



## Practicing Intersectionality in Spain *Practicando la interseccionalidad en España*

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### Abstract

Intersectionality has become a very popular term in academic, policy and activist circles. We understand intersectionality as a theoretical project concerned with elucidating the relationships between different principles of inequality and oppression. We identify three conceptual moves that distinguish intersectionality from other theoretical frameworks about inequality and power: a movement from additive to interactive models, a movement from categorical to process-based frameworks, and a movement from autonomous individuals to embedded social relations as foundations for social theory. We deploy examples related to the paid domestic work in Spain to demonstrate the usefulness of these conceptual moves.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality; Gender; Class; Migration; Race

### Abstract

*El término interseccionalidad se ha vuelto muy popular en círculos académicos, políticos y activistas. Las autoras entienden la interseccionalidad como un proyecto teórico que busca analizar el modo en que distintas formas de desigualdad y opresión social se relacionan entre sí. Las autoras identifican tres movimientos conceptuales que marcan este proyecto: sustituir modelos aditivos por modelos interactivos, reemplazar marcos teóricos que se basan en categorías sociales por modelos teóricos basados en procesos sociales, y tomar las relaciones sociales —y no la idea del individuo autónomo— como la unidad de análisis básica para construir teoría social. Las autoras ilustran el proyecto teórico y las implicaciones de los movimientos conceptuales a partir del análisis del trabajo doméstico en España.*

**Palabras clave:** Interseccionalidad; Género; Clase; Migración; Raza

### Introduction

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has quickly travelled around the world and has become very popular in academic, policy and activist circles (Crenshaw, 1989). In fact, Kathy Davis (2008) notably declared that intersectionality has become a buzzword that is used in very different ways and for different purposes in dif-

ferent contexts. Academics are intensively debating the appropriate uses of the concept, defining its boundaries as well as its contributions, and discussing how the concept can be deployed in various research and policy making contexts (e.g. Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Within this ongoing discussion, our intervention seeks to advance a particular understanding of intersectionality that we argue

can be usefully applied in the Spanish context.

We understand intersectionality as a theoretical approach concerned with elucidating the relationships between different forms of oppression based in social processes associated with salient social categories like gender, sexuality, race, class or age. Intersectionality furthermore signals a commitment to move beyond theoretical frameworks that assign each of these forms of inequality to independent and separated conceptual boxes. Intersectionality theories differ from frameworks that assign specific social categories more and less relevance solely according to the institution being considered (thus making class alone a feature of the economy, gender alone a feature of the family or nationality solely a feature of states). Instead, intersectionality theories attempt to incorporate crosscutting sociopolitical processes that give salience to positions in relation to multiple categories in specific contexts and times. As Sylvia Walby and others have argued, this aspect of the theory implies recognizing that “one set of social relations rarely saturates a given institutional domain or territory (...) different regimes of inequality coexist within institutions and within countries” (Walby, 2009, p. 68). For instance, gender is always produced and reproduced in institutions other than the family, and all families are organized by relations of power other than gender. This multi-institutional perspective suggests making the relative salience of particular categories to the organization of inequalities in specific institutions at any given place and time a matter of inquiry rather than an a priori commitment.

A central claim made by scholars using intersectionality theories is that social processes that construct and reproduce relations along any axis of inequality are inherently entwined with processes that construct and reproduce inequalities on other axes. This theoretical principle does not translate clearly into any one specific understanding of how these relations of power and axes of inequality have consequences on each other, leading to theoretical debates that foreground different perspectives of where and how power operates.

Some theorists emphasize the social categorization processes that generate diverse categories for identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-

Davis, 1997). From this perspective, those who are assigned more marginal positions in multiple categories then fall through the cracks between the group identities being constructed. For example, as black women are neither seen as central to the category black nor to the category women, they become invisible both theoretically and politically. This understanding of the exclusionary working of theories focused on a normative standard type has been central to the development of intersectional theories, even before the term itself was coined, in the writings of black feminists in the US and UK (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984). In emphasizing such relations, intersectionality offers a unique framework to interrogate unmarked categories - the male in gender, the heterosexual in heteronormativity, or the white/native-born in racism - and unravel how these are constructed in relation to and dependent upon problematized and marked categories - the woman in gender, the homosexual in heteronormativity, or the black/immigrant in racism.

Other theorists stress the multiple processes that generate inequalities and how they inflect each other within the multi-institutional contexts in which they operate. This tradition also has a history in so-called “dual systems theories” in which feminists struggled to explain the ways that “patriarchal capitalism” organized inequalities not merely as the sum of patriarchal and capitalist oppressions but as an inseparable mix of both (Brenner & Ramas, 1984; Hartmann, 1976; Walby, 1990). From this theoretical perspective, the issue is less finding the categories of invisibility generated by this duality than identifying the ways institutions interact through history in ways that generate both reinforcing and contradictory forms of power and privilege. For example, the workings of globalized patriarchal capitalism “feminize” ever more workers by placing them in the informal sector, with below subsistence wages, while “masculinizing” both male and female managers with wages that allow them to outsource their domestic labor, decreasing the opportunity for such feminized and masculinized workers to share the same household, and increasing demands on the state to replace informal familial redistribution of income with more formalized policies.

Finally, some theorists are concerned with attempting to bring the social constructionist emphasis in the perspectives on race-gender intersectionality together with the historical materialist emphasis on the intersections of capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism and nationalism as macro-institutional processes. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992, 1999), for example, stresses both the cultural power working in the co-construction of race and gender in specific categorical labels, identities and images as well as the economic, political and legal foundations of material advantage and marginalization that are embedded in the historical development of specific communities, corporations, states and transnational institutions. From this perspective, the “controlling images” (Collins, 2005) associated with the “other”, as well as hegemonic discourses as the “heterosexual imaginary” (Ingraham, 1994) are forms of cultural power that configure, constrain and complicate the operations of material advantages. As Joan Acker (2006), for example, shows, “jobs” are not merely “empty slots” that can be filled with any worker, but are organized both consciously and unconsciously around understandings of ideal workers and the suitability of particular social groups for specific social tasks. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1999) illustrates this idea in her analysis of the gendering of reproductive labor, in which jobs that are associated with dirt are designed for people “who belong there” because of their subordinate and degraded racial status.

We consider all three of these traditions fruitful. We conceive of intersectionality as involving three conceptual movements that distinguish it from conventional frameworks about inequality and power: (1) a movement from additive to interactive models, (2) a movement from categorical to process-based frameworks, and (3) a movement from autonomous individuals to embedded social relations as foundations for social theory. To demonstrate the usefulness of these moves, we develop the example of intersectionality as a form of analysis applied to the paid domestic work sector in Spain.

### Practicing intersectionality in Spain

The number of domestic workers in Spain more than doubled in less than a decade, mostly through international migrant women’s labor. Official insurance data retrieved

from Spanish Social Security records (Seguridad Social, 2014) indicates that the number of domestic workers doubled from 120,000 in 2001 to 300,000 in 2009. A different governmental data source based on survey questions, the Labor Force Survey retrieved from the National Statistics Institute microdata (INE, 2014), includes more uninsured and informal workers; it reports 221,500 domestic workers in 1996, rising to 512,000 in 2009. This same data reveals that until the mid 1990s the percentage of international migrants among domestic workers was negligible. For instance, only 6.9 percent of domestic workers were foreigners in 1996, but 62.5 percent in 2009 were non-citizens. This phenomenon occurred in a context of economic expansion, growing levels of Spanish women’s employment in the formal economy, declining fertility and an increasingly aging population, and a growing normalization of international investment and labor migration. We employ our three-step model of intersectionality to illuminate the way in which this transformation in the realm of care and domestic labor affects the relationship between gender, ethnicity and class inequalities in politics, households and markets.

### From addition to interaction

Theories that focus on one single principle of inequality (e.g. class in Wright, 1997; gender in Pateman, 1988; nationalism in Anderson, 1991) imply that the social relations in that realm are largely independent and autonomous from forces that govern social relations in other realms of inequality or social exclusion. Such theorists assume that the social foundations of class inequality operate independently and autonomously from these of gender inequality, although they may then affect the experience of women and men differently because of their position in the family. In this framework different forms of inequality enter in relation with each other largely as a summation. When multiple kinds of oppression conflate on one single body, that of a migrant lesbian for instance, scholars declare that this individual suffers from triple oppression: the share for being a migrant, the share for being a woman and the share for diverging from heteronormativity.

As Ange-Marie Hancock (2007), among others, argued, there are a number of problems with this additive approach. Here we would high-

light two. One is the political dynamic that results from the belief that one can unambiguously classify social groups in a single hierarchy from more to less oppressed. This approach tends to essentialize social groups and at the same time incites competition between them. Hancock described this dynamic as the “Oppression Olympics, where groups compete for the mantle of most oppressed to gain the attention and political support of dominant groups” (Hancock, 2007, p. 68). While this has become a familiar critique, we add an awareness of how this “competition” is shaped by the changing dynamics of local politics. For example, in Spain, migrant women received considerable attention as a “most oppressed group” pre-economic recession, but now that the attention of dominant social groups is drawn to the problems of the native born population (e.g. evicted families, many of which are also foreign-born) the category of migrant women has largely been forgotten.

The second problem is that an additive approach produces inaccurate conclusions. It is simply not true that migrant lesbian experiences result from adding the average (male) migrant experience to those of the average (native born) lesbian. Being a migrant transforms the meaning of sexual non-normativity by increasing the risks of violating the law and decreasing the degree of sexual autonomy available. That the relationship between sexuality, gender and nationality is interactive rather than additive means that oppression does not come in units that can be measured and compared, but rather is experienced in specific contexts (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Hancock, 2007). International migration to particular countries with specific regimes of incorporation shapes the experience of sexism and meaning of gender equality as well as the opportunities for achieving and exercising economic and/or sexual autonomy, differently for migrant and non-migrant women and men.

Both the strengths and limits of moving from an additive to intersectional understanding of inequality can be seen in Spanish debates about migrant domestic workers. On the positive side, the awareness of the multiple problems facing this group as a distinctive, intersectionally defined category rescues them from invisibility. Dominant organizations of workers (such as *Comisiones Obreras* and

*Unión General de Trabajadores* –UGT–) and of women (such as the *Instituto Nacional de la Mujer* or organizations like *Mujeres Progresistas* and *Mujeres en Igualdad*) are not each assuming that the woman doing paid domestic work is “somebody else’s problem” but giving attention to a group that in additive models would fall through the gap between their separate organizations’ mandates. On the negative side, these are indications that “Oppression Olympics” is assumed to be necessary. Indeed, the claim that migrant women have it worse than anybody else has been common among women’s groups and feminist activists. Moreover, this claim can also reflect a tendency to define particular groups of women as victims rather than agents and to extend help and protection without their democratic participation in defining needs and objectives.

The inherent complexity of multiplying numbers of categories also can contribute to sustaining an imaginary homogeneity within groups and produce essentialized types. For example, although migrant women never made up more than 65% of the total domestic workforce in Spain, the social imaginary rapidly associated migrant women with domestic workers. Women’s associations and unions initiated actions addressed to these workers, who were seen as requiring protection and information. Most of these programs assumed all migrant women worked in the domestic sector (e.g. workshops for caregivers for the elderly; legal advice for navigating employment relations in the household) and that all paid domestic workers were migrants, thus obscuring the recognition of Spanish-born domestic workers and blocking their access to such training and support programs. The union UGT, for instance, literally moved their services for domestic workers to immigration offices.

While only research will be able to assess how well or poorly migrant and Spanish-born domestic workers fare economically in comparison to each other, even this empirical question obscures other axes of exclusion. Do Spanish-born domestic workers experience declining social status by association with migrants, are migrant domestic workers more or less tightly and paternalistically controlled by their employers? Variation within and across employment, housing, family and community

conditions of labor rights, social autonomy and political representation is likely to be obscured by a focus on essentialized categories even when produced by interaction rather than addition. For example, examination of civil society in Spain suggests that organizational and political resources for domestic workers have expanded for migrant women, while not addressing either the non-migrant domestic workers who might have benefited from these services and the migrant women working in other jobs who might have preferred other kinds of services.

### From categories to processes

The above limitations in the move from addition to interaction suggest that analysts should emphasize social relations and processes rather than categories or groups of people. The question would then shift from asking about the special needs or concerns or perspectives of migrant domestic workers as a category to ask about the relationships among the global processes transforming the relationships of labor (both productive and reproductive), of citizenship (both formal membership and social inclusion), of intimacy (both inside and outside of legally sanctioned forms), and of representation (virtual, symbolic images and formalized political institutions).

Putting the emphasis on categories pushes to the background the processes that maintain group boundaries and that sustain their socio-political salience. While biological maleness and femaleness are not inherently discernible categories, men and women are recognizable in daily life because we mobilize a set of symbols, performances and materials that associate male bodies with a set of ideas and practices about masculinity and female bodies similarly with femininity. There is nothing intrinsic to human nature that requires the male-female dichotomy to have the political salience it has nowadays. Instead, any given configuration of gender inequality is a socio-historical byproduct of a number of institutions, discourses and social relations. Similarly, the ideas of national identities emerge historically and become embodied, not only in individual identities but also in state practices of conferring citizenship and forming international ties with other states perceived to be “related” in their ethno-political configurations. In Spain, for instance, citizenship laws

clearly draw ethno-political boundaries in declaring that migrants from certain Latin American countries can become nationalized much faster than those from Morocco (Joppke, 2005).

Looking at processes instead of categories improves our conceptual tools to analyze two key premises of intersectionality. First, processes highlight the ways in which categories obtain different meanings at different times and contexts. The headscarf as a symbol of women’s oppression is a recent image that emerged in relation to the appropriation of gender equality discourse by Western elites. In Europe, wearing a headcovering, often a scarf, is accepted and unproblematic for women in other contexts understood as Christian and “traditional,” for example among nuns or older, rural women; but it is considered a highly political symbol of Islam and of the oppression of women in Islamic states considered “backward.” This transformation is related to the EU declarations that gender equality is one of its core citizenship values (Verloo, 2006); European is emerging as an ethnic category that is partly defined by its rhetorical commitment to modernity and thus gender equality. What is meant by gender equality is, nonetheless, contested. Researchers suggest that since the 1990 gender equality became narrowly associated with women’s *labor force activation* (Stratigaki, 2004), and later folded in the social investment approach that focuses on future economic competitiveness (Jenson, 2008).

These changes in what is meant by gender equality have had consequences for the discursive location of domestic workers in Spain. Spanish governments resorted to gender equality discourse to present themselves as representing a modern country in the international arena (Choo, 2006). They now define themselves as being the global vanguard of gender equality policies (Valiente, 2008). This helped defining European citizen as modern and domestic labor as unmodern in ways that aligned with the pressure from the EU on its member states to “modernize” their economies by bringing women into the paid labor force. This discursive move both obscures what work women did who were not “activated”, and what labor relations are being created to get that necessary labor done if more Spanish women are to be “active” in the sec-

tions of the economy that are politically acknowledged and economically counted.

Second, focusing on processes illuminates the ways in which and the points at which different forms of inequality are interrelated to one another, making possible the identification of mechanisms. The headscarf example above constitutes a specific mechanism whereby gender and nationalist politics intersect in contemporary Europe. And in Spain political debates about the paid domestic work sector constitute another set of processes that configure the relationship between migration and gender politics. Through the political-economic-social processes framing domestic labor as unmodern and unworthy labor, jobs were constructed that were suitable only for unmodern and unworthy workers, namely migrant women. The influx of migrant women into the occupation of domestic work was not merely a labor process or a gender process or a nationality one, but an intersectional configuration of processes of devaluation and exclusion that impacted both migrant and nonmigrants but in different and interrelated ways. The Spanish women left in the category of domestic worker were made invisible as either Spanish women or domestic workers; the migrant domestic workers were constructed as serving the cause of Spanish women's emancipation rather than as beneficiaries in their own right of gender equality policies. Politicians and other public representatives recurrently made statements that illustrate this interpretative framework in which domestic workers promote Spanish women's employment. For instance, in 2010 a member of Intermón Oxfam announced, "it is to their [migrant women working in domestic work] credit that 400,000 Spanish women left their home and care labor to work outside the home" (Hidalgo, 2010, p. 2, authors' translation). Analyzing these mechanisms feeds back to our understanding of change over time, while gender equality once meant promoting equal sharing of housework (Stratigaki, 2004) it currently means expecting the paid domestic work sector to provide substitutes for domestic and care labor.

This second step of thinking intersectionally thus moves from categories to processes. Taking this step is vital for recognizing dimensions of power and privilege as such, not merely naming categories where exclusion,

devaluation, exploitation or other forms of oppression can be seen at work in all their complexity. When dimensions, relations and processes are stressed, then the invisibility of the privileged is unmasked. Recognizing the unmarked categories as also being participants in the relations of power moves the analysis beyond assumptions that only women have gender, only men have class and only migrants have ethnicity. This is particularly important because there is a tendency not to take the racialization and nation-building piece of the intersectional framework into consideration (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). The boundary making processes that distinguish us versus them - might these rely on skin color, language, religion or ethnicity - constitute a central force organizing gender and class relations, among other axes of inequality. Intersectionality is not *only* about making visible conditions of marginalization and oppression that have been largely ignored, but it is *also* about making visible the conditions of privilege and normativity that sustain and contribute to generating the former.

#### **From autonomous individuals to embedded social relations**

The focus on social processes here is meant to have strong and concrete theoretical implications. The term *processes* signals that analysts should be sensitive to motion and dynamism, as an intrinsic feature of social life. And the term *social* invokes social relations as the engine of reproduction and change. Social relations are not simply relations among individuals but relations between practices, activities or roles. The meaning of these practices, activities or roles is produced in the context of institutions. Institutions set the norms and rules that govern both material and discursive dimensions of social relations. The conventional nuclear family, for instance, defines the roles of wife and husband in ways that assign different affinities to housework, authority, or money. From this angle, the analysis gears towards emphasizing the ways in which discursive and material structures around any given institution, like the family, define the social relations in which individuals are placed to reinforce or transform it. Institutions distribute both material and discursive resources, which individuals bargain for, deploy and pursue.

This framework indicates that the simultaneous and recurrent interplay between material and ideational dimensions of social life stands beyond the individual. Ideas attached to categories of people, like the controlling images mentioned by Patricia Hill Collins (2005), confine the material opportunities available to them and condition their access to hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses to defining their worth and will. Ideas and discourses are not simply located within the individual but materialized in institutions. This framework corrects the tendency to treat sexism and racism as largely products of individual's attitudes and beliefs. For instance, many studies of social inequality are based on individual economic behavior models that assign any residual disadvantages associated with gender and race categories to discrimination or essentialized differences in preferences, depending on the model (Ferree & Hall, 1996). These studies presume that the solution to gender and racial inequalities lies in changing discriminatory attitudes or socialization routines. If only we could get rid of sexism, so the story goes, we would solve the problem of gender inequality. The same applies to racism, if only we could get rid of racist and anti-immigrant attitudes, then the marginalization and exclusion of racialized-othered groups would be resolved. These studies, while paying attention to how ideas might impact material lived experiences; they do so in a way that disconnects these ideas from the actual institutions that define the meanings of social relations at work.

Institutions rely on ideational processes that define social categories emphasized in the previous section to organize the distribution of material and discursive resources. For instance, the idea that housewives' work is unproductive and does not create value results form a specific historical development that is associated with the expansion of waged employment relations and industrialization (Folbre, 1991; Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Citizenship institutions have for long relied on this category in a number of ways: housewives' work, for instance, does not grant access to the same pension rights that employed workers have. Similarly, the paid domestic work sector is often defined as a *special* kind of job, a conception that also emerged in a concrete historical moment in which political actors and labor movements negotiated the

boundaries between different kinds of jobs (Goñalons-Pons, 2013). In many countries these negotiations lead to the formal exclusion of domestic workers and farm workers from basic labor rights (Glenn, 1992). This idea that domestic work is *special* excludes domestic workers, much like housewives, from basic rights. In the Spanish context, for instance, domestic work constitutes the only category of waged employees that cannot access unemployment benefits or rely on labor inspection regulation.

Intersectionality makes visible the ways in which multiple axes of inequality and power are involved in the workings and change of these social relations. In the US researchers showed how the unproductive housewife saturated the normative ideal of femininity in the family when it only reflected the situation of middle class white women. This discourse contributed to marginalize the situation of slaves and workingwomen who could not claim to meet femininity or "proper families" (Glenn, 1992; Truth, 1851). It took second wave feminism and substantial socioeconomic transformations to destabilize the link between femininity and housewifery, which has not, however, challenged the link between housewifery and unproductivity. With respect to domestic workers, Spanish labor and feminist movements historically challenged the idea of domestic work as a *special* kind of job; they claimed that domestic workers should be treated and have the same rights as any other worker. Yet, as the domestic work sector escalated with the influx of migrant women's labor in the early 2000's, the discourse that domestic work was a *special* job reappeared again as hegemonic, embraced by unions, feminists and politicians from all political parties. Pilar Goñalons-Pons (2013) argues that the racialization of domestic workers is crucial to understand why the discourse of domestic work as a *special job* became again hegemonic.

Institutions organize the distribution of economic resources and discursive opportunities in ways that facilitate some paths for change and make others difficult. We would argue, for instance, that the discursive association between gender equality and women hiring domestic workers noted in the previous section is, together with the racialization of domestic workers, an important blockage to ful-

ly recognize domestic workers' rights. The narrow scope of gender equality as women's labor force activation welcomes and legitimates professional women's gains in the labor market but heavily constrains the discursive opportunities of domestic workers, who end up justifying their demands for justice and equality on the basis that they "help other women." This framing implies that improving domestic workers' rights might conflict with professional women's ability to hire their services. Moreover, promoting women's full-employment through stimulating market replacement for domestic and care labor benefits only some women and does not challenge the organization of labor market institutions that continue to exclude, discriminate and devalue workers who deviate from the unencumbered worker model. This arrangement can potentially trigger socioeconomic polarizing processes that progressively separate affluent and dual-earner households from other households with more unstable access to employment due to family/work incompatibilities and penalties.

Because social relations along one axis of inequality are involved in reproducing inequalities along other axes of inequality, studying social change and thinking creatively about possible futures needs to account for how changes in one dimension might affect elsewhere. The legitimization and acceptability of hiring domestic work among dual-earner middle-class Spanish couples contributes to maintaining gender inequality in housework and care work, which also contributes to the marginalization of migrant workers through the devaluation of domestic work and their unequal access to labor and citizenship rights. Class privileges are also created and reproduced through the unequal access to market substitutes for domestic and care labor. If, for instance, gender equality discourse embraced the full recognition of domestic workers' rights and raised the price for their services, such a change could potentially have short-term negative effects for middle-class women and domestic workers, but might simultaneously facilitate broadening the meaning of gender equality in ways that would politicize men's withdrawal from unpaid work, labor market discrimination against the encumbered worker and the larger socioeconomic devaluation of domestic and care labor that is

performed largely by women either for pay or no pay.

This final conceptual move illuminates the role of institutions in anchoring social relations and the distribution of discursive and material resources. Intersectionality theories place the unit of analysis at the level of social relations in multi-institutional contexts, in contrast to theoretical frameworks based on the autonomous individual ideal. In so doing, intersectionality researchers emphasize the ways in which ideas and discourses are materialized in institutions. Solutions to sexism and racism lie beyond changes in attitudes and instead require a profound evaluation of how institutions (families, labor markets, citizenship, to name a few) rely on gender and race biases to function and distribute resources and opportunities. Moreover, this approach encourages researchers to investigate the ways in which institutions change over time, how and which social relations trigger such changes and how these social relations are transformed in the process.

### **Conclusion**

Intersectionality is a powerful term to signify a theoretical project that elucidates the relationships between different axes of social inequality and relations of power. To date there is no unified program associated with the term intersectionality, the terrain is still open for suggestion. Intersectionality, in comparison to other theoretical approaches, offers flexible and dynamic lenses to systematize change and complexity. The links between different axes of inequality are strategic locations to identify flaws and gaps in existing social explanations and to promote creative thinking for alternative perspectives. Our proposal has emphasized three conceptual moves with which intersectionality scholars engage.

The movement from additive to interactive models challenges single-axis theories and helps researchers make sense of how connections between different forms of inequality produce interactive effects. The movement from categorical to process-based frameworks emphasizes the social construction of categories and how these change over time and across space. This approach denaturalizes and de-essentializes social groups that are deeply rooted in existing institutions. Finally, the

movement from autonomous individuals to embedded social relations elucidates how discursive and material processes configure institutions within which social relations take place. Complexity and motion are, to our understanding, central features of intersectionality.

We have also illustrated how intersectionality can be fruitfully applied in Spain. We showed that changes in the material and discursive locations of domestic workers rely on multiple references to class, gender and race. We argue that intersectionality helps to better understand why domestic work is implicitly seen as good for gender equality and what might be necessary to change this discursive configuration. Beyond domestic work, intersectionality could also be fruitfully applied to other phenomena. Current debates about abortion and reproductive rights, for instance, repeatedly mobilize social relations around gender, class, disability and race. Similarly, studies about the consequences of the economic recession would benefit from taking an intersectional approach to highlight the underlying complex structure of power relations in unemployment, eviction or poverty. We encourage researchers to practice intersectionality and elaborate original social explanations that synthesize complexity in ways that do not marginalize disadvantage or make privilege invisible.

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FORMATO DE CITACIÓN

Goñalons Pons, Pilar & Ferree, Myra Marx (2014). Practicing Intersectionality in Spain. *Quaderns de Psicologia*, 16(1), 85-95. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/qpsicologia.1216>

HISTORIA EDITORIAL

Recibido: 13/04/2014  
1ª Revisión: 21/04/2014  
Aceptado: 04/05/2014