MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND THE CITY. HOW MIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENTS ARE CHALLENGING THE URBAN POLITICAL ARENA

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Abstract

The present paper outlines my current research project on urban political mobilization around migrant rights issues. The main objective is to investigate the process of politicization of different collective actors, looking at if and how migrant rights movements are challenging institutional local politics, both at the formal and substantial level. On the one hand, by looking at the process through which different urban spaces produce migrants' rights movements that embody different organizational strategies, this research wishes to point to the importance of the 'local' opportunity structure, including availability of organizational and technical resources, in shaping organizing and mobilization. On the other hand, by looking at the effects of such networked organizational strategies in shaping the struggle for migrant rights, the research wishes to investigate alternative practices of 'citizenry-making' from below and their implications for the political incorporation of migrants and other actors involved in social mobilization. A secondary and related objective wishes to explore the potential of diffusion of such 'organizing cultures' across cities, looking at how local models of organizing may be exported to other cities through physical and digital networks.

Introduction

Over the last few years, the role of migrant rights[1] movements as a catalyst for social change in urban spaces has attracted the attention of a number of social researchers. The recent waves of mobilization in Europe and in the United States, taking place in cities as diverse as Los Angeles (Milkman, Bloom and Narro, 2010), Miami (Albright, 2008), Houston (Gleeson, 2013), London (Chimienti, 2011), Paris (Nicholls, 2008) or Berlin (Monforte and Dufour, 2011), have generated new interest in the study of collective action, especially with respect to its implications for the political participation of migrants in receiving societies.

On the one hand, such movements – here conceptualized as a "collective forms of contentious politics activated for the purposes of achieving political goals through non-traditional means" (Nicholls, 2008: 841) – seem to distinguish themselves from older movements as they have shifted from exclusively targeting the state to interacting with a number of opponents at a variety of scales (Voss and Williams, 2012). On other hand, while succeeding in raising awareness over the dreadful conditions of migrant labor in advanced capitalist economies – and in gaining some small victories at the local levels (Milkman, Bloom and Narro, 2010) – migrant rights movements also appear to have revitalized community and labor organizing through innovative and effective campaigns, setting the example for the political empowerment of a number of other actors (Milkman, Bloom and Narro, 2010).

The present research centers on such urban political mobilization around migrant rights issues. It focuses on networks of coalitions, advocacy groups and grassroots organizations whose objective is the improvement of the precarious legal, political and social standing of migrants. The main objective is to investigate the process of politicization of these different collective actors, looking at if and how migrant

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[1] Migrant rights movements, at this stage of the research, are still defined in very broad terms. On the one hand, they may consist of a number of organizations with very different organizational bases and focuses – ethnic, geographical, religious, political work-based, etc.. On the other hand, they may not all be exclusively composed of migrants, although migrants themselves, and recognition of their 'rights' are the main focus of collective action.

rights movements are challenging institutional local politics, both at the formal and substantial level. On the one hand, by looking at the process through which different urban spaces produce migrants' rights movements that embody different organizational strategies – that including different types of networked powerful social actors that operate through the mobilization of different cultural repertoires and identitarian toolboxes – this research wishes to point to the importance of the 'local' opportunity structure in shaping organizing and mobilization. On the other hand, by looking at the effects of such networked organizational strategies in shaping the struggle for migrant rights, the research wishes to investigate alternative practices of 'citizenry-making' from below and their implications for the political incorporation of migrants and other actors involved in the mobilization. A secondary and related objective wishes to explore the potential of diffusion of such 'organizing cultures' across cities, looking at how local models of organizing may be exported to other cities through physical and digital networks.

Overall, the project plans to rely on Social Network Analysis (SNA) and on qualitative evidence collected in two different cities with respect to a number of organizations and campaigns involving migrant rights issues, in order to show how different institutional arrangements in two urban settings eventually affected the shape of local movements, their strategies and demands as well as their outcome.

As for the structure of this paper, after presenting the theoretical background of the research I will proceed to present the research questions guiding my project and their relevance for social research in the field. Finally, I will introduce the methodology and the selected case studies, as well as possible research biases.

Theoretical background

In this section I wish to describe some of the theoretical premises on which this research is built. I plan to do that by highlighting the connections between rights, citizenship and migration, social movement theory and urban social network processes. The first section addresses the issue of rights in connection with the idea of citizenship, stressing the latter's role as both a mechanism of exclusion and differentiation between members and outsiders constructed by the state, as well as a mechanism of grassroots political empowerment that builds on practices of claim-making. The second section reviews theories of grassroots political mobilization, problematizing the political process framework in relation to emerging new social movements. The third section places the debate on migrant rights movements within the urban arena, highlighting the potential of looking at processes of politicization through a social network perspective.

A multilayered perspective on citizenship and rights

In my research I am interested in the issue of migrant rights as a way to address both the questions of political incorporation and political engagement of migrants within a given polity. In other words, I wish to investigate how migration acts as a catalyst for redefining and reshaping the political meaning and the boundaries of citizenship in a political community (Baubock, 2007:15). In modern societies, the concurrent construction of the individual as a political subject and as a rights-bearer can hardly be disentangled from the notions of citizenship, nation state and sovereignty, as well as from the

way in which such notions have been historically constructed in different social and political contexts to define members and outsiders (Benhabib, 2004; Sassen, 2006).

Different scholars have emphasized the dual nature of citizenship, conceived as having both a *legal* dimension – a formalized set of rights and obligations ranging from the political to the legal, social or cultural dimensions[2] – as well as a *participatory* or *substantial* one, which relate to the very act of enforcing and expanding citizenship rights in everyday life (Castles and Davidson, 2000; Reed-Danahy and Brettell, 2008;), as well as to "the way in which persons who are not citizens participate in the common social, economic, and political life of a specific state and claim rights in these multiple domains"(Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2008: 205).

Both dimensions need to be assessed when looking at political participation of individuals to the life of polity, for opposite yet complementary reasons. On the one hand, to highlight how certain categories of people may enjoy a full spectrum of rights but still not be considered citizens at the same level of others, as they are not recognized as part of the community in identitarian terms (Bauder, 2008). On the other hand, to underscore the political relevance of claim-making practices of those individuals who are partially or completely excluded from formal citizenship provisions, yet do create new spaces for political participation (Reed-Danahy and Brettell, 2008).

According to Sassen, the notion of citizenship as linked to political membership in a nation state has been increasingly challenged by a number of processes falling under the term of globalization (Sassen, 2006). Technological innovations in transportation and communication have sustained the proliferation of various types of transnational networks and the increase of different cross-border flows, including (but not certainly limited to) human mobility. On the one hand, mostly as an effect of economic globalization and of the subordination of social policy to economic policy, such processes have concurred in limiting the scope of previously formalized citizenship rights in a number of countries – see, for example, the demise of the welfare state in Europe and the consequent erosion of a number of social and economic rights (Schierup et al., 2006). On the other hand, they have also entailed "a multiplication of non-formalized or only partly formalized political dynamics and actors, [and laid the conditions for the rise of] various types of rights-bearing subjects beyond the citizen, even though they are more partial and thinner than the latter" (Sassen, 2006: 279).

Such process and its contradictions become very visible when looking at the way states have dealt with migration. On the one hand, In Europe or in the United States, while third country nationals legally resident in a country have been generally excluded from formal political participation, they have often been granted a wide spectrum of social and economic rights (Schierup et al., 2006; Glick-Schiller and Caglar, 2008). On the other hand, and mostly as a result of a political struggle from below, undocumented migrants have also been able to secure a number of rights reserved to citizens in the United States, such as the right to own a house and access mortgages or the right to receive adequate compensation for the work done (Sassen, 2006). In line with this argument, Sassen convincingly claims that such dynamics signal the

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[2] Benhabib, for example, refers to *civil rights* as the rights relating to "the protection of life, liberty, and property, the right to freedom of conscience, and certain associational rights, such as those of commerce and marriage". *Political rights* "refer to the rights of self-determination, to hold and run for office, to establish political and non-political associations, including a free press and free institutions of science and culture". *Social rights*, which vary to a wide extent in different countries, "entail the right to form trade unions as well as other professional and trade associations, health care rights, unemployment compensation, old age pensions, child care, housing, and educational subsidies" (Benhabib, 2004: 145-146).

fact that the "formal political apparatus can accommodate less and less of the political in today's world" (Sassen, 206: 280).

Nevertheless, we should not forget that, "in the face of much movement across borders, the state continues to hold great power, as through its laws it delimits, constraints, and affords rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities" (Menjivar, 2006: 1033). Scholars such as Nicholas De Genova or Cecilia Menjivar have highlighted the way citizenship, and the rights associated to it, are selectively used by the state to support the incorporation of different population groups – i.e. temporary residents, asylum seekers, 'labor migrants', etc – in a subordinate position. This becomes clear when the mere presence of non-nationals on a specific territory, the right to legally reside in the country, is made conditional to a number of constantly changing requirements, such as possession of a work contract, of a health insurance or of a suitable accommodation (Castles and Davidson, 2000). As a result, juridical uncertainty and temporariness may become the norm for a number of migrants, keeping them in a state of 'liminal legality' (Menjivar, 2006) while increasing their vulnerability vis-à-vis employers, social service providers or any other actor (Menjivar, 2006; Goldring et al., 2009).

Migrant rights movements across the world, to this respect, have been playing an important role in challenging the current state of affairs. On the one hand, by bringing together a variety of different organizational and individual actors – NGOs, advocacy groups, migrant organizations, individual citizens, non-citizens, civil society associations – they have proposed models of political organizing and participation which seek to challenge conventional politics (Milkman, Bloom and Narro, 2010). On the other hand, such movements have produced a variety of (more or less successful) counter-narratives of political inclusion of migrants which was strategically framed depending on the political opportunity structure of the specific context – i.e. support the rights of migrants as the rights of workers, rather than supporting the rights of migrants as the rights of citizens or as human rights (Gentile and Tarrow, 2009). Such movements, for their potential capacity to propose alternative and inclusive political discourses, as well as to challenge conventional (or institutional) politics, have thus attracted the attention of social science researchers. At the same time, from a theoretical point of view, they demand to be analyzed in relation to broader theories on social movements, as the latter provide the necessary theoretical framework to understand on-the-ground processes of politicization and political contention.

New Social Movements and Political Contention

Political contention through social mobilization has been traditionally explained by scholars in the field through *political process theory* (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2004; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; McAdam, 1996). Accordingly, mobilization can be analyzed in relation to four different variables: the *political opportunity structure* available at a given time for a particular movement to raise, develop and continue; the *resource mobilization capacities* of the organizations involved; the *discursive framing* of the struggle by the different parties involved; the cultural *repertoires of contention* available to challengers and opponents.

The concept of political opportunity refers to the structural historical opportunities that are made available to an organization, and/or a movement at a given time within a national framework, and mainly in relation to a given national state – i.e. in case of migrant rights organizations, it may reflect the current migrant regime in the country, the social and cultural policy on migration, the overall strength of conservative or progressive political parties, etc.. Resource mobilization refers instead to the capacity of an

organization to effectively mobilize resources that are strategic for the stated purpose, as well as to its ability to forge alliances and build effective coalitions in order to achieve successful mobilization. The third variable, framing, refers to the conceptualization of the struggle itself by the different parties involved, including allies and opponents of the movement. Finally, contention repertoires are related to the set of strategies and tactics used by activists, but also (potentially) by their opponents, when engaging into collective action.

On the one side, scholars such as Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, in their attempt to refine the explanatory breadth of the their theoretical framework and also account for the development of movements *over time*, have proposed a more dynamic model of social mobilization (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2004). This model incorporates a relational perspective, looking at how social interaction and creation/destruction of social ties generate new possibilities for change, innovation or repression by impacting the fate of political actors, old and new, as well as alliances and coalitions. To this respect, while considering all the variables above mentioned, it does advocate for looking at them relationally: how political opportunities are there only as long they are visible and perceived as such by political actors; how organizational resources exist and play a role only as long as they are 'socially appropriated' (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2004) by activists; how discursive framing needs to be placed in a more general context where different actors – the challengers, but also the state, the media, the economic institutions, etc. – compete to define what is at stake; lastly, how strategies and tactics may be employed by activists but by any other third party involved in the struggle as well.

Such a model provides a powerful explanatory framework to analyze different types of social movements, especially in connection with the historical unfolding of surrounding political, economic and social institutions. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the important theoretical contribution of classic social movement theory, scholars such as Kim Voss and Michelle Williams have argued that such a model proves partially unsuitable to analyze the current wave of mobilizations, especially when considering the overwhelming importance accorded to the political opportunity variable, framed in state terms (Voss and Williams, 2012). Such a framework, they contend, is based on a configuration of relations among state, society and economy that mainly refers to the (Western) experience of the late 19th and 20th centuries, when the state had strong interventionist capacities in the economic and in the social domains, both as market promoter and market regulator. Consequently, most mobilizations, in the forms of social movements, were then mainly targeting the state, as the latter was the only actor capable of and willing to accommodate social demands and grant social and economic concessions, otherwise facing a strong challenge to its political authority.

Voss and Williams rightly point out that the situation has changed, as new movements are now increasingly operating at a variety of levels, from the local to the national and transnational level, challenging a variety of actors ranging from local political institutions to global business corporations or international financial organizations (2012). This has mainly happened because of the increasing power of economic institutions in influencing contemporary societies beyond the span of national boundaries, and to the detriment of the power of the state in intervening to advance the interests of its citizens (Voss and Williams, 2012; Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006). While the state has certainly not lost its interventionist capacities, it has gradually restrained from mitigating the negative effects of markets on society, rather accommodating the interests of global capitalism through labor market deregulation and

precarization, commodification of public resources, 'managerialization' and 'financialization' of political decision-making, etc. (Voss and Williams, 2012; Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006).

In light of the changing nature of national political institutions and of national democratic participation – the latter being severely undermined by the increasing subordination of national governments to international undemocratic financial institutions – civil society has thus acquired a renewed role as generator of alternative democratic practices and grassroots institutions (Voss and Williams, 2012). On the one hand, the 'local' – here considered in opposition to the 'national' or the 'transnational' – becomes the geographical and symbolic space where the effects of market penetration are mostly felt. On the other hand, it also becomes the crucial arena where civil society can effectively engage with and challenge political and economic structures (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012; Voss and Williams, 2012).

Mobilization, Social Networks and Rights in the Urban Space

A *local* perspective on social movements, which specifically emphasizes the role played by neighbor grassroots community organizing in triggering new movements, rather than the mere process of social appropriation of pre-existing organizational structures (Voss and Williams, 2012), has a strong tradition in urban studies. While a number of studies support the idea of global, transnational or national social movements, other scholars have pointed out the crucial relevance of the local urban context – the city, if not the neighborhood – as primary unit of analysis for political contentions (Castells, 1983; Nicholls, 2008; Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012). In this sense, we could argue that the concept of political opportunity still retains his validity, but only as long as it shifts its focus from a nation state perspective to broader *multi-scalar* one.

Indeed, while emphasizing the importance of the local social context as a crucial variable to explain social mobilization outcomes – i.e. institutional framework, local history of social mobilization, pre-existing civil society, diversity and richness of available resources, etc. – such literature also considers urban settings as spaces where nationally guaranteed formal rights (civil and political rights, social and economic rights, religious rights, etc.) are substantially the object of constant renegotiation and contention (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012). This also means that a struggle on local issues that some would consider as a fight for the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996) – i.e. on urban planning regulations, on occupation of public space, etc. – may in fact have much larger implications reflecting more general rights struggles (Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans, 2012; Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012). At the same time, in relation to the previous discussion on practices of claim-making, it may have important political repercussion for the politicization of a number of actors, from disempowered citizens to non-citizens with virtually no formalized rights.

In a parallel fashion, a number of scholars has emphasized the notion of *social networks* as a crucial lens through which current patterns of social movement organizing can be analyzed and understood (Diani, 2002, 2003; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Vermeulen and Berger, 2008; Castells, 2012; Nicholls and Uitermark, 2012). Such a perspective, first developed in social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Knoke, 1990), considers social phenomena with respect to their relational characteristics, and looks at how power shifts can be explained by changing positions of social actors in relation to others within a network of connections. Such connections, or ties, become crucial when

looking at the way individuals and organizations come together to collectively take action over a certain issue. While the initial form of personal and organizational networks may owe, in first instance, to exogenous factors – presence of a pre-existing network of organizations, strong familial or friendship ties among activists, etc. – the very shape these networks take also affects the trajectory of movement development over time, influencing selective diffusion of cultural repertoires and of organizational strategies through certain actors and not others (Diani, 2002, 2003). Moreover, embracing such a perspective allows us to analyze how and why different types of organizational actors become more powerful within a given movement, and how, in turn, that affects development of specific strategies and demands, as well as of specific movement 'knowledge practices' (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2011).

The notion of social networks also becomes relevant when looking at processes of cultural diffusion, as it emphasizes the potential of different sets of ties for the transfer of organizational capacities and contention repertoires across places (Savage, 2006; Castells, 2012). Scholars such as Peggy Levitt have underscored this aspect in relation to the specific migratory domain, arguing that transnational transfers of norms and practices as an effect of migration may also contribute to mutual diffusion of different types of civic and political engagements between sending and receiving countries (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Trans-regional and transnational (or 'translocal'?) networks among urban activists become especially relevant, as successful campaigns or models of organizing are exported to and replicated in a variety of settings, both within and beyond national borders, to expand its political and geographical significance (Aguiar and Ryan, 2009). Such model, which relies on a traditional yet innovative model of 'multiscalar politics' (Aguiar and Ryan, 2009: 949) certainly bears a strong potential for diffusing 'good practices' among activists across the globe. Yet, exporting a model from one place to another may not be an easy and painless task, especially when pushed by strong and centralized institutional actors such as labor unions. The question of how to effectively diffuse general practices of organizing while preserving local histories and sensitivities thus remains (Savage, 2006).

Research question

In my project I would like to answer the general question of why migrant rights movements develop in a certain way in a given urban context, and how that affects the mobilization process and its outcomes in a given political contention. More specifically, I wish to investigate the process of politicization of different collective actors involved in the struggle for migrant rights in two different urban contexts, looking at how different urban spaces produce migrants' rights movements that embody different organizational strategies and rely on different types of strategic networks, that include different types of powerful social actors and that operate through the mobilization of different cultural repertoires and identitarian toolboxes. Furthermore, I am interested in understanding how such movements challenge institutional local politics through original practices of claim-making and political participation.
Main questions:
Why and how do different urban configurations affect the organizational form that migrant rights movements take? How do different organizational networks within social movements reflect different dynamics of leadership formation, ideological framing and claim-making? In turn, how does that impact

political and social participation of migrants and other actors directly involved in, or targeted by such movement?

Sub-questions:

1) What are the differences and similarities between the urban configurations of two different cities with respect to the relation between economic modes of production, local institutional arrangements and migratory dynamics?

2) a. What are the main organizational features of the migrant rights movement in the two selected case studies? b. Why and how have different types of organizations hegemonized the migrant rights movement in the two cities, and how has that affected framing strategies and definition of demands? c. What consequences has the organizational structure of the immigrant rights movement had on the participation of the migrants themselves in the struggle, and on their social and political empowerment?

3) a. How do organizing cultures travel across cities through different types of networks? b. What are the implications of exporting different models in other cities?

Relevance

While there is an increasing body of literature on migrant rights movements in urban settings, fewer attempts have so far been made to study such mobilization in a systematic and comparative perspective. On the one hand, little attention has so far been paid to how configuration of local spaces affects the specific organizational development of movements over time – how locally-based political opportunities allow for the rise of specific types of organizations, and how movements build up (or not) on new and existing resources *through* urban networks, at both the local and translocal levels. On the other hand, the way in which different organizational configurations within movements impact political and social empowerment of migrants has also been largely neglected – i.e. for example, how different political agendas develop depending on the prominence of faith organizations, labor unions, advocacy-based groups or grassroots organizations.

Drawing on a combination of Social Networks Analysis (SNA) and qualitative methods, this research also wishes to contribute to the study of social networks within a social movement setting. While such methodology was previously used to investigate other types of movements, such as the environmental one (Diani, 2002), there are virtually no example of a systematized application of such research methodology to the study of migrant rights movements.

Methodology

To address the research questions proposed above I plan to conduct a two-fold research which accounts for the different levels of analysis – i.e. the political opportunity structure, at both the national and local level; the development of different organizational strategies over time within the migrant rights movement; the consequences of such strategies in relation to the political outcomes of the movement and to migrant political empowerment. All aspects need to be evaluated in a comparative perspective, in two distinct urban settings.

With respect to my research strategy, I plan to: 1) analyze the historical development of the political opportunity structure in two different cities, focusing on both national and local specificities with

respect to institutional framework, migration regimes, access to citizenship and social and economic rights, etc.; 2) map networks of organizations and of social movement leaders and personalities working on migrants and refugee rights, as well as related major campaigns and programs & projects taking place in both urban settings over the last thirty years[3]; 3) conduct a qualitative selective assessment of one specific case in each city – may be an organization or a specific campaign – in order to further elucidate on general trends observed through social network analysis.

The first part of the research will be mainly carried out through a detailed literature review focusing on the two cases of study. The second part will use Social Networks Analysis (SNA) tools to map social network structures linking different organizations and activists across the city and beyond, including translocal and transnational linkages if present. Data about the network structure will be gathered by using a variety of sources, including existing academic literature, newspaper archives, online campaign material and organizations' reports and websites. The third part will be conducted through qualitative methods and may involve in-depth interviewing as well as participant observation. Overall, two different level of analysis will be considered: inter-organizational, that is, the relations among different migrant rights organizations as well as among MROs and other parties (supporters and opponents); intra-organizational, that is, the relations among migrant rights activists, staff and board members within a given organization.

In its initial phase, data collection will be kept as open as possible. No specific requirements have been laid out with respect to the characteristics of the organizations or activists participating in the migrant rights' movement, as describing the richness of movement structures is precisely one of the objectives of the present research.

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[3] See Annex 1 for more information. Annex 1 is a methodological guideline for preliminary network data collection, in its first tentative form.

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