
BODIES IN THE MAKING: MIGRANT WOMEN IN EMBAJADORES (MADRID)

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Introduction

This paper is based on the research I am developing for my Ph. D. dissertation entitled “Identity Articulations: Practices and Representations of Migrant Women in the Neighbourhood of Embajadores (Madrid)”. In this project I deal with processes of subjectivity conformation in migrant women drawing on feminist literature, cultural studies and actor-network theory. In that direction I am trying to widen the more habitual spectrum of actor-network theory –social studies of science- by articulating it with feminist views and analysis, in order to consider not only bodily, discursive and material aspects and entities, but also questions such as reconfiguration of memories and desires.

Concretely, I address the constitution and hierarchisation of certain characteristics as significant embodied “differences” which continuously “mark” certain *bodies* as “migrant women” in concrete daily-life situations. In this direction I argue those embodied “differences” are deeply connected with political decisions and images repeatedly produced and inscribed in newspapers, demographic statistics, the Spanish state legislation and processes of EU constitution. I suggest that distinctions between *global* and *local*, *macro* and *micro*, appear as a result of particular and concrete practices that enact them as such in daily-life interactions. Therefore, we would never be placed in the “global” or in the “local” as two independent domains, but always entwined in practices and complex assemblages: the effect of globalisation is a result of the multiplication of connections that conform networks that are local in each of their points (Bruno Latour, 1991/1993: 178). Rather than understanding those diverse trends and patterns as separate instances, I understand them as differences in scale. Differences in-corporated and inscribed in aspects such as food consumption, models of beauty, clothing patterns, forms of interaction, the very materiality of the streets and the circulation of commodities. I consider material and semiotic, cultural and economic aspects as being continuous and intertwined. I argue that describing all this heterogeneous complexity in the very same terms –keeping certain “symmetry” as ANT will argue- will allow an analysis of the constitution of differences and its hierarchization: that is, to make visible the ways in which power emerges producing *different differences* as either being hegemonic or marking exclusions. Therefore, who are “migrant women in Embajadores” is not so much a given, independent, preexisting reality, but a *question* to problematise: a complex assemblage of *heterogeneous materials* (John Law, 1994) constituted in relation to the same process of investigation I am developing –from which I am not excluded.

The reason that made me choose Embajadores as the site of my research, is linked to the fact that I did not want to focus in a particular “migrant community”: The neighbourhood not only has an

increasing migrant population –more than 20% as a mean, and in some areas close to 50% of the total population- but also the present national populations are highly diverse. This allows the consideration of the processes of subjectivity conformation in women from different national backgrounds. And also the relations, negotiations, tensions and reproductions established between them and in relation to the discourses provided and imposed both by the society of reception and from the different national communities, including the “Spanish” one. So *space* has not only delimited –so to speak- my research, but also has played an important role in it. Specially, because I have addressed space/place not only as a physical given but as something co-produced with the people living in it: an inhabited, imagined, and projected space (Margarita Barañano Cid, 1999, 2002; Edward Soja, 1996).

To produce the information for this research I have interviewed people from the neighbourhood, in two phases. In the first one -Spring-Summer 2001- I completed 18 interviews and 6 life stories, of “migrant” and “native” women and men, from the widest backgrounds responding to the more prominent migrant populations in the neighbourhood -according to the data consigned by the city council population register: Morocco, Ecuador, Colombia, China, Senegal. In the second one – Spring-Summer 2003- I have completed information interviewing 5 different “migrant women” I have had contact along my ethnographic field-work. This is allowing me to shape, concrete and discuss some of the findings of the first phase.

Moreover, I have been living in the neighbourhood developing ethnographic research for almost three years. I have had a continuous relation with the area all along this project –not only in academic but also in more political and personal terms. Adding to that I have recollected, in an almost daily basis, newspapers information for two years –mostly from EL PAÍS- about the situation of migrant people, both in the Spanish State and the EU. In top of that I have considered the changing legal status of migrant people in Spain and in the EU. This is specially relevant not only for the interpellative character of legal orderings, and its importance to “mark” and constitute subjects-citizens, but because just in the Spanish State the Immigration Law has changed three times during the research period and is about to change once more –not to count international and EU legislation changes.

Processes of embodiment: making/markings bodies

Given all this information about the general development of my research, in this paper I want to focus on *processes of embodiment*. Specially how the *body* becomes a privileged space in the *making/markings* and delimitation of a *body-nation*. That is, the body comes to stand as a *invisibilised* mark of citizenship –“white-nationals”-, or a *visibilised* mark of exclusion –“migrant women”. To do that I will problematise both what do we understand by a *body-subject* and what it is meant by “migrant women”. In this direction, I do not intend to provide a description of what does it mean to be a “migrant woman”, nor to represent the “migrant women”. Rather I want to focus on how certain body-subject positions are read and enacted in diverse situations as being or not “migrant women”, independently of the legal status or identification of the people read/enacted as such. I want to stress the possibilities of mobilisation and political contestation of those positions, and how certain boundaries are recurrently enacted as embodied marks of exclusion or inclusion.

Therefore I look at *bodies in the making*, or maybe the *making/markings of bodies* recognised as belonging to “migrant women” in the particular context of this research. But whose bodies do appear as belonging to “migrant women”? Who are “them” and which mechanisms of visibility and “*passing*” are being displayed? How are they deployed? As I will argue, *who* is a “migrant woman” is far from being a clear thing. The positions recognised as “migrant women” are both more mobile

and more obdurate that it may seem at first. Further on, to be recognised as a “migrant woman” depends on many things, such as possessing certain bodily characteristics and skin pigmentation that appear as different from certain “us-citizens”, and are fetishised in a logic that promises a visual delimitation of the “migrants-others” (Sara Ahmed, 1998). But it also depends on being or not in the possession of particular documents or material means –it is not the same to be an immigrant than a tourist by instance.

Thus to address all these questions I will start, first, by proposing a notion of *body as assemblage*, understanding the body not as a given unity but as the complex and contingent result of multiple interactions and connections between heterogeneous entities. In that direction “the body” will be considered beyond the limit of the skin. Far from appearing as an impenetrable barrier, it is presented as a porous and moving surface that links rather than separates. The attention to the articulated and complex character of bodies requires –I will argue- to trace on the multiple devices, mechanisms, objects and bodies implied in the constitution of a particular body-subject: clothes, social relations, eating habits, gender marks, etc. Bodies in this conception will not stand as the latest guarantee of the independence, pre-existence and autonomy of a subject. Rather they will stand as the precarious and unstable result, as the partial and situated fixation of continuous and unequal processes of *articulation* and *re-articulation*.

This notion of bodies will allow me to analyse, in a second place, the *ways in which a subject-body position become “marked” as significantly different*. Differences are established in a relational and hierarchical mode preserving and delimiting spaces of either privilege or oppression and exclusion in concrete contexts. Those differences become incarnated and inhabited “marks” because of which certain bodies come to be identified as “others” versus the *unmarked* “ones” that are constituted as norm and pattern of “normality”. In particular I will analyse the situations where bodily “marks” – standing for gender, “race”/ethnicity, sexuality, religion- multiply and collide. I am interested in the ways those differences articulate and how are they deployed in each occasion. In particular in those cases where one mark of exclusion becomes the unmarked space for the enactment of another (Judith Butler, 1993, 2000; Vikki Bell, 1999). I will argue those marked bodies are being continuously produced in *articulation* (Stuart Hall, 1980/2002).

Both the materiality of the marking and its significance vary from one situation to another. Therefore, it is not possible to understand the position occupied by the “migrant women” participating in this research as something that can be explained exclusively in a gender basis, or in a ethnic, or in a racial, or in a religious way. On the contrary, the positions occupied by these women are multiple and depend on bodily practices that are, all at the same time, a form of gender, racial, ethnical, religious, and of particular sexuality displays. This does not imply to consider gender, “race”, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. as axis that juxtapose one another (Butler, 1993; Bell, 1999). Neither it means every aspect will have the same weight in each occasion. They are co-produced as implosed in a body and beyond –social relations, legislations, technologies, objects, etc. Even more, to understand them as something that can be summed up in a body, may produce the false impression that there is a something “gender”, or “race” or “ethnicity”, etc. that has a previous existence and is provided with the consistency of a substance. The argument I develop in this paper moves in other direction: I intend to focus on the practical bodily displays through which certain characteristics come to stand as proper of a “gender”, or a “race”, or an “ethnicity”, etc. Therefore, I will look at *how* questions such as gender, racial, ethnic, or religious differences are produced, *embodied* and “marked” in the enactment of things such as accents, clothing patterns, skin colour, bodily displays, etc.

In fact, and as will argue in a third place, these differences are continuously enacted in the *production of boundaries* that mark certain bodies as *citizens* and certain bodies as *strangers*

(Ahmed, 2000). This is a work that depends on the articulation of different people, objects, protocols, and orderings. The exclusions and belongings to the nation-state are, therefore, recurrently produced and inscribed in the body. The negotiation and production of bodies imply a continuous redefinition and redeployment of boundaries. Migration implies to think on the position of citizenship and what does it mean to be excluded from it. Migration focus our attention on the trespassing of boundaries from one country to another. But boundaries have stopped being simply a line delimiting the area of a nation-state. Boundaries proliferate expanding in every space and place. And so their surveillance has stopped being only a question of controlling the limits of the state, its outside, to be more and more a question of its inside. In this context, it becomes extremely relevant to consider *how bodies act and are recurrently produced as boundaries in themselves*. Thus certain bodies are recognised as “marked” in a logic that tend to homogenise images of a nation with a particular definition of an “unmarked” and “natural” body. But the “national” body far from being “unmarked” or “natural”, is deeply marked. It requires, as it has been said, the complex articulation of sophisticated devices: a wide linguistic competence, an accent recognised as not having accent – that is, as being an accent “proper” to the nation-, a religious ascription, a particular skin pigmentation, eyes and hair colour, certain clothing. But also, the fulfilment of the multiple official requisites that entitled someone as a citizen: being born in the country, or completing a number of years in it, or being born of parents entitled with that citizenship, or being married in a heterosexual couple to a member of the given state, or having a baby in the country, or, of course, being a football star.

Fourthly, and in this direction, I will emphasise the role of multiple *technological mediations* in the constitution of particular orderings and body-subjects (Latour, 1994/1998). Technological mediations through which those different differences are inscribed, recreated, given meaning, materialised, translated and made durable: residence permits, visas, work permits, passports, identity cards, legal orderings, press images, police controls, statistics, health care access, food consumption, religious rituals, communal fests, etc. Therefore, as actor-network theorists argue, diverse *objects* become important *agents* in the conformation of different *body-subjects*. Particularly, the role of mediator devices such as *identification documents* becomes relevant as they allow certain people to be produced as citizens. Meanwhile others are produced as a kind of “second” or “third class” citizens depending on their papers and the “quality” of them. Further on, some-*others* are produced as abject and threatening bodies or even “delinquents” just by the fact of not having the “right” papers -as being “without papers” is newly consider a breaking of the law by the Spanish State immigration law, (LO 8/2000) actually in force.

Finally, I will emphasise how the status, meaning and recognition of a body *change* according to the context. Therefore, the “same” body can *pass* from being recognised/enacted as a “foreign”, “migrant” one, to be recognised/enacted as a “national” one in other situation. Can we argue it is really the “same” body, or it is different? Which kind of mechanisms are deployed in the production of certain bodies as *others*? How can they be mobilised? How can they be resisted? As I will stress using examples from my field-work, it is not only that the “legal” status of a person can change depending on the situation –due to the modification of a law, or to the expiration of a tourist visa, or the enlargement of the European Union, by instance. It depends also on the forms of interaction in which a particular body is performed: a phone call conceal from view the colour of the skin, that then becomes an irrelevant marker that may be substituted by the accent, for example. I want to stress on those possibilities of modification that can be partially performed to produce and to conceal different ways of recognition. If not everything can be mobilised, yet, as I will point out, diverse forms of *passing* are actively put in place in different contexts to resist certain characterisations or exclusions.

Bodies as Assemblages: Practices, relations, articulations

«People are networks. We are all artful arrangements of bits and pieces. If we count organisms at all, this is because we are networks of skin, bones, enzymes, cells – a lot of bits and pieces that we don't have much direct control over and we don't know much about at all. (Though if they go wrong then we are in dire trouble). And if we count as people rather than as organisms this is because of a lot of other bits and pieces –spectacles, clothes, motor cars and a history of social relations- which we may have some control over. But we are equally dependent on these. Indeed, to put it this way is to put it too weakly. We are composed of, or constituted by ours props, visible and invisible, present and past. (...) Each of us is an arrangement. That arrangement is more or less fragile. There are ordering processes which keep (or fail to keep) that arrangement on the road. And some of those processes, though precious few, are partially under our control some of the time.» (John Law, 1994: 33)

«The bodies are perfectly “real”, and nothing about corporealization is “merely” fiction. But corporealization is tropic and historically specific at every layer of its tissues. (...) Corporealization involves institutions, narratives, legal structures, power-differentiated human labor, technical practice, analytic apparatus, and much more.» (Donna Haraway, 1997: 142)

How can it be argued the body is an *assemblage*? If we think of bodies we may have pretty clear ideas not only of how a human body may look like, but also which characteristics make it distinct. Probably we can think of an independent and autonomous unit. A unit that is not only a bodily one, but also a “psychical”, desiring, thinking one. From Decartes on, “the specifically human” has moved, translating the Christian idea of the existence of a spiritual “soul” to a thinking/rational capacity: «I think, therefore I am.» So certain kind of psychical interiority appears to be set on the basis for the understanding of humans as autonomous and independent *subjects*. But is this interiority so stable or essential? As Latour (1999) points out, a subject position with all its given characteristics of will, desire, individuality is the result of complex interactions, definitions and orderings. With a similar line of argument Nikolas Rose (1998) talks about the “psy” mechanisms as a group of regulatory practices and productive technologies through which human beings are constituted as such, as people, as “independent selves” endowed with a psychical interiority:

«If human beings have come to posit themselves as subjects, with a will to be, a predisposition towards being, this does not, as some suggest, arise from some ontological desire but is rather a resultant of a certain history and its inventions (...) I suggest that all the effects of psychological interiority, together with a whole range of other capacities and relations, are constituted through the linkage of humans into other objects and practices, multiplicities and forces. (...) Psy knowledges and authorities have given birth to techniques for shaping and reforming selves assembled together within the apparatuses of armies, prisons, schoolrooms, bedrooms, clinics, and much more.» (Rose, 1998: 172 y 173).

But if the psychical interiority has been put into question as a guarantor of the specificity of the human-subject, “the body” seems to have risen as the latest assuror of it. The “body” appears as the “raw material” where culture imprints a particular subjectivity. The materiality of the “body”, its “maintenance” along time, seems to provide a sure basis for a far too much put into question subject. Yet, as Rose points out, «“the body” is itself a historical phenomenon. Our current image of the lineaments and topography of “the body”-its organs, processes, vital fluids, and flows –is an outcome of a particular cultural, scientific, and technical history. The properties of “the body” – walking, smiling, digging, swimming- are not natural but technical achievements. (...) Even the apparent naturalness of the limits and boundaries of “the body”, which appear to define as if inevitably the coherence of an organic unity, is both recent and culturally specific.» (Rose, 1998: 183).

Therefore, whatever will mark the specific character of humanity it is but the changing product of a society and of a context. It is an unstable and problematic question that depends on multiple definitions that vary along time and space. In this direction, we can remember the historical discussions about whether women or whether “Indians” or “blacks” had soul, or rational capacity. Those were indeed discussions about who was to count as *human*. The requirements to be considered a civil person, entitled with political rights and responsibilities, are far from being a given or essential thing. It is a densely populated and regulated status. So humans do not appear as humans in general, but as certain socially inscribed ones: we are product of our interactions, practices and relations. Besides, the changes along time on *who* is to be considered human are directly dependent on the orderings present in a particular society, its unequal power distributions, and the exclusions it promotes. Indeed, the exclusion of women, illiterate, poor, indigenous and black people from the Illustrate civil contract can be understood as the expression and reproduction of Western, white, proprietor males privileges and prejudices in that society.

Given all this, I want to emphasize the role of bodies in the definition of a human subject, not as the latest assuror of its permanence, but as ongoing agonic processes to mark in and out who is to be count as human in a given moment. It is therefore, a recurrent exercise of setting and contesting boundaries. In this direction, to argue that bodies-subjects are assemblages is to stress the relational and enacted character of humanity and of the position we occupy in a particular socio-technical ordering. So, rather than understanding bodies as the ultimate assuror of a subject-position –in those times marked by the death of the Modern invisible Subject- I want to focus on *how* concrete bodies are produced. In fact, I will argue that the supposed independent and unified character of bodies is but the precarious effect of the contingent assemblage of multiple and *heterogeneous materials*, orderings, protocols, etc. (Law, 1994). Interactions where, as it is being stressed by actor-network theorists and by Donna Haraway’s *cyborgs*, not all the participant elements happen to be humans (Haraway, 1991; Michel Callon, 1992/1998; Latour, 1991/1993).

While Modern dualisms were committed to the constitution and stabilization of *boundaries* in order to keep everything in place -global/local, inside/outside, subject/object, human/non-human, etc.-, both actor-network theory and Donna Haraway’s work are strongly committed to the questioning of those stable classifications, and to the differential status given to each part of the line. Versus this emphasis in purity and separation, they stress the hybrid and complex character of bodies where the human, the animal, the technical, the textual etc. implode and are performed in each particular interaction. Moreover, versus a conceptualisation that limits the agency capacity to humans, actor-network theorists and Haraway expand that agency to non-humans. Therefore, they will stress the role of animals, objects, machines, orderings, protocols, standards, etc. in the conformation of particular collective assemblages, where concrete body-subjects emerge from and that are continuously enacted into being.

«Our own “agency” then is the resultant of the ontology we have folded into ourselves in the course of our history and our practices. For all the desires, intelligences, motivations, passions, creativities, will-to-self-realization, and the like folded into us by our psychotechnologies, our own agency is no less artificial, no less fabricated, no less unnatural and hence no less real, effective, confused, technical, machine-dependent- than the problematic agency of the robots, replicants, and monstrous symbioses that Donna Haraway uses to think of our existence: cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras.» (Rose, 1998: 189).

Therefore, the constitution of particular body-subject, of selves endowed with an interiority –that is, what supposedly separate us from the non-humans-, is not the result of a process of spontaneous generation of a will with a previous ontological status. It is rather the effect of multiple operations and relations that trespass the limits of that self, the limits of the “human” (Rose, 1998).

In this direction the concept of *actor-network*, described as being irreducible either to a singular actor or to a network, becomes a relevant tool: «An actor-network is, simultaneously, an actor whose activity consist in entwining heterogeneous elements and a network which is able to redefine and transform what it is made of.» (Callon, 1992/1998: 156). Thus, the concept of actor-network works not only to contest the stable status of subject and object, it also collectivises, de-individualises, and makes fluid those positions. Actors-networks are the products of the partial and contingent fixations of reiterative articulating practices. *Articulations* where the identity of each of the articulated elements emerges in the very process of articulation (Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe, 1985/1987 : 119): the different resultant elements are mutually conformed in the articulatory stream. Entities loose their monolithic solidity and become fluid. Their “stability” along time does not depend on them being static, but on the re-enactment and reiteration of the relations that conform them. That is, its constant displacement and partial re-creation. «A subject is a heterogeneous assemblage of materials and textuality spread in diverse fluxes and networks that (in some places) can not be situated. It is an ongoing project, in perpetual flux and with continuous variations.» (Nick Lee y Steven Brown, 1994/1998: 241-242).

Performing/practicing bodies

The relational processes through which a particular subject position is occupied, a body and a subjectivity are performed and inhabited have been widely theorised by sociology. Particularly in trying to explain the paradoxical equation between sociality and individuality. In that direction, the work developed by Pierre Bourdieu becomes relevant. His attention to *practices as productive exercises constitutive of reality* seems to me very close to some of the considerations developed by actor-network theory. And although Bourdieu does not question the ontological primacy of human entities, I think it can be interesting to link both lines of analysis, in particular in considering the conformation of particular body-subject positions.

Bourdieu bases his analysis in the concept of *habitus*. The *habitus* is described as that structured and structuring gear where the social field skeleton takes shape and consistency in concrete subjective practices that, at the same time, internalize, re-create and displace the social orderings where they are placed (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; 1980/1991). That is «a system of cognitive and behavioural structures (...) historically produced (...) that are incorporated to each organism as durable dispositions, and that generate and structure individual and collective practices in a conditioned but not determined way. It is a generative system that simultaneously mark which is possible and which is impossible through the establishment of the “practical sense” and the internalisation of directly or indirectly experienced history.» (Fernando García Selgas, 1994: 507).

Those internalised practices are embodied and lived, through which Bourdieu named corporal *hexis* (Bourdieu, 1980/1991). *Hexis* is an ancient Greek term that could be translated as bearing, appearance or air. It makes reference to the forms of presenting, inhabiting, and producing a body in such a way that a concrete social position is assumed while is being enacted through those same practices. It works as «a performed political mythology, incorporated, transformed into a permanent disposition, in a durable mode of staying, talking, waking, and, therefore, of *feeling* and *thinking*. (...) It is performed in the way of staying, of carrying the body, of behaving... » (1980/1991: 119).

Similarly to the way Judith Butler theorises performativity, Bourdieu describes in terms of *mimesis* the process by which we act and generate concrete forms of being and feeling that fulfil behavioural patterns that are constituted just as stylised effects of our practices. A continuous exercise that does not presuppose the strategic will of a pre-existing subject that may determine the direction of action,

but something far more unconscious: «The body believes what it plays: it cries when it mimes sadness. It does not represent what it plays, it does not memorise the pass, it *acts* the pass, that is annulated therefore as such, it revives it.» (Bourdieu, 1980/1991: 124). Thus, subject positions and bodies will not be pre-existent in a strict sense. They will *emerge* in the practices, articulations and re-articulations of different elements, protocols, orderings, etc.

By pointing out we come to assume a concrete position and to respond to certain discourses and expectations, that at the same time, are product of our very same actions, we found ourselves reproducing a counter-inductive paradox that inverts temporalities: responding to previous orderings we develop present actions, that feed the future stylised discourses towards which we respond as previous. But this complex riddle can be explained if we consider that we never ever start from a *tabula rasa* situation. We *are* always immersed in multiple relations with heterogeneous elements that delimit which is possible and impossible in a given moment. Further on, not all elements have the same valences and connectivity capacities, neither they incorporate to relations in a static way. They carry with them inertias and obduracies from previous articulations. So, temporality is not so much marked by a static continuity, but by a permanent recreation and re-connection: «[the body] does not represent what it plays, it does not memorise the pass, it *acts* the pass, that is annulated therefore as such, it revives it.» (Bourdieu, 1980/1991: 124).

As Judith Butler (1993) points out theorising her concept of performativity, we cannot think the productive, or the performative effect of practices is the result of a singular act. Rather this performative effect emerges from a ritualised and repeated enactment always already inscribed in a previous grid of relations where it becomes significant and that it is *cited* in each exercise. Those exercises of citation and re-citation are *iterative* (Jacques Derrida, 1988; Butler, 1993). That is, they are unable to reproduce clonally what is cited. Therefore disruptions, modifications, and partial displacements are always introduced. Those partial displacements show, on the one hand, the continuity between a concrete practice and that which it cites. On the other hand, and at the same time, it implies a distance and a difference—the deferred and different hiatus theorised by Derrida’s concept of *différance* (Derrida, 1970: 265). So subjectivity conformation is established on a rupture, on a hole, a space of indetermination that will not be so much empty, but too full, *saturated*, overcrowded by relations, entities and significations whose direction cannot be defined beforehand: they are *undecidable*. That is, every subject-body position will be constituted as the partial limitation of an *excess of meaning and materiality* that irremediably subverts it (Laclau y Mouffe, 1985/1987: 128). Then, the “opening of the social”, the impossibility of a closed and reproductive determinism is partially guaranteed by this random, and to some extent unpredictable character of those movements tending to produce a concrete fixation of identity.

Different differences, marks and exclusions: *othering* the body

«And though there are clearly good historical reasons for keeping “race” and “sexuality” and “sexual difference” as separate analytic spheres, there are also quite pressing and significant historical reasons for asking how and where we might read not only their convergence, but the sites at which one cannot be constituted save through the other. This is something other than juxtaposing distinct spheres of power, subordination, agency, historicity, and something other than a list of attributes separated by those proverbial commas (gender, sexuality, race, class), than usually mean that we have not yet figured out how to think the relations we seek to mark.» (Butler, 1993: 168).

The process through which we come to recognise and being recognised as bodies “marked” in one direction of another makes evident that not everything counts as significant in the classification of a body-subject. In particular, positions occupied by “migrant women”—as wide and unstable that term

may be- points to situations where those different differences proliferate, overloading those “body-subject positions” with marks of exclusion and oppression. The over-visibility of those “marks of exclusion” tends to offer the impression those body-positions are marked versus certain unmarked ones. Yet the invisibilisation of the marks of “normality/normalization” results not so much of its concealment, but of its taken for granted over-proliferation as patterns of normality (Carmen Romero Bachiller and Silvia García Dauder, 2003). In this direction we can think on the Western whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, etc. over-presence in press images, publicity, TV, films, collective celebrations, etc., etc. We can also think on the fights for representation the groups interpreted as minority or secondary have developed.

Many have been the efforts to offer an account of the exclusions and oppressions linked to the injustices of hierarchical and unequal relations of gender, “race”, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism. The concept of *intersectionality* becomes relevant in this context as it tries to consider the complex interaction and mutual conformation of those processes of differentiation and exclusion. In this direction I will like to stress the work of people such as Barbara Smith (1983) with her concept of “simultaneity of oppressions”; Patricia Hill Collins (2000) claiming the “interlocked” character of oppressions; Audre Lorde (1982/1996: 197) pointing out that our place is “the house of difference” “rather than the security of a particular difference”; Avtar Brah’s (1996) analysis on the interacting relations of gender, “race”, ethnicity, etc.; the denounces to the emphasis in supposed “purities” instead of considering “impurities” or “hybrid” and “mestiza” characters, as María Lugones (1994/1999) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) will point out, just to mention a few¹.

Nevertheless, if we consider “race”, “gender”, “class” or “sexuality” as separate instances or axis juxtaposing or intersecting one another, we may be offering the erroneous impression that there is a something “race”, or “gender”, or “class”, or “sexuality” we can put on or carry on with us. The discourses that constitute those aspects are but stylizations abstracted from concrete practices and daily-life experiences (Butler, 1999). Therefore to talk about the juxtaposition of axis of differentiation tends to keep the image of constitutive totality in the conformation of an identity in each of those aspects. As if, by instance, in a moment we were women, the next one whites, the following we had a precarious job, and in another one we were lesbians. Moreover, this image tends to offer the impression each difference is equivalent or isomorphic to all the rest. But in our daily-life interactions the precarious and contingent body-subject-positions we inhabit are the result of concrete and highly hierarchical –but instable- orderings, where differences implode, presenting themselves with the consistency of embodied saturations. To give an account of the embodied processes of hierarchisation and marking that make relevant aspects defined as related to gender, “race”, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. it is necessary to attend to the particular power relations performed in each particular occasion (Romero Bachiller and García Dauder, 2003).

Therefore, the internal coherence of the “gender”, “race”, “sexuality” and “class” discourses is a product of processes of ritualised stylisation, that confers them with the illusion of a substance (Butler, 1999). Each subject-position is constituted and enacted in singular relations that incorporate, implode and perform those discourses sedimenting/making them in particular bodies, spaces, representations and desires. Every exercise of fragmentation and separation of the racialised or generised components of a concrete body-subject position may imply removing the complex particularities that constitute it –although it may sometimes be useful for analytical reasons. It may imply, for example, failing to consider the moments where a concrete mark of difference becomes the background or the condition of possibility for enacting another (Butler, 2000; Bell, 1999).

¹ I know this list is absolutely unfair and there are many others whose work has been fundamental to my analysis.

In this direction, actor-network theory becomes relevant to my view, as it points out the orderings, social positions and collectives present in a concrete space are effects of contingent assemblages that work in the constitution of “the real” in each particular moment. Therefore, social ordering categories such as gender, “race”, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. far from appearing as having a stable, independent and previous existence, will be understood as the result of continuous situated practices that re-enact and re-create them in each interaction. Moreover, they are not performed as separated axis, but as necessarily entwined and mutually constituting aspects.

Nevertheless, pointing out “reality” has not a previous, stable, independent existence, does not mean “reality” is being created *ex nihilo* –out of nothing- in each interaction. Neither it means each element incorporated in a network or translation will start from the same position, or may have identical mobilisation capacities, or similar conditions of possibility and impossibility. Rather, assemblages conform unequal relations, and they imply concrete and strategic orderings that contingently articulate human and non-human entities in differential ways. As they are not static elements, but in process and in perpetual change, it will be necessary to attend to the *inertias* they incorporate to the networks. Networks that modify them and become modified by them. It is through the embodied internalisation and materialisation of those *orderings* (Law, 1994) that a group of relations becomes “durable”, that is, it is kept along time. This keeping has to be linked to the establishing of certain “rituals” and *standardised* patterns of behaviour. A *phenomenology of conventions* –in terms of Susan Leigh Star (1991)- that may “assure” to some extent that certain practices and relations are enacted and therefore “kept” in place. Durability depends then on the multiplication and solidification of relations, as well as in its transformation through the development of new connections. «To the extent to which that network stands in place, it tends to generate a series of hierarchical, bureaucratically-ordered power effects.» (Law, 1991: 182).

Following all this, we can consider how gender, “race”, ethnicity, sexuality differences emerge in each interaction, in each enactment of bodies, representations, desires, spaces, etc. My proposal then, is to look at *how* those different differences are continuously produced and interpreted as being a mark of gender, race, ethnic, etc. We do not face, let say, “gender” as such, but particular bodily characteristics, or clothing patterns, or ways of behaving that come to be understood as constituting a gender position. Then, if we stop at that very moment when all too quickly we translate certain marks in “gender”, we may be able to consider *how* such differences are produced in each situation. Moreover, rather than all too directly making a difference between “race” and “gender”, or “race”, “gender” and “sexuality”, we can consider *how* are they mutually constituted in an inseparable way.

Bodies and/as boundaries: the boundaries of the body

The boundaries constitutive of bodies are porous and the relationships they open are multiple: «The fold allows us to think the processes by which the human being is overflowed and goes beyond its skin without appealing to the image of an independent, autonomous, close in itself, agent Subject... but precisely because of its changing, unfinished, multiple and open character. (...) It is simply, something variable, product or property of a chain of connections between humans, technical artefacts, thinking and acting devices.» (Miquel Doménech, Francisco Javier Tirado and Lucía Gómez, 2001: 34).

The continuous production of boundaries between some bodies and some others, between certain nation-states and others, –with its apparent stability and its pretension of security- is a fundamental part in the constitution of concrete body-subject positions. In this direction the recognition of

certain bodies and subjectivities as “marked” imply multiple relations, orderings and technical mediations that hierarchically delimit distinct positions.

Versus the “unmarked” bodies, the ones presented as “marked” are reiteratively and compulsively incorporated in its condition of “others”. They are delimited as strangers to the receiving society/nation-state. Questions as diverse as gazes, paternalisms, police controls, hate words; untrustings, insecurities, vulnerability, fears; exploitation, criminalization, harassments or even physical violence constitute some of the ways through which those hierarchical differences are “made” and the boundaries that delimit those “others” are stabilised. Obviously, not all the referred mechanisms have the same weight. But as subtle some of them may seem, all of them work in the hegemonic stabilisation of certain “marks” of difference through their practical and quotidian reiteration.

So migrant bodies come to be recognised as “bodies out of place”, as *strangers* (Ahmed, 2000: 55), while certain people –“white nationals”- are conferred a kind of “right of being”, a certain apparently *unmarked*, pre-given, uncontested status as “proper” bodies-citizens. Versus them migrant bodies are made visible, “*marked*” as lacking certain obscure essential character: «the stranger is not *any-body* that we have failed to recognise, but *some-body* that we have already recognised *as* a stranger, as “a body out of place”. Hence, the stranger is some-body we know as not knowing.» (Ahmed, 2000: 55). In the case I refer here, this “we” translate quite directly into being white and fluent Spanish speaker with non-recognizable “foreign” accent. But not too white or blond, which may mean to be a different kind of stranger, possibly a Northern consuming tourist, or maybe a nearly European citizen Eastern European immigrant. *Nosotros como no-otros* (we as no-others). «The racial/cultural identity of “true nationals” remains invisible but is inferred from ... the quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the “false nationals” –Jews, “wops”, immigrants, *indios*, *natives*, blacks». (Etienne Balibar, 1990: 284).

But boundaries are not only placed at the physical limits of a nation-state territory or in its entrances –airports, ports, border posts. Boundaries proliferate and become more and more an embodied question that delimits belongings and exclusions. State politics become *biopolitics/bodypolitics* (Michel Foucault, 1976/1998; 1992). A mythical image of a “national-body” is continuously enacted, a body image presented as being “unmarked”, that is: white, Christian, particularly clothed, with a particular accent, etc. In an exercise that privileges the gaze, the visual, boundaries and marks of otherness fold to the skin. Thus, the skin becomes part of an important boundary regime. A regime actively involved in the racialisation of certain bodies versus the “non-racialised” white bodies of the national-citizens. In this direction, Frantz Fanon’s notion of *epidermalization* becomes specially relevant. As Paul Gilroy describes:

«The critical notion of “epidermalization” bequeathed to our time by Frantz Fanon is valuable here. (...) It refers to a historically specific system for making bodies meaningful by endowing them with qualities of “color”. It suggests a perceptual regime in which the racialized body is bounded and protected by its enclosing skin. The observer’s gaze does not penetrate that membrane but rest upon it and, in doing so, receives the truths of racial difference from the other body. (...) Dermo-politics succeeded biopolitics. Both preceded nano-politics.» (Gilroy 2001: 46).

Gilroy (2001) goes on arguing racial marking and exclusions have now moved beyond the skin to be placed more and more at the level of the gene. Yet, in my opinion, the process of *epidermalization* and the privilege of the perceptual and visual regime are still in force. Particularly because of the reiterate equation between a certain image of a body and the nation-state. This is made evident if we consider how the Constitutional Tribunal of the Spanish State pronounced a sentence in February 2001 stating that “race” -as a non-white skin colour- could justify an

identification requirement by the forces of order (EL PAÍS on Friday 16th February, 2001). Through this sentence the Tribunal rejected the sue presented by a woman who was asked by the police to identify herself just by the fact of being black. She had not any appearance of doing any criminal activity: she was just standing at a train platform waiting for a train to come. In this “dermo-political” logic (Gilroy, 2001) it seems that to have a particular skin colour is endowed with certain access or exclusion to citizenship. A black skin colour then becomes a significant mark, a mark of suspicion: it becomes an embodied boundary that delimits the “outside” and the “inside”, the exclusions and belongings to the nation. «Bodies come to be “lived out” through the collision of gendered, class and racial identificatory practices. “Skin” as the unstable *border* between the body and its others comes to be fetishised (in the sense that it is seen to “contain” the truth of the subject’s identity).» (Ahmed, 1998: 27)

Yet this fetishisation of the skin as border can produce serious contradictions with traditional expressions of belonging to the nation. As one of the women interviewed –a black Spanish woman whose father was from Guinea- commented talking about one of her brothers, this dermo-political logic clash with the habitual beholders of a nation. Being an Army member, or even a “patriot” does not assure a recognition of belonging:

«Miguel is one of my brothers. He is older than me. (...) He is a Bosnian veteran, an army member, parachutist... one of “fatherland love” and all that stuff. However, talking with him, and in this I agree with him, he told me: «Fuck, we are neither from here, not from there, not from anywhere...». Although he said it with a halo of sadness and I don’t feel any sadness. It is something doesn’t bother me at all... but he felt... of course he was born in Canarias and has been brought up in Madrid... all his fucking life... twenty... well thirty, he may have thirty already... and *people doesn’t consider him from here. Obviously, because he’s black as a coal...* because talking he does it as me... alright a little rougher, but (laughing) I guess to be in the army may have something to do with it. But what I mean to say is that he has been brought up here and everything, but people don’t consider him from here. And he has had much contact with the Equatorial-Guinean colony, by instance, and Equatorial-Guinean people don’t consider us Equatorial-Guinean, you know? So it is a sensation... well he lived it with a little anguish that of “I’m not from any place”, the sense of belonging... “I don’t belong to any-where really... people from here... I’m from here but people from here don’t consider me from here, and people from where my origins are... -and in his case, those are his origins both from father and from mother-... don’t consider me from there.” You know, he has a quite curious feeling of displacement ... and of course in that I agree, a hundred per cent.

The sense of belonging, then, changes and becomes mobile: He fails to be recognised as Spaniard, due to a hegemonic reiteration of dermo-political regime that equates whiteness with being from Spain. Yet he fails to be recognised as Equatorial Guinean as he does not speak but Spanish, as he does not have an Equatorial Guinean accent, and as he has been brought up in Spain developing different uses².

Technical mediations: the production of body-object regimes

² I will like to emphasise in the ironic position of the army in this direction –and besides the case of Miguel as he has Spanish citizenship since his birth. On the one hand it is described not only as one of the ultimate assurors of the territorial space of a nation. And it is endowed with almost a “mystic” of patriotism and “fatherland-love”, etc. Yet on the other hand, and due to the scarce number of incorporations it has recently accepted the presence of migrant people. Migrant people who are also offered “papers” and better conditions to receive Spanish citizenship.

The durability of a concrete social order –emerged as a power effect in the assemblage of multiple entities- is guaranteed not only through the incorporation of human elements to the relations that conform it. It requires as much the inclusion of non-humans agents. In fact, as Latour (1994/1998) points out it is through technology that a society tends to perpetuate. That is, through the non-human entities mobilised in a concrete social ordering. Therefore, when a technology is successfully incorporated into a chain of relations, it tends to be stabilised becoming an unquestioned *black-box*. Thus, it can be used in the consolidation of a particular articulation.

Displacements, roundabouts, delegations and forced passages generated in unequal power relations proliferate, multiplying grids of heterogeneous entities. Those grids and entities will be inscribed and materialised depending on the stability of the relations that conform them. So technology and technical actions act as materialised protocols that inscribe and perform social orderings and relations. This allows a form of delegation by which actions enacted in a different time and space by different agents can be re-enacted and re-created in a particular space and time (Latour, 1994/1998). By instance, we can think on the powerful material effects generated by objects as small as an ID, or a passport, or a resident permit. Inscribed in a little plastic card, or within the pages of a small stamped notebook, things such as immigration laws, boundary regimes, multiple international agreements, an international law, labour markets from both country of departure and arriving, ethnic, racial or religious ascription, a particular gender position, etc., are entwined and enforced. Those are just a few examples of how the regulatory exercise of *technobiopower* –as Haraway (1997) re-defines Foucault’s biopower- is redeployed in identity/identification documents. «Operating through artefacts, domination and exclusion are concealed under the appearance of natural and objective forces.» (Latour, 1994/1998: 283).

Thus, passports and identity cards can be described as *immutable mobiles* (Latour, 1992: 216), as partially established and materialised sets of relations that acquire certain independence and can be mobilised somewhere else. But also we can consider the role of embassies, customs offices, border patrols, police controls, and each single moment we are asked to identify ourselves –at banks, while buying with a credit card, etc. Each of those spaces and enactments serves as terminals of those *centres of calculation* where information accumulates and data are contrasted. Centres of calculation become neuralgic nodes by its capacity to promote and establish relations, to multiply and accumulate them. All these enlarge and favour different capacities of mobilization and certain exercises of power distribution: the durability and solidity of a phenomenon, the stabilisation of a particular grid of humans and non-humans depends on a multiplication of connections that favour that every single element “keeps in place”.

Passing strategies: power regimes, obduracy and resistances

If boundaries come to be inscribed in the skin, how can they be mobilised? Which possibilities of contestation have those unequal regimes of recognition and production? Many have been the analysis offered around what has been called “*passing strategies*” (Ahmed, 1998, 1999, 2000; Siobhan B. Somerville, 2000; Valerie Smith, 1998; Butler, 1993). The interest in analysing these strategies comes primarily from the fact that *passing* exercises put into question the stability of the boundaries settled between certain “us” and some “others”. Beyond that, they put into question the stability of the “bodily marks”, and the promises that assure a direct relation between “the truth” of a body and its visual recognition (Ahmed, 1998). The works on *passing* stress its potential to question the security of any identity. Indeed they argue the occupation of any identity position is always uncompleted, and to a certain extent fraudulent: any process of identification implies a certain *passing* (Butler, 1993).

In this direction, Sara Ahmed (1998) uses an autobiographical anecdote as a point of departure in her analysis of the disrupting character of tuning in the reading of the body: either as a white one which has been exposed to sun light, or as a “racialised” other. The white tanned body is read as incorporated to practices of leisure and caring of the body; the racialised black body is read as threatening other, as a dangerous *outsider-within* in terms of Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 12):

«This event occurred when I was 14 years old, walking around the streets of Adelaide. I was stopped and addressed by two policemen in a car. They called me over, asked me what I was doing (I said I was walking). The policemen closest to me asked me if I was Aboriginal. I was indignant, replying “no”. The other policemen interrupted, gave me a wink, and said “it’s sun tan, isn’t it?” I smiled, but I did not say yes or no.» (Ahmed, 1998: 38).

Nevertheless, as Sara Ahmed (2000) points out the differences between some forms of *passing* and some others are important. They are produced in enormously unequal power relations it is necessary to consider. They have consequences both in the success or in the failing of the passing practices. By instance, in resisting the boundaries regime and surveillance, as well as the entrance limitations to the Spanish state as immigrant, an Ecuadorian woman might try to *pass* as a tourist to *pass* the frontier –in this case made present in the customs office at the Barajas Airport. This form of *passing* although a very common way of resisting the policing of boundaries, is also very risky one. The customers officers possess the competence of rejecting anyone understood to be “suspicious”, even if she or he is in the possession of all the official requirements to enter the state: tourist visa, a place to stay, an important daily amount of money for the given period, etc. As Rosa, one of the interviewed women narrated:

«- Then well, I finally arrived, in the airport, I went down the plane, and I said: Where is it that they control to pass? I, nicely curled the hair, nicely dressed, everything... because they said you have to go nicely like this, otherwise there they know... they can think which nation will she be... then, I did everything as they told me...
- ... that you should look like a tourist...
- That is, that I should look like a tourist. Then I arrived... and I went to what are the controls to pass here. And they told me: “Where are you going?”. And I said: “I’m going to Madrid”. “And what are you going to do?”. And I said: “I am going to walk around...” (laughing). Because they told me: “don’t you say your are looking for a job, because they will send you immediately back to Ecuador. You’re not to say anything of the like. You have to say... I have my son in the United States [the interviewed woman has a son in the US] and I go for a walk and that’s all”. Then he says now: “How much money do you have?” I took it out, as I have enough money they let me pass... And he tells me: “Ah, alright pass”»

In this example the passing as a tourist serves to actually pass the boundary. Concealing certain “marking” of the body may allow certain possibilities of mobilization, avoiding the control and surveillance that recurrently interpellate a body marked as a boundary, as an embodied stranger in this dermo-political logic. This was also the case when some Maghreb migrant women asked in a Maghreb migrant women day-centre in Madrid³, whether it would not be better to take out their head-scarves in order to be not so easily recognisable as migrant – and possibly without papers- to the police forces. This strategy was proposed as a response to the implementation of a new more severe and restrictive immigration law (LO 8/2000 actually in force). Paradoxically, by taking off their head-scarves, and becoming in terms of their cultural background overexposed to the Western

³ This was narrated to me in the course of an interview developed in January 2001, with two of the technician working at the centre. However they asked me not to record the interview so just have the notes I took in the course of it.

male gaze and supposedly fulfilling the Western “integration” requirements, they become *cover* to the surveillance gaze as ethnically/racialised and probably “without papers” women⁴.

As it seems clear by those examples, the exercise of *passing* depends on the mobilization of multiple devices. The presence of money and the “nice clothing” and the “nicely curled hair”, in the case of the Ecuadorian woman passing as a tourist. The taking off of the head-scarves in the case of the Maghreb women. The mobilisation of certain objects and mechanisms that work as technical mediations, as mediator devices, allows new reconfigurations where the subject-bodies enacted are being read differently.

To illustrate this argument I will use some examples taken from the interview I carry to a black Spanish woman. In a situation where the visual is privileged, and a continuous unmentioned equation between “being-Spanish” and “being-white” is enacted, the black woman body is read as a foreign one, as a stranger. The following anecdote cannot be more clear in that direction:

«Well one night at the Karakola [a women-only squatted social centre in the neighbourhood] they came... well we were... I guess it may be a Sunday of something like this, and during the summer we had the doors opened and so... and them, just nothing, three old ladies from the neighbourhood came to tell us to turn down the music, and so... And right in that moment I was at the other door discussing with a guy who was trying to get into... So “you can’t get into...”, and all that. And then when I got the guy to understand he can’t get in because the house is women-only I turn and I see the three ladies saying we have to turn down the music and all... And talking with them there were Silvia, an Italian girl, with a strong Italian accent, and Anna, another girl from the house that is Swiss. And well, she neither have a very local accent, to say it somehow. So there were they, trying to talk to this three women neighbours of Karakola. So I turn, and I say “Alright, what happens? We have to turn down the music then” and so. But in a really cool way talking to one of them. And suddenly, one of the other ladies, who was like really “vehement”, I told her “But Mrs. –I was about to say- don’t worry. Yes we are to turn down the music” and so. And she told me “But you, shut up that you’re not from here” (laughing). You know? And it was, like yeah, alright... this kind of interpellations, of course, there was a consequent teasing and joking from all Karakola’s girls, that was like “we can’t believe it!”. The lady that was talking to Silvia and Anna each with a stronger accent. And here I come to tell her “Alright, Mrs. that...” like this, with this voice “what happens?”. And she tell me to shut up because I’m not from here... it was like “but what does this mean?” The feeling of belonging and how should be the people from which places...

In this narration the informant is placed as a migrant foreigner, while the “actual” foreigners/migrants are recognised as belonging to the state because they are white. The black woman body stands as a sign than seems to be stronger than the linguistic competence. The privilege of the visual works in presuming boundaries and belongings, and in placing certain bodies as “others-migrants” or as “us-citizens”. So in order to be “recognised” as a citizen “despite” her body –despite this regime of recognition that understand a black skinned body as an outsider-, she told me how she needs to make sure she has always her ID with her. She needs to “prove” herself as a citizen standing on documents of identification, while the “white” nationals seems to “prove” their citizenship just by the fact of being. The same can be said of a plan presented in Autumn 2001 by the British state in relation to the “new nationals”. The plan intended first, to require from the

⁴ The question of scarves in Islamic women is far too controversial and in this paper I will not develop any of the questions at stake about that issue. Rather, I just want to use this particular case as an example of the possibilities of concealment and mobilisation of certain objects and embodied marks of exclusion. An interesting trial to formulate the issue, that collects some of the debates developed in the feminist movement in Spain about this question is M^a Teresa Ayllón y María Panadero (comp.) (2002) *Identidad y símbolos de opresión o la polémica del pañuelo de Fátima*. Madrid: Mujeres y Teología.

migrant people who may want to become British to pass certain linguistic and cultural tests. And second, it was planned to provide all “new British” with an ID that will “prove” their belonging to the state. The paradoxical question is that by the moment, no British people have any ID. So it seems the “new British” will be not so “able” bodies. They would lack certain essential character, and therefore their “weak” status as citizens will need to be back on with other devices. The body seems to be enacted not as an independent entity, but as something continuously produced in articulation, and dependent to many devices and artefacts.

But what happens when the visual is concealed? Another anecdote of the same black woman informant can be significant in this direction. She was working during a time as phone-operator. In those interactions where the visual was excluded through the deployment of the technical mediation of a telephone, she was systematically recognised as Spaniard. The accent rejected before as a significant marker, was now the main referent to classify her. An accent that projected her body for the people she talked to through the phone as a white body. This produced some curious situations. Her work basically consisted in sending people to repair different things as required by her clients, and then checking afterwards the results. She told me how sometimes there were people who complained to her –by telephone- the people sent to do the work were not Spaniards, or were not white. Not only they ignore she herself was a black woman. As her accent was immediately recognised as a Spanish one, her body was therefore supposed to be white. Once more the equation between a white body and the “national-body” was reproduced.

During the interview with this woman, however, she opposed this systematic questioning of her Spanish citizenship as a black body with her recognition as “national” while being in Cuba for holidays:

«Yes of course, specially, well, with the issue of race, of course.. it is very peculiar, now I’m remembering, when I went to Cuba on holidays... Well I was there on holidays and I was with the guy I was going out with during that period. So nothing, we hire a car and we were going to a beach... I don’t know... a beach that theoretically –and this is really though by the way- was for tourists only. So we passed with the car, a kind of little control or something like this, that they never even stopped you. And well, we passed and as we’re arriving... I don’t know like a hundred metres further, we see they are hailing us asking us to stop. We stopped. A couple guys came, and told us the beach is tourists-only (laughing). Then, of course, immediately I look at him, I took my backpack, took out my passport and then automatically they “Oh We are so sorry...”. As if it may be a big offence. To me the outrageous thing was it was only for tourists. But it is quite funny, a place I found where I can “pass”. But yes I had to go to Cuba to “pass” as autochthonous. (Laughing)»

In contrast with the woman from Ecuador who was to pass as a tourist to be able to become a “migrant woman” once inside the country, she is here unable to pass as a “tourist”: she passes as “autochthonous”. But what did it mean her passing as autochthonous? How was she positioned and recognised by that *passing*? First of all she was denied some privileges: the beach was only for tourists. But also, and taking into account Cuba is an important site of sexual tourism, how was understood her black woman body in company of a white man and heading to a beach reserved for tourists? Perhaps she was read as a Cuban woman involved in some kind of heterosexual-economic transaction with a male tourist. Nevertheless, again here we found that it is through the deployment of certain devices she was reincorporated to the status of tourist: in this case the passport.

Points of departure, points of arrival

As I have been trying to develop in this paper *who* is to count as a “migrant woman” is far from being a clear question. On the contrary is part of a complex process which involves and mobilises multiple heterogeneous devices. An embodied process of continuous production, assuring and re-enactment of boundaries. Boundaries that as fix and stable they may seem can be mobilised and disrupted in many ways –both for strategic or unwilling reasons. My intention was, then first, to propose that understanding bodies as dynamic assemblages may offer possibilities to analyse the complexity in the conformation of a body-subject. In particular, I suggest it may serve as a way of facing the multiplication of marks of difference, and the possibility of given an account of those in its hierarchical constitution. Secondly, it works in putting into question the all too quick classification of certain bodies as migrant ones, and stressing the capacities of agency and political intervention of people traditionally positioned and described as “victims”, “passive” and “powerless”.

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