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Beyond victims and cultural mediators

An intersectional analysis of migrant women's citizenship practices in Spain and the United States

by DANIELA CHERUBINI
and MARÍA PILAR TUDELA-VÁZQUEZ

1. *Introduction*¹

The present article explores the potentialities of applying an intersectional perspective to the study of the shifting dynamics of citizenship inclusion and exclusion processes, emerging in contexts of global mobility, migration and multiculturalism. We analyse citizenship in two interconnected forms. Citizenship corresponds to a historically specific regime of belonging developed under liberal state definitions (Ong 2003). Within this framework, the citizen subject embodies normative values of belonging in opposition to an external *Other* shaped by logics of race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation, among others (Yuval-Davis 1999). Secondly, citizenship is attended as those practices in which subjects adopt, contest or reject such normative definitions of belonging, enacting a more relational and dynamic conception of citizenship. Thus, we define citizenship as an ongoing construction, which takes shape through everyday practices, and involves subjects not defined by ideal definitions of «the citizen», contesting the conditions of their subordinated inclusion (de Sousa Santos 2003) and claiming recognition as political agents. Our work proposes to address the redefinitions of citizenship emerging from «below» and from the «margins» (Kabeer 2005). We focus on a specific side of these dynamics by applying an intersectional analysis to vernacular definitions of belonging and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011) enacted by the participants of migrant women's grassroots organizations.

¹ The present article is the result of the authors' shared analyses. Daniela Cherubini is the author of paragraphs 1, 3.1, 4; María Pilar Tudela-Vázquez authored paragraphs 2, 3, 3.2.

Our analysis draws on ethnographic research carried out in two different contexts: Spain and United States. We analyse how migrant women articulate their political subjectivities in contexts where they experience complex forms of legal, material and symbolic subordination. We look at different forms of «political» use of difference (Colombo 2006), and at the «positioning» processes (Anthias 2001; 2006) by which identity categories – such as «woman», «migrant», «illegal», «Latina», among others – are reproduced and/or contested by these activists.

We contend that intersectionality could be a powerful tool for grasping these processes. It provides an analytical framework to highlight not only the gender, ethnic, class etc. structure of contemporary citizenship but also the subjective and everyday processes entailed in the production, reproduction and transformation of this structure (Morris 2002; Yuval-Davis 1999). We engage with those contributions proposing a processual and constructionist vision of intersectionality, able to combine the analysis of the structural and subjective aspects involved in the intersections among multiple inequalities and social locations (Anthias 2006; Choo and Ferree 2010; Nash 2008; Yuval-Davis 2015).

2. Intersectionality as a tool for the study of the negotiations of belonging and citizenship

Rooted in Black, Third World, postcolonial and anti-racist feminisms, intersectionality represents a theoretical and analytical perspective which provides a key understanding of multiple identities and social inequalities as simultaneous constructions, in a complex, non-additive shape. Apart from these core ideas and common roots, what intersectionality is and what doing intersectional research means is open to plural interpretations in the current debate. This special issue represents the reflection of a prolific theoretical, epistemological and methodological debate that has intensified over the past decade.

Within these debates, we would like to highlight two inter-related key problems connected to our inquiry. One concerns the debate between those positions that take distance from rigid structuralist applications (Prins 2006; Staunæs 2003) and those that criticized the excessive focus on individual identity narratives (Collins 2009). In response several authors, call for a

multilevel analysis able to address the interplay between agency and structure (Anthias 2013; Winker and Degele 2011). The second key issue revolves around the dilemma between the necessity to rely upon concrete social categories (e.g. gender, race, class, etc.) or social groups (e.g. black women), and the risk of their reification. This gives room for a methodological debate on how to deal with the complexity entailed in a non-essentializing analysis of multiple and intersecting categories (McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2015). From these debates, relevant proposals have been elaborated incorporating a constructionist and processual vision of intersectionality through terms such as «situated» (Yuval-Davis 2015), «interactive and dynamic» (Ferree 2011, 56), «social constructivist» intersectionality (Choo and Ferree 2010; Prins 2006). This perspective rests on the idea that racialized and gendered structures of inequality are partly expressed and produced in everyday practices, through which actors give meaning to particular social categories, and assume, resist or transform expectations of what it is to be inserted into such categories. It highlights the processes through which social categories and power relations are articulated and signified in different historical contexts, by focusing on people's agency and the structural milieu in which it takes shape. This position converges with recent developments in the anthropological and sociological debates, where an understanding of identities and differences as dynamic, relational and contextual constructions emerged as a way out from the dispute between essentialist and anti-essentialist positions (Baumann 1999; Colombo 2006).

Floya Anthias suggests: «We need to move away from the concept of intersectionality as interplay in terms of people's group identities, in terms of gender etc, and towards seeing it as a process. It is a social process related to practices and arrangements, giving rise to particular forms of positionality for social actors» (Anthias 2006, 26). «Positionality» aims at addressing both the dynamic and institutionalized aspects involved in the construction processes of multiple identities and belongings. It «combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities, or as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings: a process)» (Anthias 2001, 634). The term allows addressing the issue of identity constructions and belongings not just looking at «social positions», or determined locations, but also at the «positioning» practices through which subjects

deal simultaneously with the possibilities and limitations derived from these positions and in which their actions are immersed.

One of the potentials of applying an intersectional perspective in the study of new forms of citizenship is the analysis of those political subjectivities emerging from relational spaces where certain categories become significant in specific contexts (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Mouffe 1992).

This analysis must be attentive to the different regimes of political belonging displayed in scenarios where relationships between civil society and state are negotiated (Ong 1996). Political subjectivities are constructed through a double process of subject construction that, on the one hand, incorporate normative definitions of belonging displayed through hierarchical categories of difference. These historically constructed categories tend to organize the social body in a *democratic* manner according to liberal definitions of belonging which have a tendency to recreate «the community» as a non-conflicted and homogenous whole (Yuval-Davis 1999). On the other hand, social actors interact and negotiate such normative notions. These processes of subject making take place through micro practices performed in the construction of the self, highlighting the role that individuals play in the definition of their own identity. Both processes that of being defined and self-defining, intervene simultaneously in building the individual as a subject through forms of power that are not bottom-up produced or vice versa, but that are deployed in an organic and relational way towards normalization (Ong 2003). Thus citizenship is understood as a dynamic process of political belonging mediated by institutional notions of «ideal» belonging, usually linked to cultural and historical definitions of national community (Brah and Phoenix 2004).

Yuval-Davis (2011) introduces the differences between politics of belonging and belonging. The latter corresponds to dynamic processes of self-identification and identifying others. Politics of belonging corresponds to those practices oriented towards maintaining the frontiers between us and them in a political community. In the case of women, Yuval-Davis presents three frontiers operating in the construction of national projects. The biological frontier, where women are included as reproductive agents of the members of a nation or social group. The frontier defined by immigration policies, which locate women as dependents of family ties. The cultural frontier, which refers to those

state-nation building mechanisms that construct women as symbol of the Other, responsible for maintaining the culture of origin, and simultaneously portrayed as victims of their own culture.

Politics of belonging refers to two processes, one related to the maintenance and reproduction of these frontiers by the political hegemonic powers, and another produced by its resistance on behalf of political agents. Politics of belonging are considered by the author as those that will give meaning to the exercise of citizenship (Yuval-Davis 2006). It is precisely in the spaces where belonging and politics of belonging connect that citizenship scenarios take form, allowing the analysis of the definitions of belonging displayed, the actors involved and how they become politically significant.

Difference, understood as a social relation, plays a key role in the negotiation processes which shape certain political subjectivities towards acquiring political legitimacy. The research field of «everyday multiculturalism» (Colombo 2015; Wise and Velayutham 2009) has developed this idea, by highlighting how ethnic, cultural, racial differences can be mobilized through everyday interactions in order to exclude certain subjects from access to rights and social resources. At the same time, such differences can also be used by excluded subjects seeking recognition and advancing citizenship claims (Harris 2009). There is a wide recognition in the literature on how, for instance, an essentialized discourse on identity may be used for strategic purposes, deploying what Gayatri Spivak addressed as «strategic essentialism» (Spivak and Harasym 1990). Beside these strategic forms of framing differences, social actors often deploy more fragmented practices and a «tactical» use of differences and identities (Colombo 2006, 208).

3. Migrant women's political subjectivities towards political action: two case studies

Our analysis draws on two ethnographic research projects on migrant women's associations carried out between 2007 and 2010 in the Spanish region of Andalusia, and in San Francisco Bay Area (California, USA). The European case study was based on participant observation and narrative interviews with forty

activists from migrant women's associations of the region². The US case study focuses on the Latina migrant women collective *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA) and was based on participant observation, in-depth interviews and Participatory Action Research³. Although different in their sampling strategies, the studies share a common conceptual framework and a core interest for ethnographic analysis applied to understand migrant women grassroots redefinitions of citizenship (Caldwell *et al.* 2009). Both address the intersectional dynamics involved in the experiences of multidimensional subjectivities, paying attention to migrant women's grassroots groups, as an expression of political agency and self-organization of subjects located at, and acting from, the margins within the gendered, ethnicized and classed citizenship structures in the analysed contexts.

We combined the results of the two studies, to attend to the negotiations of belonging and reframing of the category «migrant woman» as subjects of political action. We examine the practices and subjectivities, which emerge in these groups, asking whether and how they assume, re-elaborate or contest dominant definitions of belonging and citizenship as incorporated in public discourse and social policies. We focus on the redefinition of belonging deployed in particular institutional contexts, where politics of belonging locate *other* women as key actors to solve identified social problems, such as the integration of newcomers (Spanish case) or domestic violence (US case).

3.1. *Migrant women's associations in Andalusia, Spain*

The first migrant women's associations in the region were founded during the mid-1990s. Since then, many other groups were established after participants positioned themselves as ethnicized/racialized women, immigrants, domestic workers or professionals experiencing descendant mobility. At the same time, when fieldwork started, the associations shared, at least, two ele-

² 27 groups composed and lead by migrant women were involved in the study. Participants came from Latin America, Morocco and Romania (few from other non-European countries) and held different legal statuses. See Cherubini (2013).

³ A total of 148 Spanish speaking women from the organization participated, between the ages of 18 and 55, mostly from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Perú and Uruguay. See Tudela-Vázquez (2015).

ments of relevance: a) They addressed gender issues related to migrants' social integration policies, b) They moved in a common discursive and political frame.

The institutional and political framework which delimited women's agency was characterized by tensions between, on the one hand, restrictive and selective immigration policies, implemented to regulate the entrance and access to rights directly by country of origin and indirectly by class and gender (Lister *et al.* 2007, 77-108). On the other hand, integration policies designed to support immigrants' active civic participation as key for social cohesion; which in the end tended to replay mechanisms of subordination and the associations' dependence on public administration (Gregorio and Arribas 2008, 261).

Within this framework, migrant women are objects of ambivalent rhetoric. Once ignored, female migration is now acknowledged by Spanish public opinion and in social integration policies; however, increased visibility seems to be related to stereotyped representations (Gregorio 2011). Migrant women are constructed as «gendered and cultural Others» (Gregorio and Franzé 1999): subjects who are over-determined by their culture of origin and their subordinate position as «ethnic women». These representations provide the roots for the rather dichotomous ways in which migrant women are addressed in national and local integration policies: either as vulnerable subjects, or as «mediators by nature» and facilitators of the immigrants' integration processes. The first image regards migrant women as a category at risk of social and economic exclusion and as potential victims of «cultural-specific» forms of violence. The second construction is rooted in the idea that migrant women are well-versed for mediation work, due to their gendered and cultural socialization and their family roles.

Regarding how participants in migrant women's associations cope with this frame and its categorizations, we can describe different positioning processes. One consists in assuming a role we would label as «expert immigrants and mediators». They present themselves as experts on cultural mediation and social interventions with female sectors of immigrant population, in order to legitimize their struggles and to make their social and political action influential. This role takes shape through a strategic use of the «expert knowledge» that women developed thanks to their active engagement in the association. Still, women also emphasize their multiple identities in terms of gender, ethnicity

and so on, as resources for a better understanding of migrant women's needs and experiences. In other words, gender roles and identities, national and ethnic belongings, religion, and the fact of being a migrant, are all elements that enter in the definition of this profile and in its use in different interactions.

On this point Belinda⁴, one of the interviewees, poses a significant question:

Who better than us, to be noticed and be recognized? [...] Who better than us, who have lived in our skins, to understand a situation? Any situation that might happen [to any migrant woman]

Belinda is one of the founders of an association of Latin American women, the only migrant women's association in the town where she lives. She is claiming a privileged point of view, rooted in her experience as migrant *and* woman, which would enable her and other activists to know what it *means* and how it *feels* to be a migrant woman.

Zineb is the president of a Moroccan women's association. Talking about the feedback she receives from the group's participants, she states:

Well, that's what members say. When they come here, they say we treat many issues specific to women, while others [other organizations] do not account for women [...] For [other organizations] do have education projects. [...] But mothers say they do not do this so well [...] They say, for example: «maybe because you are mothers you understand better».

She also presents the activities of her association as incorporating an added value rooted in the fact that they are designed by and for Moroccan immigrant women, by and for Moroccan immigrant *mothers*.

Interviewees use their gender and migrant identity (variously intersected with nationality, ethnicity, religion and class) as political resources to present themselves as «bridges» facilitating reciprocal understanding between migrant women and other sectors of society. When activists play this role, they are more likely to be socially and politically valued, since they are able to contribute to the «cause» of immigrant integration and cultural encounter. Moreover, their qualified contribution is largely appreciated as long

⁴ All names are fictional.

as they claim to have access to those sectors understood as sensitive targets difficult to involve in integration policies (e.g. women employed in domestic service or sex work, non Spanish speakers, Muslims, and so on). Thus, women give meaning to and place emphasis on their gender, ethnic or national identity in different ways, depending on the situation, and in order to have access to spaces of action and recognition, and to social and economic resources that assure the continuity of the collective projects.

At the same time, these positioning processes entail some ambivalences which are worth being analysed. On one hand, the commitment as mediators and experts in integration seems to reflect the subjective identifications of these activists and to respond to their interests and abilities. On the other hand, these positions resemble the dominant image of the migrant women described before. Women articulate and convey their political subjectivity through the few narratives at their disposal in order to benefit from the few possibilities of action and voice available to them. This could be read as a tactical use of dominant definitions of the migrant women in the «demotic» discourse produced by these activists (Baumann 1999).

Yet a slight but relevant displacement can be noted. The figure of the «expert immigrant and mediator», as it emerges from women's practices and accounts, should be interpreted as a reassembly, rather than a replication, of the «natural mediator» model offered by dominant public discourses. Women invest a lot of effort in expanding and qualifying their cultural capital and often present themselves as competent subjects, who successfully managed their own integration process and who can also help other migrants in this challenge. When women activate this frame, they count on the logic of merit and expertise as a way of being, or becoming, political subjects. In a context where their social and political inclusion is mostly framed in a culturalistic and sexist discourse, this is an interesting reworking of the meanings of citizenship and belonging.

The research also showed that some of the activists more explicitly distance themselves from these prevalent modes of action and political subjectivity, and try to openly resist the hegemonic narratives about the place that corresponds to migrant women in politics. It is the case of women and associations developing cultural and artistic projects, different from the mainstream «intercultural events» orientation.

Monica is a case in point. She is a postgraduate student involved in a young association that seeks to develop Romanian cultural activities, with a focus on poetry, literature and social history. In deciding what to call the association, one of her concerns relates to being asked to provide some kind of social assistance services if they put the words «women» and «immigrants» in their name:

We do not know how to put it [the name], as a women's collective, a cultural collective, or migrant women's collective [...] Because, of course, we think that if we constitute ourselves as an immigrant association they will start calling us asking for milk⁵, or something like that [...], or to act as mediators... We're not in a position to do that, we are not prepared for that.

These are fringe experiences within the network of associations addressed in the research. Nevertheless, they stand out for their potential in revealing the normative force of the category construction around the «migrant woman». These activists report difficulties in finding partnerships and material support for projects that are considered of little relevance, since they «*have nothing to do with the social*», as the words of Monica testify:

Now I am starting to have doubts: Does promoting Romanian culture even matter and who is it being done for? [...] Is it just the whim of someone who has had her nose in a book all her life?

3.2. *Mujeres Unidas y Activas: a Latina Immigrant Women Association in the San Francisco Bay Area*

To understand the institutional processes that intervene in the construction of the «immigrant woman» as a political subject in the United States it is necessary to consider at least two mechanisms. First, the importance of identity politics as part of the heritage of the civil rights movements; and race, in particular, as a fundamental organizational principle for people to be inscribed along the black-white line of belonging as they arrived in the US (Ong 2003; Young 2000). Secondly, the present political and economic context that perpetuates the «illegality of migrants» (Sarabia 2012), where illegality is understood as a

⁵ She refers to food banks.

specific sociopolitical relational space articulated through the legal history of US political economy (Ngai 2004). Thus a migrant subject from south of the border is undeniably racialized and constructed as the *eternal foreigner* independently of how many generations she has been settled in the United States (Oboler 2006; Raymond 2006).

The present research is located at the intersections of gender based violence, immigration and race/ethnicity, to take into account the different definitions of belonging displayed in institutional contexts where the women of Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) assume, negotiate and insert themselves as Latina Immigrant Women. These three intertwined identity axes define the project, as their intersection locates participants through shared experiences of differentiated subordination. Citizenship practices displayed in the context of this collective, respond to both; the disciplinary citizenship regimes that tend to located poor women as *in need* social services recipients; and the (re) appropriation of these categories, by the women involved, for the production of critical political subjectivities. Through educational and community organizing campaigns, participating in MUA implies for its members the development of an intersectional analysis that allows them to draw an integrated and complex picture of their daily problems that at the same time broadens their political capacity as rights bearers.

Throughout the history of this organization we can identify three moments where their identification as a target population within the context of social intervention for partner violence prevention has produced different political subjectivities.

The first moment is connected to the origins of the organization as a support group in the mid 1990's. The group served as a safe space for low income Spanish speaking women who had recently arrived to San Francisco, California. The main goal of the group was to break the isolation and fear many of them were experiencing as a result, among other factors, of their undocumented status (Coll 2010). Women who participated in the group were in a legal limbo produced by the implementation of immigration laws that had given control over their legal status to the sponsoring spouses (Erez, Adelman and Gregory 2009). For many this dependency had intensified their vulnerability in violent relationships. Violence was shaped by other dimensions of their identities. Their political self-identification as poor un-

documented women of colour and victims of partner's violence allowed them to be part of a national coalition pushing for the approval of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This legislative package, approved in 1995, integrated a broad range of regulations that included allowing certain immigrant women abused by their partners to apply for legal residence independent of their abusers. It has been considered the first comprehensive policy effort oriented to include the intersected experiences of immigrant women in abusive relationships⁶. However, as we will see, VAWA applicants must insert themselves in a highly victimized and exposed fashion with the intervention of the police, family separation and insertion in an over controlled environment. Thus, its implementation has revealed important gaps that inhibited the effectiveness of this well-intentioned legal reform (Espenosa 1999).

A second moment corresponds to an internal strategic planning process, which took place between 2002 and 2004, in which the organization redefined their political position as part of the violence prevention and support network. To respond to victimizing notions of belonging commonly inserted in social services disciplinary citizenship, MUA developed a profound internal analysis and participation model based on bottom up decision making processes and leadership development for its members (Coll 2010). Such a process allowed to consolidate their intervention model, based on addressing multilayered forms of subordination that interact with the problem of intimate partner violence, such as lack of economic resources, legal dependency, and child care responsibilities, among others. They proposed women leadership capacity building and community empowerment, as an alternative to those domestic violence prevention programs often focused on individual and isolated approaches for behavioural change. As María, MUA programs Director explains:

We are not a domestic violence agency, but we provide many domestic violence services. But MUA is recognized more for its leadership development. Even members see it this way... and it's very important because if they had told me this was a domestic violence group, I probably wouldn't have come.

The third moment corresponds to the campaign, titled «Echoes of Silence, Raising Our Voices» (2008-2009), in which

⁶ The United States passed the Violence Against Women Act in 1994 and renewed it in 2000 and 2005.

the organization implemented their participation model with the aim of inserting their proposals and needs in the local arena of domestic violence prevention and intervention. The starting point of this citizenship campaign was a Participatory Action Research, developed within the organization to gather experiences of Latina migrant women survivors of domestic violence, explore the support services available and evaluate the barriers to access these services. One of the motivations for this project was shared by Laura, an active member of the organization:

We knew that (domestic violence) services were not working, many women were quitting (the program) and service providers were asking us – in particular Anglo-Saxon ones or staff born and raised in the U.S. – why Latino women are more prone to leave the shelters and go back to their abusive partners than other women. We saw it from our own viewpoint: we want to preserve the family, «he's the father of my children» and things like that... but I also believe that domestic violence services haven't been accessible enough to Latina women.

Logics of «otherness» unfold to answer definitions of «*Latina immigrant women*» inscribed in institutional spaces of power which are embodied by «*Anglo-Saxon and US-born-and-raised women workers*». To respond to normative definitions of belonging, that often blame immigrant women violence on their culture, Laura articulates identity boundaries established from the axes of social differentiation of culture and race. It incorporates such logics, accepting them but at the same time questioning the capacity of service providers to respond to the needs of the women.

MUA situated in an institutional framework to inscribe definitions of immigrant women survivors of partner's violence as community leaders actively proposing new forms of intervention. Women involved in MUA not only wanted their experiences to be included in the San Francisco map of inequality and abuse, but also developed recommendations to promote changes in the policies and practices of public institutions and social services. Reviewing the tensions present in government spheres, anthropologist Kathleen Coll (2010) analyzed how women advocating for the rights of gender-based violence survivors are often inserted in logics of victimization and disempowerment when seeking commitments for change in institutional spaces. Citizenship practices performed by MUA consisted of being a community space that brings together women to actively participate in the political sphere

and advocate for their rights rather than an organization that provides assistance to victims of domestic violence in times of crisis.

Among its significant results, the work developed by MUA in this campaign exposed the limited capacity of some of the most important resources available to respond to the needs of female survivors of domestic violence participating in the research. Some of the obstacles identified were the insufficient translation services, lack of cultural competency among provider's personnel and prevalence of police intervention, family separation and individual support. Few of the research participants had applied for VAWA's legal protection claiming eligibility by proving to be a particular kind of «victim», as one of the participants in the group discussions furiously expressed: «*they want strong cases, strong meaning you are in the hospital, your head is split open or you're missing an eye*». Additionally, VAWA is only available to women legally married to a citizen or legal resident in the US. This legal provision reinforces experiences of illegality and vulnerability when considering only those who are legally linked to the State as worth protecting.

Through its campaign, MUA showed that policies for intimate partner violence prevention and intervention often focused in the psychological effects of male domination disregarding the intersectional factors that intervene in women's experience of violence (Crenshaw 1994). MUA presented a work model on gender-based violence that promoted a collective response with an understanding that violence is expressed beyond the boundaries of domestic life and articulated in intersecting categories of gender, legal status, culture, race and social class. This definition provided a much more complex and rich map of the root causes of the problem of gender-based violence, useful to reject, modify and challenge one-dimensional gender logics that often unfold from normative discourses of culture as the main obstacle for women's human rights achievement.

4. *Concluding remarks*

This article provides an example of analysing the intersectional dynamics involved in experiences of mobilization that transcend traditional single axis horizons, as the cases of MUA and the Andalusian associations have shown. We have used intersectionality

as a heuristic device for the study of the citizenship negotiations that take place in the relational spaces deployed between definitions of belonging elaborated by the protagonists in these studies, and the politics of belonging inserted in institutional frameworks. We have focused on specific political and institutional areas, where migrant women's collectives deal with institutional interventions and policies designed towards migrants' integration and against gender-based violence in immigrants' communities. When migrant women's collectives are inserted into these institutional contexts their legitimacy is often articulated in gendered, racialized and classed definitions of citizenship that recognises women only as long as they fit into subordinated and mutually exclusive roles, such as those of «victims» or «mediators», «recipients» or «agents» of the social interventions designed for this category. These labelling processes tend to limit women's political agency and hinder their recognition as «full and equal partners» in the social and political arena, as full «citizens» (Fraser 2000).

In contrast with these constraining mainstream definitions, the participants articulate more variegated interpretations of what it means to be and act in the public space as migrant women. They push forward complex and intersected definitions of political belonging based on lived experience and the identification of a multi-rooted problem analysis perspective. They mobilize different aspects of their identity, depending on their counterparts and in different circumstances, enacting a contextual and political use of difference. These processes take place in power constraining contexts where identities and roles performed are expressions of ongoing negotiations and positioning mechanisms. Migrants assume, refuse or rework certain ascribed categories and meanings, within structural and discursive frameworks that impose different resources and constrains on their agency.

In the two contexts under study, we have shown relevant differences in the modes and outcomes of these negotiations. In the Spanish case study, the recent character of migrant women's collective action and its aforementioned dependence on public administration, lead to the prevalence of fragmented forms of resistance and of a tactical use of differences, as the main way for migrant women to negotiate their material and symbolic visibility in the political arena. In the US case a consolidated trajectory of community organizing promoted since the mid 1960's and inserted in the context of identity politics allows

for the deployment of strategic essentialism forms, deploying mechanisms of difference as efficient political resources used by activists. Thus even when the women of MUA insert themselves in rigid institutional spaces there are important revisions of the solutions that are being proposed at an institutional level and of the role that «other» women play in this area of intervention.

Intersectional analysis reveals how subordinated experiences of inclusion may also become spaces of resistance and political action for those subjectivities constructed at the margins. We understand how such citizenship practices could be oriented towards the transformation of structural conditions such as racism, labour exploitation, and criminalization/illegality, among others. However, the capacity of organizations to promote such changes depends on the context in which they insert their action, the rigidity of the institutional definitions that inscribe them, as well as the surviving strategies displayed in the negotiation processes.

Our work contributes to an analytical move towards processual and situated accounts of intersectionality, advocated by numbers of scholars. This intersectional and constructivist perspective provides complex insights for understanding categorization processes as emerging from the interactions between agency and structure. Social categories related to gender, ethnicity and so on, are seen as constructions that have the capacity to label individuals, while at the same time only existing as long as they are incorporated, or challenged, both in institutions and in everyday interactions of situated social agents. Categories are not only permanent key tools in mechanisms of othering, exclusion and oppression; in certain circumstances, they can also be open to reinvention and active manipulation, articulating sites of resistance and producing resources for action. We argue that this intersectional thinking can be very useful in the analysis of the negotiations and redefinitions of citizenship from below, since it pays attention to both: people's structural position defined through gendered, racialized, classed frontiers present in the context they inhabit (Yuval-Davis 2011), and to their positioning practices and everyday forms of resistance. The two case studies presented highlight how women deploy practices close to classical repertoires of intersectional politics (e.g. organizing as Latina collectives), as well as more fragmented actions, related to shifting «positionalities» (Anthias 2001).

The present contribution proposes to draw meaningful connections between the concept of intersectionality and current research

on the transformations of citizenship. Our work contributes to the critical reflection on how intersectionality can travel to other spheres of knowledge, different from those where it originated, without losing its analytical power and specificity and without turning into a black-box (Davis 2008; Lykke 2011).

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Beyond victims and cultural mediators. An intersectional analysis of migrant women's citizenship practices in Spain and the United States

The article explores the potentialities of applying an intersectional perspective to the study of the inequality changing forms and the transformations of normative notions of citizenship in contemporary contexts. It focuses on the negotiations and politics of belonging emerging from migrant women's collective action. The article proposes a critical review of the theoretical and methodological debate on intersectionality, paying special attention to those positions that help advance the connection between agency and structure. It articulates a processual and constructionist perspective as a good analytical tool for studying the negotiations of differences, citizenship and belonging enacted by subjects situated at the margins of the contemporary structure of stratification. The second part of the article discusses the results of two recent ethnographic research projects on migrant women's associations in Andalusia (Spain) and San Francisco Bay Area (US).

Keywords: Intersectionality, migrant women, belonging, citizenship, difference.

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