



A **toolkit** for **diversifying knowledge** and **tackling discrimination** through **civil society participation** in universities.

# STRUCTURAL RACISM



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## E L A B O R A T I O N

**T**oday, there is a naive idea that racism is mostly a matter of moral behaviour, of individual attitudes that refuse to accept diversity. This is dangerous in that it makes invisible a fundamental dimension of racism, and one that directly affects the people considered "others", their lives and their possibilities: racism is structural in European societies, it is not just an individual inclination. As Garcés and Amzian (2017) point out, racism is a modern pattern of Western power, whose fundamental product is the nation-state, sustained and reproduced through institutional regulations and practices, not only at the level of social interactions between individuals.

By pointing out the structural dimension of racism, we seek to highlight how the production of racialized hierarchies is at the very heart of the systems of power that govern us. The modern state is based on the systematization of a hierarchy that places Western identity above all others (Garcés and Amzian, 2017). The construction of an allegedly superior Western identity is strongly linked to colonial processes, in which racial difference was forcibly established as a structuring category of the colonial social order (Espinosa-Miñoso, 2010). In the colonial history of Europe, the fictions categories of "us" and "they" become normalised, being delimited through borders that are naturalized symbolically and materially, based on a false internal homogenization and the idea of the "other" as a threat (Mbembe, 2018).

This border between "them" and "us" is what constitutes the nationalist discourses, constantly invented and reproduced through the intersections of racist ideologies, institutions and practices (Yuval-Davis, 2004). At the base of the notion of nation lies the idea of "cultural purism", related to essentialist traditions, homogenizing and exclusionary practices, as well as building identities that are presumed to be self-evident and immutable (Hernández and Suárez, 2008). In this sense, one of the nodes of contemporary racism is the construction of cultural differences as preexisting, immeasurable and unchangeable, tracing different types of "others" that can be included or excluded from society. In contemporary Europe, 'the other' may be a migrant or a member of a racialised minority, as any sign perceived as culturally different becomes a signifier of a border to divide the world between "us" and "them" (Yuval-Davis, 2004).

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## C O N C E P T U A L I Z A T I O N

**T**he development of the concept of structural racism was fed by the shared context of Barcelona's PAR group. It is in this sense worth mentioning the position from which we produce knowledge. Most of us are migrants who have gone through a bureaucratic process in order to legalise our situation in the country. This has importantly defined our position and chances in this society. When discussing discrimination and inclusion we always came to the issue of power structures and the related laws that create a hierarchised ladder including different steps or levels of access to rights. In this sense, an important part of our discussions dealt with how these structures demarcate our chances to be and to participate in society. And in relation to this, we were driven by an interest to problematize and transform these systems, as we often see that a greater centrality is given to the effects of discrimination, and less to its causes. Thus, this text aims at grasping how these structures work, what their main elements are. From there, we hope to be able to formulate possible political alternatives.

The situated definition of structural racism came about through a series of collective discussions that were fed by our experiences as migrants and, in the case of some of us, as household and care workers. It was therefore important for us to give an account of how structural racism is materialised in specific issues also related to the context of Barcelona and the Spanish state affecting us in our everyday lives. In this sense, conceptualising the Law on Foreign Persons (Ley de Extranjería) as one of the pillars of structural racism expelling us to the margins of society will offer a depiction of a system that no longer appears as abstract, but rather as concrete set of elements and procedures through which these structures of racism become actualised.

Similarly, the process of conceptualisation was fed by different forms of knowledge. We tried to move away from the taken for granted ways of knowledge production in academia. Thus, we considered our collective experience, as well as certain performances or artistic creations, as relevant material from which to start inquiring. This is important because it allowed us to discuss which voices are authorised or disauthorised to speak about a certain phenomena, reaffirming the BRIDGES' commitment to diversify the sources and inspiration we draw on to think of the world. These discussions of our collective experiences with structural racism also incorporated the feelings derived from them, which were very relevant at the time of generating the collective definition. They allowed us to build an understanding that, in turn, respected the different positions

in which we live and face structural racism. Moreover, in addition to this experiential knowledge that derives from our personal experience, many of us also produce knowledge from an activist or a professional engagement with the topic. This active position has often been a way for us to cope with or escape from some of the consequences of structural racism by providing spaces for legal advice, psychosocial support, and fostering or promoting academic and activist research and interventions. We occupy in that sense multiple, stacked positionalities in relation to the topic, in which the personal, the political, and the academic become often entangled.

Finally, there is yet one more relevant question regarding the process of co-construction of the concept, and that is for whom do we create this definition? In this sense, we agreed on the importance of using a language that would allow us to reach different spaces such as those we are connected with. We therefore looked for a more grounded and accessible definition, including aspects derived from experiences in which power structures and different levels of access to citizenship were mentioned, in order to be used both in university and activist spaces and in everyday life. In this way, we created a situated and grounded definition to be used as a tool to dismantle common myths and rumours. This is so because we consider that the kind of racism we describe here becomes perpetuated because those who are not affected by it remain ignorant about the kind of situations we describe. Racism is reproduced because these individuals can imagine that the State, the “system” in which we live, is designed to create differential filters of access to different rights. This tool thus seeks to account for this active silencing by offering points that must be considered in order to understand and intervene in situations generated by structural racism.

### **The racist institution**

It is possible to identify these processes of differentiation both in the source and destination of narratives around identity, as well as along lines of belonging and exclusion. Institutions regulate society according to axes of gender, race, class, age, among others, ordering various aspects of social, political and economic life (Herrera, 2011). Likewise, public policies correspond to the institutionalized discourse and function as a system of qualification and classification of situations, establishing processes of social inclusion or exclusion, delimiting what is allowed or prohibited (Agrela, 2006). Not only public policies describe reality: they prescribe it. That is, they define the problems that must be addressed, their explanation and alleged solutions. Public policies, such as migration policy, generate social and political inequalities, they “generate classifications and distinctions between populations, building people into subjects and objects of the same, regulating their lives and inventing meanings about the groups to which we remain linked, or by opposition, excluded” (Agrela, 2006, p.5).

Both the production of racialised hierarchies and migration control are at the heart of the creation of the European Union (Santamaria, 2002). Since the creation of the European Union as a supranational entity migratory movements are permanently confronted with repressive migration

control policies. The Schengen regulations, which since 1990 have become one of the fundamental pillars of the EU, establish legislative differentiations according to the danger attributed to certain nationalities with respect to internal security, public health or the international relations of the Member States (Hönig, 2014). The erasure of internal borders comes at the cost of the erection of stronger external borders: the constriction of what is often referred to as Fortress Europe. This 'paradox of globalization' (Pérez, 2006) , engenders a neoliberal system that pushes for the elimination of economic borders, whilst strengthening those barriers that prevent the freedom of movement of human beings, at the cost of human rights and human lives.

Along with this, according to Óscar Pérez (2006) two more paradoxes define contemporary society: the paradox of universality and the paradox of democracy. The first refers to the fact that all human beings should be equal rights holders, whilst immigration policies imply the erasure of migrants' rights; the second consists of the fact that democratic decision-making requires a political community that, by definition, is exclusive. In order to function, when we speak of democracy in these terms, it requires that part of the population suffer violence through exclusion in a sustained manner. In Spain, in terms of the rule of law, the welfare state, public order, as well as territorial-national boundaries, 'democracy' has implied the legalised production of its others as well as their consequent criminalisation, persecution and death (Asamblea Antirracista de Barcelona, 2019). One of the technologies through which Spain's 'others' are built, is the 'Law on Foreigners', which was presented as a requirement for joining the EU and forced thousands of people to circulate in the bureaucratic and institutional labyrinth of irregularity that it produced (Asamblea Antirracista de Barcelona, 2019).

The condition of administrative irregularity in which thousands of migrants find themselves corresponds to a structural factor originated by the same regulations on migrants, in terms that the irregularity only exists because the existence of the Law on Foreign Persons, which in practice prevents the human right to emigrate. This situation, in turn, allows the exploitation of migrants in precarious jobs in the underground economy, making it impossible for them to earn a fair wage or have recognized labour rights: "The administrative bureaucracy, its slowness and arbitrariness, allows immigrants to remain in limbo, in a vital pause that in some cases lasts for years, while we wait for the review, authorization or renewal of our papers" (Manifiesto Parad de Pararme, 2001). This is based on the promise of security, both for the receiving society and for the people who migrate. The Asamblea Antirracista de Barcelona (2019) gives some examples of this:

☞ *The strategic use of the issue of security operates both at the European level, with genocide on Europe's borders and its seas (where the development of death policies has become chillingly technological and standardised); and at the state level, for example, through the increasing imposition of administrative obstacles to the renewal of residence permits, while the invisibility of*

*exploitation in housework and care or agriculture, where migrant labour reaches extremely high percentages, is increasingly serious. The same is true at the local level. During this summer we have witnessed, once again, how political and media discourse links migration with criminality, making these groups responsible for the increase in insecurity in the city. The street vendors faced another episode of police and media persecution; migrant children and youth, in constant persecution, have become the new scapegoat for an insecurity that is shown to be alien to structural issues. The Generalitat de Catalunya is beginning to consider a new programme of deportations of minors, something that the new Deputy Mayor for Security of the Barcelona City Council, Albert Batlle, has explicitly requested. The Muslim youth is also criminalized by prevention and surveillance protocols that build it as a potential terrorist. The removal of migrant women from custody continues to occur systematically, as in the recent and shameful María case. And we must also remember the very high and sustained migrant representation in the evictions.*

Thus, what has been happening since the incorporation of the Spanish state into the EU until today, is a hardening of the legislative framework for these groups, especially with respect to the conditions required for visas and family reunification (Sánchez, 2011), as well as the precariousness of the living conditions of immigrants in social, labor and health terms, with frequent police abuse, administrative harassment, imprisonment in Migrant Detention Centers and expulsions (Brandariz and Fernández, 2017). These practices are part of an institutional policy that erases the colonial memory and reconstitutes colonial racist under new forms (Bentouhami-Molino, 2016). Stop and Search and racial profiling are just some of the signs of racist abuse of police power, justified by the maintenance of (white) citizens security. Racial profiling is a standard criterion in many identification practices, in which documentation is requested from persons selected for their physical appearance: for what they look like and not for what they have done. These checks are widespread, in both public and private spaces frequented by people with physical features, identified as different from the majority of the population. These discriminatory, racist, classist and illegal practices, are however justified as a necessary for the effectiveness of public security. Yet, more than 74% of the people identified have never committed any crime (Manifiesto Parad de Pararme, 2019).

Groups of migrants for their rights and against racism have denounced the new constellations of the colonial powers of Europe, where the Global North continues to hold a monopoly on violence towards the people and territories of the Global South. The North-South political and economic inequality is based on relations of exploitation and extraction of labour and resources, as well as on the control of the displacement of their populations through migration policies at the state level and bilateral agreements at the international level. A press release of a migrant-rights group, released in memory of the terrorist attack of March 11, 2004 in Madrid, makes this very clear:

☞ *Despite the fact that the investigation has not been concluded and many questions remain open, the government and the media are criminalizing migrants by manipulating popular sentiments. This is not the first time this has happened. Migrants are classified as illegal, imprisoned simply because they do not have papers, denied any political rights, condemned to work in semi-slave conditions in order to survive and, finally, discriminatory legislation such as the Law on Foreigners is applied to them. This self-serving identification of immigration with terrorism hides the fact that many immigrants come to Europe fleeing from the war and terror suffered in their countries of origin, most of the time provoked by commercial interests of foreign powers and fed by weapons sold from the West. In remembering the victims we cannot forget that it is the powerful who practice violence on a daily basis. They bombard the civilian population in wars of mass destruction, they condemn thousands of people to precarious work, homelessness and misery. They, in turn, promote racial and sexual discrimination, death at home, at work or in the boats. Terrorist violence is also part of the violence inherent in the current established order and serves as a justification for imposing policies and measures that will create more social unrest and violence (Manifesto, 2005).*

## **Citizenship scales**

Nation-states, in their exercise of sovereignty, have absolute competence to set the terms for the admission and presence of migrants in their territories, which generate forms of discriminations and exclusions that call into question their adherence to human rights treaties (Muñoz, 2009). This situation is reinforced by the scarce existence of international laws on citizenship, leaving nation-states full powers to delimit the conditions of acceptance or denial of citizenship status, exempting them from legal duties towards non-citizens (Peña, 2012; Usher, 2004).

Within this framework, legislative borders prevent access to fundamental spaces for personal and social development for individuals and communities that do not meet national(ist) requirements, resulting in migrant populations and other groups being excluded from citizenship (Peña, 2012). This conception of citizenship is mainly exclusive, or as Maguemati Wabgou points out:

☞ *On the basis of the categories of citizen and foreigner, the legal discourse that dominates the conception of this citizenship is often limiting or restrictive in that citizenship should not be understood simply as a legal status defined by a set of rights and responsibilities, but also as an identity and the expression of belonging to a community, people or nationality (2012, p.125).*

The differentiation between citizens and non-citizens takes the form of distinction in terms of the conditions required for access to social services, which citizens enjoy without any prerequisites, as well as the exclusion of citizens' political rights, thus preventing political autonomy, i.e., the possibility of taking part in decisions on public affairs, especially those that affect one's life (Peña, 2012). For this reason, thinking about citizenship in relation to migratory processes implies, on



the one hand, problematizing the traditional views of citizenship, and on the other, addressing those that seek to break the exclusion implied by the formation of a particular political community, as noted in the following Manifesto of the Alternative Forum on Migration in 2001, that remains relevant to this day:

☞ *These women and men are denied citizenship, that is, access to rights on equal terms with the rest of the national population, and the ability to participate in public affairs that affect the entire population. The same draft European Constitution, when it states that every person holding the nationality of a Member State' will be a citizen of the EU, excludes from citizenship more than 15 million people from third countries. This unfair and conflict-generating situation must be overcome. It is necessary to make progress on citizenship, understood as a sense of belonging to the community, breaking with the instrumental vision of immigration that only takes into account the interests of the labour market and that sees its presence as something provisional. This belonging to the community implies being subjects of rights and duties, with full participation in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the place where one resides. For this reason, we believe it is essential that European citizenship be associated with stable residence in EU countries, and not with the concept of nationality (Manifesto, 2001).*

Citizenship is a social, political and historical construction, which accounts for the relationship between State sovereignty and people's rights, and is often intended as the precondition for political participation and empowerment of people who, historically, have been excluded from the full exercise of their rights, such as women, religious or ethnic minorities, and migrant communities (Muñoz, 2009; Usher, 2004).

### **Unconditional citizenship**

Critical migration scholars have taken up his conception of bare life to delineate the plight of refugees and unauthorized migrants, who exist in an indefinite and suspended state of non-citizenship (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004; Salter 2008). Accordingly, the illegalisation of migration creates a political limbo, where people's lives are held both "inside and outside the juridical order" (Agamben 1998, 27), where migrants are denied the right to have rights (Arendt 1973) and the right to (political) existence.

However, in this context, social and political struggles are fundamental, as they aim to empower those who are excluded from citizenship and those and discriminated against. In the words of Nancy Fraser (2009), these struggles aim to expand "the who" of justice. Collective mobilisations are fundamental to these objectives, as they are configured as a space in which oppressed groups can demand respect for their rights and exercise their powers in a system that seeks to exclude them.



Therefore, citizenship is not the precondition for any form of political action and subjectivity. Literature and debates on acts of citizenship (see Isin and Nielsen 2008; McNevin 2011; Nyers 2015) place the focus on the formation of political subjectivities by those performing and prefiguring citizenship despite their exclusion from normative citizenship. From this perspective, the citizen is not the only holder of political power, but also those who open and inhabit new spaces for political participation and who, in this exercise challenge understandings of State sovereignty and power as absolute, but rather force a transformation of the relationships between the State and civil society. Here citizenship is defined not as a formal property that can be held or given, nor as a settled identity, but as a practice that people produce through social, political and cultural modes of mobilisation (Isin and Nielsen 2008).

This implies that political participation cannot be understood solely according to axes of citizenship, but as a broader and deeper relationship to non-state spaces, common spaces from which to deliberate, decide, control and influence state policies. In this regard, Mezzadra (2012) proposes an understanding of social and political autonomy in frameworks that exclude the category of citizenship, and to think about the political power of migratory movements and conflicts from the perspective of the subjective practices, desires, expectations and forms of mobilisation of migrants themselves. In that sense, migrants constitute important political subjects and actors, beyond and outside of socio-legal conditions. Here, border-work figures as a contested process in continuous transformation, constantly redefined and shaped by those forces that attempt to escape controls (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Walters 2015). The novelty of this approach is to shift the focus from migration as a marginal reaction to the centrality of political and economic structures, to conceptualise it as a constituent force that actively defines political and social structures (Karakayali and Tsianos 2005; Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008; Mezzadra 2012). This shifts away from politics concerned with the realm of citizenship-related rights, and instead highlights those horizontal practices, experiences and modes of contestation that circulate through borders, as well as the strategies and tactics that groups of migrants mobilise in their everyday encounters with border controls and security technologies (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

Nancy Fraser (2009) points out in this regard that overcoming social injustice implies dismantling the institutionalized obstacles that prevent some from participating on a par with others, as partners with full rights to social inclusion. From her perspective, justice consists of the articulation of economic, cultural and political dimensions, where the latter is related to the scenarios where the struggles for redistribution and recognition are developed under certain decision rules that structure the confrontation. In the political field, then, it is not only defined who can demand redistribution and recognition, but also how these demands must be raised and arbitrated. This is a fundamental point of inclusion, since when citizens do not have access to this scenario under equal conditions, a political injustice or a failed representation is produced:

☞ There can be no integration if there is no equality, integration must be a matter of two, otherwise it is submission. The immigrant must abide by a language that he does not know as superior and use it as his main language without being allowed to teach his own to his children, the immigrant must abide by the customs of another as superior and better, he must wear western clothing and deprive himself of his own or he will not be considered integrated, Moreover, he may be forbidden to wear the burqa in the democratic Barcelona that does not prohibit full nudity in the street, he must consent to the denigration and persecution of his religion, which is forbidden to open places of worship while the churches proliferate without measure even though they are empty of worshippers. That is the summary of the integration necessary for the immigrant to be exploited for a miserable wage, if he does not integrate he cannot even aspire to that. And on top of that, it is the immigrant who is allegedly guilty of not integrating, as if the worker were guilty of excessive exploitation (Manifesto, 2005).

Therefore, along with other authors (Wabgou, 2012; Fraser, 2009; Massó, 2011; Mezzadra, 2012) we affirm that other forms of citizenship are necessary, which consider the conformation of a political community beyond borders, that is a broader visions that allow to face the discriminations and limitations that the policies of control and restriction of migratory flows impose, as well as the discriminatory and racist practices of the receiving societies, when taking into consideration people who were previously excluded from the borders of recognition. From this perspective, the entitlement of rights can be thought of in terms of the principle that all people, i.e., all those who are subject to a particular governance structure, are in a position to be the subject of justice in relation to that structure. This principle has the advantage that it does not presuppose formal ties of belonging, since these are installed because of that principle. At the same time, it allows frameworks for the protection of rights at different levels, to the extent that we are anchored to different levels of governance -global, local or regional-, from which actors and social organizations can undertake demands for participation in the configuration and decision-making corresponding to each one of them.

### **Synthesizing Structural Racism**

We understand that structural racism has to do with the differentiation and hierarchization of differences based on discrimination by sex, gender, class, race and citizenship status in a given territory. In the first place, structural racism corresponds to a legal-political structure, where the State and its legal and institutional forms (the constitution, public, financial, educational institutions, etc.) play an important role, in implementing formal inclusion and exclusion from the political community. Secondly, it corresponds to an ideological structure, mediated through cultural production or the media, which contribute to the naturalization of several forms of oppression and discrimination, such as border controls or daily police controls further reproducing existing stigma, as well as implementing racialised forms of repression, segregation and criminalisation. In

this structure, three concepts appear to overlap and determine individual and collective destinies in various ways: institutional racism, immigration policy and citizenship status. Immigration policies are exercised by bureaucrats and police forces that implement institutional racism in their work and contribute to social inequality, by creating different classes of citizenship based on bilateral agreements with countries of origin. It is important to work to deactivate stereotypes and prejudices based on differentiation with a negative charge, such as racialised, cultural, classed and gendered discrimination, which place some people in a privileged situation with respect to others, fostering poverty and lack of opportunities for the vast majority of people in the context of the European Union.

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