Weaving Spaces of Participation and Social Justice.
Civil Society Organizations and Indigenous Migrant Women in the United States

Tejiendo espacios de participación y justicia social.
Organizaciones de la sociedad civil y mujeres indígenas migrantes en Estados Unidos

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the importance of civil society organizations that support indigenous migrant women's rights in the states of Texas and California in the U.S. From the ethnographic work carried out through a decolonized, collaborative, and feminist methodology, a collaboration began with three organizations from the aforementioned states. This text will detail the actions carried out by these organizations to alleviate the obstacles faced by indigenous women in the country. The article focuses on two different migration scenarios: firstly, when women are intercepted and detained by the Border Patrol, and secondly when they reach their destination. Both migration situations involve complex and operational analyses by the organizations and the affected women.

Keywords: 1. civil society organizations, 2. migration, 3. gender, 4. ethnicity, 5. social justice.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la importancia que adquiere la actuación de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil a favor de los derechos de las mujeres indígenas migrantes, en Texas y California, Estados Unidos. A partir del trabajo etnográfico realizado mediante una metodología descolonizada, colaborativa y feminista, se ha trabajado con tres organizaciones de los estados citados. En el presente texto se expondrán las acciones que realizan dichas organizaciones para paliar los obstáculos que enfrentan las mujeres indígenas en ese país. El artículo se centra en dos escenarios migratorios distintos: en primer lugar, cuando las mujeres son interceptadas y detenidas por la patrulla fronteriza, y en segundo lugar, cuando llegan al lugar de destino. Ambas situaciones migratorias implican complejos análisis, así como de operatividad de las referidas organizaciones y de las propias mujeres afectadas.

Palabras clave: 1. organizaciones de la sociedad civil, 2. migración, 3. género, 4. etnicidad, 5. justicia social.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at analyzing one of the several factors that make up and influence migratory processes: the place of Civil Society Organizations (hereafter CSOs) working for the rights of migrant women and men in their capacity as popular mobilizers. These organizations are filling a triple space of action (the migrant community, society, and institutions) that ultimately contributes to improving the processes of democratization (Arnold & Spedding, 2007, p. 155).

The text analyses how three organizations in the United States of America (hereafter USA) articulate themselves to denounce abuse, defend human rights, manage tools of social involvement for migrant women, create networks, and foster civil solidarity. Through this multidimensional approach, we aim at understanding the role of said organizations develop from an inclusive perspective, as to identify how indigenous migrant women are particularly impacted by such. According to Blackwell, Hernández Castillo, and Herrera (2009), when it comes to transnational and non-governmental organizations in the context of migration, "many organizations become instrumental in the resolution of problems and enable the empowerment of communities as well as the development of their capacities" (Blackwell et al., 2009, p. 30).

This paper uses the expression "indigenous women" while aware of its globalizing and colonial connotations and without differentiating the features of the particular cultural group these women belong to. Thus, it considers a social collective that, despite the wide cultural differences between the different original communities their members come from, constitutes itself into a sort of union in relation to the otherness not perceived as "ethnic" from the hegemonic perspective.

An intersectional study (Crenshaw, 1991) was the tool employed to analyze this matter, articulated with gender theory. The combination of both approaches allows us to identify and analyze the interconnected impacts and pressure and oppression systems. Intersectionality enables a comprehensive frame of analysis facing the crossing of different domination systems in social entities. For our case study, we also considered other categories, such as the dimensions of ethnicity and migration. In this sense, the use of the joint expression "pressure and oppression" becomes necessary, as women not only raise their voice against the oppressions that the available literature analyses as domination categories and systems, which exclude and impose limits on the subjects held in them, but they are also pressured by them. As such, both categories converge, intersecting each other.

Migration is a dynamic and relational phenomenon that is subject to several factors shaping its processes and results. These factors reach complex dimensions based on systemic-structural circumstances, crossed by gender and ethnic identity throughout the entire process. Marina Ariza and Laura Velasco (2012) point out that international migration is becoming one of the processes essential in social transformation in the last decades. So

historical patterns have changed, and new minority social groups have emerged, such as indigenous people and women. Regarding this, we must consider how ethnicity and gender influence migration projects, as ethnicity is a social construct that marks the differences between the dominant society and the so-called minorities in the socio-cultural arena. As for practices, cultural features, beliefs, ancestry, and collective identity, it also has a political impact (Robles Santana, 2017). Likewise, gender is a social category providing structure to asymmetrical power hierarchies between women and men in relation to biological sex (Beauvoir, 2000; Scott, 1996). In this context, "the body manifests as a passive medium on which cultural meanings circumscribe, or as the instrument through which an appropriating and interpretive will establishes a cultural meaning for itself" (Butler, 2007, p. 58).

The study of international migration implies a complex analytical process, as the angles and dimensions that make up this phenomenon are many. To glance at the different pressure and oppression axes affecting the analyzed people and how they relate to CSOs, a methodology has been established that prioritizes avoiding the colonial biases underlying the research carried out in the original communities. For this purpose, the present work was carried out by means of a collaborative (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2008; Paris Pombo, 2012; Stephen, 2012) and decolonized (Hale, 2001; Speed, 2006) methodology, and a feminist ethnography (Castañeda, 2012). These methods show women's voices as reflective political subjects, with whom a constant dialog is established. As for CSOs, a collaboration from horizontal and feedback positions has taken place, meant to last in time.

The findings of this paper derive from a qualitative study carried out from January to June of 2014, in the cities of Austin and Taylor, Texas, and the city of Oxnard, California (USA). Fieldwork was then completed on a second visit to Oxnard, from April to May of 2016. During both periods, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 14 indigenous women were carried out: eight Mixteco and two Zapoteco, from Mexico, two Quiche and one Mam, from Guatemala, and one Quichua, from Ecuador, as well as three Mixteco men. Likewise, eight volunteer activist women and men from five CSOs were interviewed; I was actively involved as a volunteer in three of them.

Two women lawyers were also interviewed, one member of a social organization, and the other an activist and professor at the University of Texas in Austin, as well as director of the Immigration Clinic at the University's School of Law. The observation measure focused on the identification and analysis of the gender and ethnic perspectives that these organizations used for their activity and measures for the migrant population in general, and as related to indigenous women particularly. In the quotations included in this analysis, pseudonyms are used instead of the interviewees' real names. Hence, their names appear in italics; the names that do not follow this format are real.

Grassroots Social Organizations. The Building of Social Justice Spaces

To analyze the relevance gained by the CSOs in the context of the migration to the USA, I follow after authors Denise Y. Arnold and Alison Spedding (2007). They perceive these social movements as "a mobilization apparatus able of influencing processes that further democratization" (Arnold & Spedding, 2007, p. 155), and frame them within what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) has called "a new grammar of social inclusion, which might change the relations of gender, race, ethnicity, and even revert private appropriation of public resources" (De Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 155).

According to this analysis, activist organizations and networks create what I call "social justice spaces." Through their work, these organizations contribute to the active struggle for migrant women and men to obtain rights as social-political entities in the destination societies and can be a vanguard that impacts public policy to fight against those regulations that disfavor said populations.

In terms of the concept of social justice and according to Harvey and Pescador (1994), it should be noted that "there cannot be one single universal understanding of justice that we can appeal to" since "all discourse on social justice hide in themselves relations of power" (Harvey & Pescador, 1994, p. 14).

In concordance with this study, the androcentric and interethnic power relations underlying the analyzed processes should be considered, which seek to be diminished by the organizations, structuring their actions without any a priori gender, class, or race-ethnicity bias. This favors the creation of "social justice spaces" in which the management of other dimensions of justice can also be witnessed, based on the acknowledgment of both identities and oppressions (Fraser, 2006; Young, 2000 [1990]).

In this regard, the debates on gender and social justice (Fraser, 2006, 2007; Postigo, 2011; Young, 2000 [1990]) that cannot be addressed in this paper due to their required depth of analysis should necessarily be considered, as they remain essential to understanding the dimensions of justice from the perspective of gender.

INDIGENOUS MIGRANT WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Two Concrete Moments and Spaces in the Journey North

Indigenous migration has a long history in the United States. Authors such as Cristina Oehmichen Bazán point out how indigenous Mexican migrants have been working in the fields and mines of this country since the 19th century (Oehmichen Bazán, 2015). Gaspar Rivera Salgado points out how they began to arrive at the state of California in the 70s decade of the 20th century (Rivera-Salgado, 2014). In the case of women, it was in the 80s decade of the past century when a small fraction of migrants settled in the northwest migrated to the USA (Velasco Ortiz, 2005), this migration flow growing more noticeable some forty years ago (Stephen, 2007).

To address the idea that shapes this paper, the CSOs *Grassroots Leadership* and *American Gateways* will be analyzed, both based in Austin, Texas. The collaboration entered with these CSOs was based on their active participation in the migrant women detention center T.D. Hutto Residential Center. This center is located in the city of Taylor, Texas; it is women-exclusive, and the number of indigenous women of different ethnicities coming from different Latin American countries there increases continuously, as emphasized by Stephanie Taylor, one of the interviewed law practitioners:

> Pertaining indigenous women, there has been an increase lately, particularly from Ecuador and Peru, we don't know why […] They don't identify themselves as indigenous, so you can't really tell, since they all have very common features. They hide their ethnicity because it can bring them more violations of their rights (Stephanie Taylor, personal communication, May 11, 2014).

The work carried out by both organizations in the referred center focuses on monitoring the conditions that the detained women are kept in, as well as on counseling. In the case of *Grassroots Leadership*, such is done through their Hutto Visitation Program (hereafter HVP); as for *American Gateways*, their actions are taken as part of their work in legally defending and counseling the migrant community.

Following this, the collaboration entered into with the *Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project* (hereafter MICOP) will be addressed; this organization is based in the city of Oxnard, state of California. Its members are Mixteco migrant women and men for the most part, although there are also Zapoteco and Guerrero men and women. Their mission is "helping, organizing and empowering indigenous migrant communities in the Central Coast of California" (MICOP, n.d.). My collaboration with MICOP supported this mission by participating in their gender-perspective activities with the indigenous migrant women who live and work in Oxnard.

The two case studies are located within this multi spatial framework (Texas and California). For the particulars of this work, two different migration situations are analyzed, each in one state. In the first scenario and by focusing on the aforementioned Austin-based organizations, what in this work is specifically termed "failed migration" will be shown. This migration situation focuses on those women who have seen their migration project truncated as they have been intercepted and detained once crossing the border. In this first scenario, their immediate horizon only goes as far as being set free (Speed, 2014), trying to discern their legal situation and how to solve it.

In the second scenario, what in this work is termed "achieved migration" will be addressed, which is the migration situation underlining the migration processes of those women who have managed to arrive at the intended destination society. This first goal of arriving at their destination without being intercepted in their journey is not easily achieved

(it takes a number of attempts for some), as the risks are constant in the migration route, more so for women.

In this paper, the study of "achieved migration" is located in the city of Oxnard, where the MICOP organization provides services and develops projects intended for the indigenous migrant community, wherein many women are in positions of active participation to assist, advise and train other indigenous migrant women in that city.

Likewise, this organization reconstructs its ethnic-communitarian identity at a transnational level, as they reproduce its proper culture in the new context and sustain direct relations with its community of origin. This case would be in accordance with what some authors have termed "immigrant transnationalism," which "tries to capture the ongoing and lasting participation of immigrants in the economic, political and cultural life of their countries, which requires of a regular and frequent contact overcoming national borders" (Portes, Escobar, & Radford, 2006). Indigenous migrations in Latin America, as pointed out by Velasco Ortiz and París Pombo (2014), gains a transnational character due to the relationships linking migrants to their communities.

> Each community organizes itself in its own way, the *Tequio* [communal organization model of cooperation] can apply to everyone. We have elections of representatives here every year. You feel obliged to your community, particularly in areas such as the church, [in] children's projects, a basketball court, a school, and you don't hesitate in organizing parties or collecting funds, as they are for the entire community and not just a family (*Arturo*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

In both scenarios, the support and work of the CSOs as a critical and resolutive mass of the conflicts inherent to the obstacles and eventualities related to indigenous migration will be key for the better transiting throughout the undefined and unknown space in which these women find themselves. Consequently, and according to Arnold and Spedding (2001), these organizations can be understood as creating changes towards new spaces of citizenship, in this case, ethnic and not androcentric. Those indigenous women who have been part of this analysis are at the intersection of various pressures and oppressions associated with gender, class, ethnicity, and their status as undocumented migrants. All these categories cross with others that may further limit them, such as age, education, original language, and way of dressing, impacting on their inclusion or exclusion conditions in this new stage of their lives. However, none of these determining factors prevent them from exercising their capacity for resistance, reaction, and agency.

"FAILED MIGRATION": INDIGENOUS WOMEN DETAINED IN TAYLOR, TEXAS

When arrested and detained by the Border Patrol, many women see how their migratory project failed. From there, a process burdened by difficulties starts, which translates into

defenselessness and vulnerability in the hostile space that is the detention center where they are jailed. This center conditions them under the cumulative disadvantages they already carry (Papademetrieou, 2011, quoted by Tuñón Pablos & Rojas Wiesner, 2012, p. 12), and those they begin to face, in which their cultural practices and language barrier will become heavier yokes. Nonetheless, their strategies of resistance to the obstacles they find themselves pitted against come to complement the defenselessness violating them as holders of rights.

The detention center where the research was carried out with these detained indigenous women, the T.D. Hutto Residential Center is a medium-security prison with a capacity of 592 beds, managed by the private company Corrections Corporation of America (CCA).

> We started to work in Hutto when it first opened as a detention center for families […] It's a horrible place now, but you wouldn't believe how it was before, with children in prison uniforms and all the rules of a regular prison. The program was then modified not to detain entire families anymore. But all this is big business for the companies, they make a lot of money from the detentions of immigrants, and so they had to open it again for detentions and they just changed who was detained, they're women now, and that was in 2009. What we are trying to do now is documenting what is happening to women at the border (Barbara Hines, director of the Immigration Clinic, personal communication, May 11, 2014).

During the time of my research at this prison, conversations were held with a number of indigenous women detained there. The communication was quite complex since most of them only spoke their original languages, and they hardly spoke or understood Spanish. They did not know how to read or write, and they were ignorant of their rights as migrants, as detainees, and as monolinguals. To this list of "social disadvantages" in a U.S. detention system, the difficulty on the part of the CSOs to understand these women should be added, not only when it comes to oral communication but also pertaining to the clash of two different cultural systems. When they arrive at the detention centers, they already accumulated several violent experiences: those suffered in their journey and those inflicted on them by the security corps, both at the time of detention and in the so-called "ice boxes"[2] or in the large cages they call "dog kennels" (Hines, 2019, p. 62). Once detained in the center is when they can establish contact with two of the organizations mentioned in previous paragraphs in which I was also participating.

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[2]"Ice boxes" are temporary detention cells in which migrant women and men are held when they are detained crossing the border illegally. They are called like that because the air conditioning there is set to extremely low temperatures as a measure of pressuring migrants into signing their voluntary deportation. In these cold cells, pregnant women and even babies are held. The reader can delve deeper into detentions in these "ice boxes" by finding in the biography at the end of this paper the report *Hieleras (Iceboxes) in the Rio Grande Valley Sector* by Guillermo Cantor (2015).

Through its HVP program, Grassroots Leadership promotes social awareness in the community in relation to the unjustified detentions of migrant women. The program has a mission to create a collective of people defending the rights of migrant women, advocating for the need to reform prisons. Once citizens partake in the HVP program, their goal is to stay on the look for any violation of the human rights of detained women. To detect this, the program consists of visiting detained women and have conversations with them. This campaign serves two goals: 1) it alleviates the loneliness of detained women by connecting them to the outside world through the visits, and 2) it raises awareness among citizens, as they begin to understand how difficult and unjust is the situation in which detained migrant women find themselves in. This program started in 2010, and in the words of one of its first coordinators:

> They decided it would be important to start this visiting program to monitor conditions, and to find a base of volunteers willing to get involved beyond visiting as they begin to see what's happening there. People who want to do more to help women once they listen to their stories (Rocío Villalobos, personal communication, May 13, 2014).

As for the volunteers, these same activists state that "we grow a little more every year, and more people knows about this visiting program" (Rocío Villalobos, personal communication, May 13, 2014). What this program has achieved is that different people of different backgrounds have become defenders of human rights by visiting these women and bringing attention to the situation they are living. Now, detained indigenous women face specific obstacles, as stated by one of the American Gateways lawyers:

> People who have visited indigenous women, even when we were unable to communicate with them due to the language barrier, we still gain awareness of the obstacles that only they face, as they face more problems that the rest of their fellow migrants due to their ethno-cultural situation (Stephanie Taylor, personal communication, May 11, 2014).

The awareness gained by the volunteers and the lawyers about the complex and challenging conditions these indigenous women are in has caused Grassroots Leadership to take a stand in pressuring the authorities and society regarding this matter.

During my visits to the center in 2014 as a member of the HVP program, I had conversations with four indigenous women: two Quiche and one Mam from Guatemala, and one Quichua from Ecuador. One of the Quiche women, *María*, who at the time of our conversation in the month of March had been already detained for six months, was trying to learn Spanish as fast as possible, as that was her second detention and she constantly remarked all the problems she endured the first time when she only spoke her mother tongue Quiché: "The first time only crying, crying, could not speak Spanish" (*María*, personal communication, May 8, 2014). She was finally set free in December 2014, after being imprisoned for over a year.

The challenges and obstacles particularly affecting indigenous women quite hardly derive from the lack of a cultural perspective of inclusiveness in the center, able to interact with the different cultures coexisting in its space. All this places indigenous women in a complicated position in terms of this research. As clearly found by following them in this process, indigenous women had serious problems trying to fill in asylum applications (only written in English and Spanish).

On top of the above, these women had a hard time understanding the legal process and could hardly communicate on a daily basis with their fellow migrants and the prison officers. Similarly, the women interviewed were unaware of their rights and they needed interpreters, which is a very controversial aspect being that the bureaucracy associated with this process is quite slow: "I wait for interpreter for Court. I wait, long time, nothing" (*María*, personal communication, May 8, 2014). In face of these communication problems, their action capacity as active holders of citizen rights decrease, as they find themselves lost in this labyrinth of procedures, language, and pressure due to their new status as imprisoned women: "I'm sad because I think they will send me back to my country soon. Can you help me?" (*Aroa*, personal communication, May 15, 2014).

American Gateways provides them with legal advice. A network of jurists visits the center once a week to inform all the detained women on their rights, as well as to advise them throughout the legal process of their detention. They are particularly attentive to indigenous women because of the language barrier between them and the lawyers, which represents a bidirectional obstacle of sorts. This organization obtained a permit so that I could accompany the two lawyers who visited the center once a week to provide the detained migrant women with advice, thus I was able to conduct my research. I was also tasked with helping them in the process of advising the detained women.

In this regard, one of the two lawyers I supported explained that one of the factors in which they have worked the most properly advising these women has been the cultural barrier, as their life cycles are different from the western one. And so, indigenous migrant women have a hard time dealing with the formal aspects of the court, and with the applications in which they must recount their background. This cultural dimension complicated the advice that the organization can provide them with.

> There has been an increase in detained indigenous migrant women. Most of them come due to domestic violence. One woman had an interview with the court in Spanish and didn't pass, even when she had a huge machete scar on her leg. We tried to persuade the migration authorities since she didn't have the chance of an interview in her mother tongue and was deported. That's how we realized that they are a special population group that requires extra attention, and we included that in the presentation [they have PowerPoint presentations every week, explaining to all detained women the legal process and their rights], that they have the right to have the interview in their

language, and that waiting for it is worth it. A fax is sent to the asylum office, stating that they requested an interview in their language, and the migration court addresses that directly. They have the right to an interpreter in the asylum interview and their deportation procedures, but not when filling the applications. There is a professor at the UT [the University of Texas, in Austin] who has helped us a lot in understanding indigenous culture, as the asylum requires them to narrate their story chronologically and indigenous cultures measure time differently. Those questions make no sense to them." (Stephanie Taylor, personal communication, May 11, 2014).

Through the work carried out by the lawyers in advising and, in some instances, defending imprisoned indigenous women in court, progress in consolidating social justice spaces as previously defined can be attested. The labor conducted by this organization builds stability bridges from among the uncertainty, insecurity, and distrust that this space of domination breeds in these women. That horizontal environment created each week turns both into a moment of relaxation and emotional tension somehow. This is so because they know that the conversations of that day will clear doubts they have in their otherwise complete lack of information.

These lawyers would ask the detained migrant women if they wanted to receive visits from volunteers to break from isolation. They then would make a list of those who did want and hand it over to Grassroots Leadership so the HVP volunteers would know which women to visit. Consequently, the creation of a new space can be perceived, a space of mutual support, a shared space in which a wide network of solidarity among organizations, activists, civil society volunteers, and academics is woven.

"ACHIEVED MIGRATION" MICOP: PROMOTING GENDER AND ETHNIC AWARENESS

California is a state in which the migrant community has been organizing since the decade of the 1970s through different associations, "with a diverse social and ethnic composition and different levels of organization" (Rivera-Salgado & Escala Rabadán, 2004, p. 147). These authors also state that there are two main drivers for the organization of these associations or clubs. One is the goal of systematizing the mutual support among migrants from the same communities, who face the same challenges when adapting to a new space. The other is the urge to help their communities of origin, which is perceived as a "moral duty" (Rivera-Salgado & Escala Rabadán, 2004, pp. 153-154). Already in their now-classic work on indigenous migration to the United States, Jonathan Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004, p. 13) stated that "in spite of the adverse conditions in which indigenous migrants find themselves, they have managed to create a wide range of civil, social and political organizations standing out for the diversity of their strategies and goals."

MICOP finds its promoters in the very same indigenous migrant community, where women are a majority. The fact that most of its activists are indigenous women makes it possible and even easier for them to intervene in the community, as they already know the obstacles they face as migrants, as indigenous people, and as women. As a result of this, the tools employed to eliminate these obstacles to the greatest possible extent arise from an ethnic and gender focus. This way, by recognizing the structures halting the development of the community in general and migrant women particularly their agenda can focus on those aspects in which they are affected the most and these projects are in turn managed considering the development of their capacities and agency.

> […] We are interested in the development of power, of leadership in the community, but the idea comes through campaigns that strengthen leadership, telling them: *you have a voice, use that voice to make these changes that you need*. It's about changing things and practices in the systems we have here, so the way they serve the community is improved. Here we are, so small as organizations, telling them: *you must be proud of who you are, you must believe in yourself, value yourself as an indigenous person, you have the capacity and all the power to be what you want to be with your language, to keep going*. And all the media here keeps telling them: *no! the model is other here* (Arcenio López, Executive Director of MICOP, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

Following this idea, one of the MICOP promoters brings attention to the fact that:

> It is very hard when someone lacks knowledge of certain things. That's what happens to people in my community (they don't know what to do, for example, when it comes to domestic violence). The Mixteco Project [MICOP] has helped us a lot. There are many needs and many boundaries, and these organization has contributed greatly [in overcoming them] (*Lucía*, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

Among the boundaries that these interviews managed to detect, as they were widely voiced by the women, the following stand out:

1) Cultural barriers

The greatest cultural barrier faced by migrant women is that of language and writing, an aspect that carries with it multiple limitations linked to other social, cultural, and institutional areas in which they interact. These aspects make them face obstacles at work, at their children's schools, and health centers. Likewise, facing new cultural systems implies a severe change in their lives; and in this sense, western medicine comes as shocking, as it brings about a new relationship with their bodies and medical practitioners. Some health promoters pointed out that women feel uncomfortable talking about reproduction, sexuality, or sexually transmitted diseases. They also feel uncomfortable when gynecologists check them, particularly if they are male. *Olivia*, a Mixteco health promoter woman, explained how

they were trained and the relevance that sexual and reproductive health matters gain among indigenous migrant women:

> They trained us on HIV, prenatal care, mammograms, on overall care. That helped us a lot, it's very different in our community, there our body is sacred, it's our intimacy. That is the greatest change we have seen in our community, that doctors touch you, not only your partner. When that happened to me, I felt that people in the waiting room looked at me and knew what they had done to me, I felt ashamed. The food, the law, everything is different, it's a huge difference for us when we get here […], and we adapt little by little (*Olivia*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

Another important aspect are the conditions of habitability. Due to the cost of housing, they must share spaces, and up to ten people may live in two-rooms apartments under not so healthy conditions. Women suffer the most in this situation as they must cook, clean, and take care of children.

> The rent is so expensive that there are even two or three couples with children in a single room, and it's sad because children who go to school don't even have a space to do their homework, nor any space to play or have fun as the children raised in this country have. These children don't have that chance (*Linda*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

2) Work barriers: the infinite working day and sexual abuse in the fields

From the interviews held with five Mixteco women working in the produce fields at Oxnard, California, denounced the deplorable working conditions at a number of companies in this city, which I proceed to narrate. The interviewed women find themselves exposed to many diseases due to pesticides and other chemical compounds used on the crops, as the companies provide them with no protection at all. The bathrooms are far from the working areas, and their sanitary conditions are precarious: "In the fields you work and work under the sun, the bathrooms are dirty, the water is hot and dirty, and they don't pay you overtime" (*Julia*, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

Those indigenous women with whom conversations were held, workers at different produce fields in Oxnard, earned less than men and were called "*oaxaquitas*" (tiny Oaxaca ladies), "*matadas*" (hard workers), or "*inditas*" (tiny Indian ladies) in a pejorative and discriminative manner. Also, a few have been subject to sexual abuse by stewards while working. They would not denounce for fear of being fired, and because of the consequences they may have with their husbands, as well as fear of "what people will say" in the community. As a result, a double vulnerability they face can be noticed, namely, that they are transgressed women and are more vulnerable than their male counterparts because of their gender.

> I was 15 years old when I arrived here, and my entire life was in the fields. I had two jobs every day, picking carrot by day and corn by night, with my sister, and although they didn't do it to me, I did see that happening, when we bend down the steward comes and stands behind the woman, but I couldn't tell my husband, and then the next one would come. And they used to tell each other, "you know what, she's damn hot, let's go and take a look at her from behind and then hahaha." It still happens but is covered. I still work picking strawberries, but I don't look down anymore, I stand my ground now, I know my rights now (*Linda*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

This disadvantageous scenario of global and historic structural subordination based on gender makes it so that they must keep on dealing with their traditional roles as women, wives, and mothers. It is a triple gender condition on which the entire domestic/patriarchal system rests upon, and it is carried on to the migratory space, being in this new society an even greater aggravation, as they take on a new role as women working for someone else.

> As a woman I work a lot, besides working outside, also the kids, cooking food, the language, many here only speak Mixteco, many people make fun of us. You're sort of oppressed because you only work and take care of kids, you can't make something with your life, you can't study, many women can't read or write, some of them can't read their payment checks, so it's very hard (*Sara*, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Taking all these aspects into account, MICOP was born with a very concrete mission: that of supporting first indigenous pregnant women, workers in the fields, monolingual, and so, isolated from the U.S. system. Consequently, they work developing mechanisms that may provide access to the medical care system regardless of ethnicity, lack of knowledge, monolingualism, legal status, or economic standing. Nonetheless, reaching the entire community is not an easy task; a large part of the indigenous migrant community in Oxnard will not involve with any organization, they are temporary workers who change regions regularly, looking for work in the fields. Their everyday life involves no further expectations due to the lack of personal time and how early in the morning they have to get ready for work every day.

In the case of women, the triple work they have in production, reproduction, and at home makes it impossible for them to lay eyes in further horizons for the most part, and to all this, it should be added how difficult it is to move around the city, as transportation is yet another inconvenience (Velasco Ortiz & París Pombo, 2014). MICOP has come to realize the reality of these people by means of the surveys conducted by its promoters.

They have been surveyed on what they lack as a means of identifying what mechanisms do, they need to set in motion so that ultimately, they can enjoy at least a more dignified and bearable life. That is why this organization is carrying out vast efforts in making it easier for mothers (traditionally in charge of the care and education of their children) to understand the bureaucracy that comes with schools and physicians, both for them and their offspring.

Through a network of health promoters who also serve as interpreters, they can incorporate these women into the new social structure, making it so that all children attend school and have the most basic resources and rights.

> I've been in the project since 2010 and in Oxnard for something like 15 years. I've been very much involved in MICOP. I experienced domestic violence with my ex-husband, he didn't respect me as a woman […] And we took courses about domestic violence, and I realized what I was going through was not ok... and I want to help the community, and I got out of that relationship. I was alone, working picking strawberries and in the Project, and I feel stronger, and have learned a lot, and now I'm working eight hours properly. It's very hard when someone doesn't know things, that's what happens to people in my community, that we don't know what to do. The Mixteco Project has helped us a lot (*Berta*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

Another focus of MICOP is on the relationship of the community with learning how to read and write, and to address this the program "Plaza Comunitaria" has been created. This program grants the official Mexican credit for primary and secondary education, depending on the case of the given student, as agreed, and arranged with the Mexican government. Likewise, for a part of the indigenous migrant population speaking only Mixteco is a limiting factor when it comes to navigating U.S. society. Upon detecting this barrier, the organization professionally and comprehensively trained 58 interpreters and had 22 of them participating actively, which were key in having both the community and the agencies with which these services are established breaching such huge language and cultural barriers. Visit cards have been implemented, that read "I request a Mixteco interpreter. I only speak Mixteco," which ensures them a minimum of communication, at least sufficient to request an interpreter.

In relation to one of the problems that has been historically deeply rooted in the community, namely gender violence, the organization has developed a protocol called *"Viviendo con Amor,"* funded by the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department (county to which the city of Oxnard belongs). Two of its promoters speak thus about it:

> We had a 40-hours training as counselors on domestic violence, on how to talk to women, what are their possible options if they decide to leave the relationship or stay. For some of them, that step has not been easy, but through this program, we can provide the information, so they see the options they have. Now we also see the need to learn about the work, the labor rights they have as women. You learn. Also, we also talk about what sexual harassment is (*Beatriz & Esther*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

The work done by indigenous women for indigenous women becomes essential. Its impact on health, new relationship and gender roles, as well as the way domestic violence is approached as gender violence, all means an important change in the way reality is perceived. These community promoters work from premises deriving from their philosophy and cosmogony, which is fundamental for there to be a clear understanding between those.

As an organization not mediated by ethnocentric interests but rather from its cultural universe in relation to the Mixteco community itself, MICOP reaffirms its own identity culture. In this sense, an interrelation between place, gender, politics, justice, and "ethnicity" (in quotation marks, as it is not comprehended within the perception held by the mentioned authors, yet for this case is an obvious given, as already detailed) can be seen, in what Wendy Harcourt and Arturo Escobar (2007) have termed "women and the politics of place."

Another aspect associated with the limitations and obstacles faced by indigenous migrant women in Oxnard is their ethnicity, which translates into a disadvantage for them. All those attributes differentiating them as indigenous people keep pigeonholing them into historically oppressive categories, in a way that causes patterns of power between non-indigenous and indigenous migration to repeat themselves.

> We also changed our way of dressing to pants, our shoes, we don't braid our hair here, as they would criticize us, they tell you, "well you're an Indian," "look at that *oaxaquita*" (*Berta*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

In many instances, the accumulation of pressure and oppression is alleviated by the intervention of the organization. In this regard, the attention and advice provided in the different areas in which this organization intervenes are important for women, whether these spaces are physical or bureaucratic. MICOP runs various projects intersected by the gender-ethnicity focus. This accounts for its social awareness in counterbalancing the frameworks of injustice and problems that women come to face in the destination society. Having the associate space, as well as the attention received from the promoters, helps develop relationships of trust that counter the pressure and oppressions of this new stage in their lives, sensitizing not only women but also men, and thus the entire community, institutions included.

> A monthly meeting takes place at Harrington Elementary School. Then we ran a survey, as many families speak Mixteco. We went door to door identifying our communities, and how many speak Mixteco, and we saw how many people need help, and it's only now that clinics and schools are recognizing that they need interpreters (*Susana*, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

In this way, those migrants who are trained as promoters under MICOP become key figures, as they communicate all the important information for their community to know all the rights and resources they can have. These aspects position MICOP as a cornerstone of the communitarian edifice in Oxnard. This non-profit association is consolidating and raising awareness at all levels of the human rights of indigenous migrants and helping them keep their identity and culture.

CLOSING REMARKS: ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL JUSTICE SPACES WITHIN A MIGRATION CONTEXT

Migration transforms society, identities, and human relations. In this relational and dynamic (ex)change, multiple intervening and negative factors can be detected, as migration is linked to aspects such as irregularity, poverty, and the criminalization of the migrant. This discourse creeps in and reproduces itself in society, magnifying discrimination, and the barriers that migrants must overcome. According to what has been previously shown, there is space that counters these adversities: they have been termed social justice spaces. In them, the figure of the migrant is dignified and their participation as holders of rights in the destination society is promoted.

> I'm happy with the work I do. I keep learning and we want to learn more. That is what I try to share with the families that come here, just like my family and me. Having the chance to know, and being a promoter helps me and my community (*Beatriz*, personal communication, April 29, 2014).

The analysis carried out stresses the different aspects of pression and oppression on indigenous migrant women, aspects that a priori put them outside of the framework of rights and so makes difficult their endeavors. The patriarchal and neoliberal system constricts by design all people on the periphery of the ethnocentric and ruling class hegemonic order from different axes of pressure, as it does with women that do not represent the westernized gender stereotypes.

In this migratory context, indigenous women are indeed at the margin of the said dominant order, they are subject to exclusion practices as well as to multiple discriminations. On the contrary, this question allows us to analyze their capacities and agency before this interplay of extreme undervaluation devices.

In the empirical work carried out, the voices of these women have revealed the critical thinking they process as relating to the disadvantageous position befalling them, putting their capacity of reaction in the spotlight. *Reaction* in the sense of becoming interested in knowing their rights, reacting, and acting the mechanisms of change. CSOs play an invaluable role in this reaction, as support for mediation-interaction.

According to Martha Nussbaum, this capacity is understood as "a set of opportunities of choosing and acting" (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 40). The opportunities suggested by the author, such as the freedom of action and of being a person, for the purposes of this study, are correlated to the CSOs by the latter providing further knowledge on the scope of both their social and working rights, which widens the framework of action. This situation allows for the resistance and agency of these women to be glimpsed, them being subjects that transform their new socio-political and cultural context.

And so, indigenous migrant women can try to drive themselves with greater success in an extra-communitarian space that a priori restricts their faculties. In any case, and just as

this reaction capacity is made visible, the fact that women studied here are not invulnerable should be considered, as they are measured by a heterogeneous knot of structural violence that gives place to different dissimilar and ambivalent responses, depending on the circumstances and the context they unfold in. It is following this line that Abu-Lughod (1990) pointed out the need to understand the mechanisms of power that generate different forms of resistance.

Within this order of things is that the CSOs promote improving those areas that perpetuate the dichotomies and exclusions impacting on the migratory context. Likewise, these organizations develop political strategies that aim at creating structural changes ultimately resulting in new spaces for citizenship, with a distinct ethnic sensitivity.

> Besides the work we do in the community, training both interpreters and promoters, we also do our part in talking to District Supervisors. We've had meetings with the police department, the Human Services Agency, and with some people in Congress. Also, in the office of the Senator, as we also advocate for the Migratory Reformation. We worked in one campaign called "*No me llames oaxaquita*" [don't call me oaxaquita] against the discrimination we live in the city. Little by little, they have paid more attention to us as an organization, as a community, and we have been informing them that most of those picking the produce taken to their tables belong to our indigenous community (Arcenio López, Executive Director of MICOP, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

The organizations studied engage politically and civically with other CSOs, such as *Grassroots Leadership* and *American Gateways*, who collaborate to know which women want to receive visits by the HVP volunteers, or with other CSOs around them, as it happens with *Austin So Close to the Border*, which volunteers from the previous two organizations visit to know the reality of migrants at the USA-Mexico border. In the case of MICOP, they collaborate with other organizations in California, such as FIOB (*Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales*, Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations), located in Los Angeles and defending the rights of the indigenous migrant population. This multidirectional cooperation fosters a wide social community interconnected by means of new strategies and forms of activism that benefit the entire migrant population. In the two cases analyzed here, organizations, law practitioners, interpreters, academics, citizens, and indigenous women themselves have established a clear connection. These spaces put pressure on the structure and raise awareness among society through the channels at their reach suitable for that purpose.

Indigenous migrant women analyzed hereby have been growingly participating in the activists' network of the mentioned organizations and have managed to obtain an acknowledgment of their rights greater than what was granted before their arrival. Similarly, most of these women, whether they speak Spanish or only their native language, can now function better in their new social space. The dimensions acquired from being able to be

advised and supported by an organization contributes to the overall improvement of their conditions: emotional and working, social, health, and as mothers.

This analysis has approached two of the various migration scenarios that indigenous women may face once crossing over to the USA. These scenarios already imply potentially negative impacts on their entire migration project. The actions of this CSOs network tend to work in the social structure to counteract the lack of information and means of indigenous migrant women and develop a sort of "culture of rights" (Franzoni & Giorguli, p. 706) in which the migrant population can participate. In the face of the ever-growingly strict U.S. immigration laws, resulting in "alarming and inhumane policies" (Hines, 2019, p. 60), small yet firm spaces of democracy and resistance are created.

Consequently, for indigenous women who migrate, the intersection of mechanisms for the acknowledgment and defense of the rights implemented by the CSOs advocate for their migratory vulnerability and allow them to generate resistance and reaction strategies to the pressure and oppression they face. By addressing this, they alleviate the disproportionate psychic and physical impacts deriving from their migration, acting as agents and holders of rights.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

Image 1. "Manos Mixtecas," poem by Jesús Noyola

Source: By Jesús Noyola, afro-descendant poet and migrant from the state of Guerrero, Mexico, and an activist at MICOP. The hands in the foreground belong to Celia Méndez, a Mixtec woman from Oaxaca, Mexico, migrant, former field worker, and current community promoter at MICOP. 2016.

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