depends not only on conceptual innovation but also on the capacity to engage across linguistic boundaries. This finding points to an often-overlooked dimension of democratic knowledge production: access to multiple languages becomes a condition for theoretical pluralism and for the recognition of broader patterns across diverse contexts.

Fourth, the expansion of deliberation into digital spaces introduces a critical tension between visibility and control. While digital platforms enable new forms of participation and the formation of counterpublics, they simultaneously subject deliberation to algorithmic mediation, surveillance, and infrastructural inequality. This dual dynamic complicates optimistic accounts of digital democracy by showing that technological expansion does not resolve structural exclusions but rather reconfigures them. Feminist deliberation, in this

context, provides a critical lens for analyzing how power operates within digital infrastructures, particularly in relation to whose voices are amplified, marginalized, or rendered invisible.

If deliberation is understood as a process that emerges through conflict, care, disruption, and collective sense-making, then consensus can no longer be treated as its primary goal. Instead, feminist deliberation suggests that democratic legitimacy may reside in the capacity to sustain plural, contested, and ongoing processes of engagement. This reframing shifts the focus from agreement to coexistence, from resolution to negotiation, and from procedural correctness to situated justice.

These findings also carry practical implications for democratic innovation. For policymakers and practitioners, feminist deliberation suggests the importance of designing participatory processes that address unequal speaking conditions, incorporate facilitation practices centered on attentive listening and care, and recognize embodied and narrative forms of communication as legitimate contributions. Institutional designs should consider care infrastructures such as childcare, accessibility measures, and flexible participation formats. In digital environments, platform governance should address algorithmic biases, surveillance risks, and unequal visibility to ensure more inclusive deliberative spaces.

Taken together, these insights position feminist deliberation not simply as a corrective to deliberative democracy, but as a transformative framework that redefines its analytical and normative foundations. By foregrounding practice, temporality, epistemic diversity, and digital mediation, feminist approaches open new avenues for understanding how democratic life is enacted under conditions of inequality and change.

However, this study has several limitations. First, despite its multilingual scope, the corpus is restricted to works available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, potentially excluding relevant contributions published in other languages. Second, the analysis focuses primarily on peer-reviewed and academically recognized texts, which may underrepresent activist knowledge circulating through non-academic channels. Third, although the article seeks cross-regional coverage, scholarship from Latin America is more extensively represented than contributions from Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. This reflects not only the composition of the selected corpus but also the fact that feminist democratic practices in these regions are not always conceptualized through the language of deliberation. Future research could therefore explore adjacent bodies of literature on feminist organizing and women's empowerment like Naila Kabeer (1999) and Charmaine Pereira's (2017) contributions to further broaden the geographical scope of feminist deliberative theory.

6. Conclusion

This article has shown that feminist deliberation is not simply a variant of deliberative democracy but a dynamic framework that redefines its core assumptions across spatial, temporal, and epistemic dimensions. By integrating a multilingual and cross-regional literature analysis, a four-phase temporal framework, and a mapping of deliberative practices, the study demonstrates how feminist scholarship reshapes both the theory and practice of deliberation. Rather than a neutral or purely procedural mechanism, deliberation emerges as a contested process structured by power relations that influence participation, recognition, and legitimacy.

The analysis reveals that feminist approaches displace the traditional focus on institutional dialogue, expanding deliberation into a distributed, relational, and materially grounded process embedded in everyday life, care practices, collective action, and digital environments. Across the temporal phases identified, feminist deliberation evolves through critique, expansion, territorialization, and technological transformation, while remaining anchored in struggles over

inequality, embodiment, affect, and spatial justice. These dynamics show that deliberation operates simultaneously across multiple scales, from intimate interactions to transnational mobilizations.

A key contribution of this research lies in foregrounding epistemic diversity as constitutive of feminist deliberation. Engaging scholarship from the Global North and Global South, and across English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, reveals how different linguistic and geopolitical contexts produce distinct yet interconnected understandings of democratic practice. This multilingual perspective not only broadens the analytical scope of deliberative theory but also challenges its implicit universalism by situating knowledge within uneven structures of power and circulation.

By bringing together these dimensions, the article positions feminist deliberation as both a methodological lens and a political practice through which democratic life is continuously enacted and transformed. It shifts attention from fixed procedures to evolving processes, from formal arenas to lived experiences, and from abstract inclusion to situated forms of justice. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on democratic innovation and provides a foundation for future research on feminist spatial politics, particularly regarding how deliberative practices reshape space, redistribute voice, and contest structural inequalities.

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