Barcelona Street Vendors' Voice and the Crossing of Narrative (B)Orders

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1. **Introduction: The value of voice**

During the last election campaign in Barcelona (2019), irregular street vending was one of

the most frequently discussed issues by mayoral candidates and journalists in interviews and

debates, despite it not being by far the main worry for citizens, as polls showed (Ajuntament

de Barcelona, 2019). The goal was to undermine the image of the then current mayor (from

the *Barcelona en Comú* party, henceforth BeC, a citizen platform led by former activists),

who stood for re-election, by accusing her of mismanaging "the problem" of street vending.

This was clearly seen in a YouTube-broadcast debate[1] organized by a Catalan (social) media-

known human rights activist and MP for the Catalan Republican Party (ERC). Based on the

agenda of "giving voice" to street vendors, the debate took place between five of the eight

candidates (from center-right, center-left and left-wing parties) and the Barcelona Street

Vendors Union's (henceforth SVU) spokespersons – all Senegalese black men. One of them

reproached the mayor for not "having ever sat down to talk to us". For the Union, "sitting

down to talk" means having a voice that matters (Couldry, 2010) politically. In fact, most

discussions about the significance of the Union are structured around the symbolic and

practical affordances of having acquired "a voice". As the same Union representative put it in

one of our research interviews, "[before] we didn't use to have a voice to denounce, we didn't

have a voice to speak, and now, since we've founded the Union, we already have a voice to

denounce discrimination, persecution, racism" (interview, 6th July 2019).[2] However, the

committed listening that this political voice requires is something that the party in power (BeC) had failed to engage in. As a matter of fact, during their term of office, police pressure on street vending had increased rather than diminished.

In the debate, the incumbent mayor-candidate responded to her alleged refusal to engage in conversation with the Union by underplaying the police issue and claiming that she had put forth an innovative "social perspective" to street vending based on "seeing" the very people involved, their needs and social realities. She also made a point of distancing herself from the three conservative candidates, who had actually declined the invitation to participate in the debate, because they "dehumanize" the vendors by focusing on their illegal activity and refuse to "talk" to them. The absence in the debate of the conservative parties was seen as paradoxical because they were said to be the ones "who talked the most" about street vending. In the debate, then, the real battle over "talk" took place among parties on the left and at the center of the political spectrum. For one, the social democratic party candidate (PSC) began one of his contributions by arguing that "it was necessary to talk and look vendors in the eye". He then went on to claim that Barcelona had a mayor who "doesn't talk to vendors or business owners" (supposedly affected by street vending). Meanwhile, the Catalan Republican Party candidate (center-left) and main contender of the mayor, underlined the latter's failed attempts at fruitful dialogue and insisted on politicians' duty "to talk and listen to" street vendors in search for solutions. These claims were striking as they came from two of the parties that, in the previous term of office, had called for a "firm hand" and had demanded that "no concessions" be made to vendors.

While it is only to be expected that conservative parties will not want to engage in any kind of talk with actors like the street vendors, for the progressive parties this comes at a cost; they are, therefore, forced to assume a voice-giving agenda. In this vignette, that agenda materialized in a race in which candidates tried to capitalize on their "willingness" to talk

rather than on their actual practice and political responsibility of talking, listening, seeing or looking vendors "in the eyes". This debate was, in fact, a profoundly unequal scenario. Speaking turns were unequally distributed. The Union had very little time to clearly state its demands and was given no space to respond to the politicians' proposals and arguments (cf. section 4.1). This putative dialogue ended up banalizing what "talking to" or "being listened to" meant. The goal of having the vendors physically present in the debate appeared to serve the purpose of basically displaying candidates' openness to conversing with them rather than having both parties equally participating in the event. In fact, the tightening of the repression of street vending right after the polls, which got the same mayor elected, proves that the will to "give vendors a voice" was clearly instrumentalized in the pre-election context to confer legitimacy to progressive politicians' stances.

However, it is also true that the actual presence of the vendors was ambivalent in itself. The fact that their voice was hardly heard is telling of its value. Like a huge elephant in the room, it forced politicians to find a difficult balance between ignoring and acknowledging it. The willingness to "talk" that candidates fought over – and the fact that the debate itself took place – underlined their awareness of the potential value of the vendors' voice, a value that was already recognized in wider social fields and that politicians attempted to capitalize on, govern or discipline. That awareness explains, for example, the maneuvering that took place before the debate. Some candidates imposed conditions on their participation; others advertised their presence or absence; still others kept their participation on hold until the last minute (as we could ethnographically attest). So, even if it was not heard, the Union's voice seemed to somehow shape and push the debate forward.

We hope our ethnographic vignette has shown the centrality of the voice as a key emic category that was widely used across the discursive space (Heller 2007). Its empirical saliency, and the multiple tensions that its heterogeneous interpretations and appropriations

generated, compel us to position it as a central category for analysis whose circulation we can empirically trace. In this chapter, we will try to show to what extent the voice as a "potential for political action" (Arendt 2013) is interwoven with the SVU's seeking of "material, cultural and political social justice" (Fraser 2009). To that end, we shall take some narrative elements, i.e., *manta* (blanket), *mantero* (vendor) and *cayuco* (small boat), as analytical categories that we can follow through their embeddedness in various discursive encounters (section 4). Our purpose is to see in what ways what we shall call "hegemonic narrative (b)orders" attempt to subordinate that emergent voice that, in turn, pushes to cross, subvert or destabilize those same (b)orders. After the analysis of those encounters, we will move onto the examination of the discursive features of a particular entextualization of that voice, what we will refer to as "the story of the *mantero*" (section 5). By considering its material and political consequences, we will claim this to be the most autonomous, free-of-(b)order-imposition, and complete version of the Union story. To contextualize all this, we will first offer a succinct description of the circumstances surrounding street vending in Barcelona (section 2) and of the emergence of the SVU, which we will characterize as a social movement (section 2.1). Then we will situate the SVU within a space with multiple actors and interests (section 2.2.). This will be followed by a brief epistemological and theoretical framing of our analytical endeavors (section 3). After the detailed examination of various pieces of narrative data, our conclusions will emphasize the idea that progressive spaces of thought and action (and their narrative orders) are often not fertile grounds for the materialization of a subaltern voice; however, sometimes cracks to these hegemonic orders appear and a newly-enregistered voice pushes to widen the horizons of representative social justice.

2.   African mobility and street vending in Barcelona: A brief contextualization

At the beginning of the 21st century, Spain started to be a final destination for African

postcolonial mobility (Sow 2004) to Europe, and no longer a stop-over country. The

processes of decolonization of African territories with their subsequent conflicts (as in the

case of Western Sahara), and the later economic "restructuring" imposed by the International

Monetary Fund in the 1980s, constitute the structural matrix of African transnational

migration to Europe (Espinosa 2017). Many African states suffer from the plundering of

natural resources by international powers – as happens in Senegal, the country from which

the vast majority of street vendors have migrated. The fishing agreements with the EU have

undermined the artisanal exploitation of shoals that used to be one of the local economic

bases. During the first decade of the 2000s, the unauthorized arrival of black Africans, who

entered Spain in small, precarious boats called *cayucos* (see section 5) via the Canary Islands,

intensified; this became known as "the *cayuco* boat crisis*"*. But as De Genova (2018)

observes, any so-called "migration crisis" calls into question the very systems of migration

control and becomes, actually, a "racial crisis". This contestation of the border regime by

human mobility is the critical perspective that our work seeks to adopt, thus going beyond the

traditional view of structural or push/pull factors. It is by focusing on the subjective practices

of transnational migrants (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013) that we can understand the emergence

of movements such as SVU in its socio-historical context.

In Barcelona, as in every tourism-centered city in Europe, street vending can be seen

along its main avenues[3] – even if not permitted by local and national law. Although the

regulation of street vending has varied over time, at present it is considered a criminal

offence, according to the latest version of the Spanish criminal code, passed in 2015 and

known as *Ley Mordaza* (Gag Law[4]). This means that, if arrested, street vendors can

eventually be imprisoned. However, it must be noted that the penalization of street vending is

not new in Barcelona; persecution hardened as far back as 2005 when a new city ordinance,

the *Ordenança del Civisme* (Civility Ordinance) was passed. All this results in vendors being continually fined by the local police and accumulating not only debt but criminal records. The double persecution (legal and economic) of vendors has a significant impact on them, most of whom are illegalized and racialized African migrants. In fact, the intersection of the criminal code/city ordinance with the *Ley de Extranjería* (Spanish Migration Law) complicates access to legal status, as many vendors end up having criminal offences in their police records. This opens up the possibility of their being detained as a first step to deportation. The combination of legal mechanisms – what De Genova (2004) calls the "legal production of migrant illegality" – condemns vendors to a long-lasting struggle over legalization and against racism and criminalization. Thus, the political organization of vendors becomes necessarily "intersectional" (Crenshaw 1989) as we will explain in the next section.

2a. The Barcelona Street Vendors' Union

The *Sindicato Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes de Barcelona* (Barcelona Street Vendors' Union, henceforth SVU) was created in October 2015. The ascent to city power of BeC, a newly created citizen platform, in May 2015 was viewed by street vendors, activists and allied social movements (mainly anti-racist) as a window of opportunity to open a dialogue with the local authorities. BeC had included in its electoral program a proposal to derogate the local ordinance (mentioned in the previous section) and dissolve the riot branch of the city police. The SVU, which quickly gained legitimacy in the local grassroots political scene as well as visibility in the (social) media, aimed to find alternatives to street vending as well as a fairer regulation of that activity.

The framing of the new movement as a union was linked to the vendors' main material claim to justice, i.e., being recognized as workers, and thus, as subjects able to

negotiate their work conditions with governmental actors. As Delclós (2016) argues, their stigmatized work activity keeps these workers out of mainstream debates about work conditions and secludes them in the realm of "informality". In fact, the racialization of poor and precarious work is constitutive of the new social composition of labor and of its struggles, where the very category of "worker" is in dispute. Paradoxically, however, this being-out-of-the-labor-market condition is a productive place from which a sense of class belonging can be sought outside the traditional apparatuses (Pirita & Sánchez 2015).

The vindication of vendors' work that the SVU undertakes is intermingled with performative political actions where they present themselves not only as workers but also as involved in wider migrant and anti-racist struggles. This intersectionality of class and race constitutes a double articulation of this movement into a form of "social unionism" (Pirita & Sánchez 2015). Following Fraser (2005), it could be argued that the SVU seeks, on the one hand, "redistributive justice" for vendors as workers, and on the one hand, "recognition" (or cultural justice) for them as racialized migrants and postcolonial subjects, thus, ultimately, joining the global fight against racism. But the most relevant dimension for our analytical purposes in this chapter is the third-level dimension of social justice posited by Fraser (2009), i.e., "political or representative justice" (see section 3), which the Union seeks to achieve as a new political actor in the city of Barcelona. In our study, then, we describe the SVU as a hybrid political artifact that combines traditional union demands with social movement practices interweaving the local and the global, as well as the material, the symbolic and the political into one single struggle.

The SVU is popularly known as *sindicato mantero* (Manteros' Union). The adjective *mantero* is a key word that has undergone a process of resignification (Chun 2016), from being a popular and derogatory term for vendors, to adopting new political and cultural values (for a detailed analysis, see section 5). It derives from *manta* because of the blankets

that the vendors employ to carry and display the products they sell in the streets. *Manta* then gives rise to *topmanta,* an expression originated in the 1990s with the popularization of digital audiovisual products, when street vendors sold CDs or DVDs that were copies of music or film hits. Thus, the English *top* in *topmanta* evokes music or video rankings and it is mockingly conjugated with *manta.* Although the type of product sold has evolved to fashion objects (like handbags) and accessories, the expression has remained in use. It is most often employed in a pejorative, even racist sense, to refer both to the activity and to the vendors (the topmanta). In the resignified Union discourse, the *mantero* becomes the political subject of the street vendors' struggle and *topmanta* designates not only the dignified survival job of street vending but also the ability of the Union to create new and autonomous forms of labor for the subsistence of the community.

One key step in that direction was the creation of an autonomous worker co-operative (called TopManta) for the design and production of clothing and accessories. This co-op project aims to improve vendors' material circumstances and solve their legal hurdles through self-employment. But this project also serves to achieve other political goals such as the possibility of questioning and altering the criminalized image of the *mantero* through the telling of their own story in their own terms, that is, by "having an (autonomous) voice" (see section 5). In this chapter, we use "*mantero*" in its abstract political significance, and "union member", "unionists" or "(self-)organized vendors" to refer to the group of street vendors who are politically engaged in the Union; "(street) vendors", in turn, refer to the rest of the community (although often represented by the organized ones). It must be noted that the population of street vendors is a changing one, not only because of uneven tourist flows but also as a result of unsteady labor demands and the fluctuating rhythms of migration. Needless to say, racialization and criminalization obscure the visibility of vendors. Either way, describing the vendor community as such is beyond the scope of our study. Rather, we focus

on the group of vendors who articulated themselves in the Union described above and, in so doing, entered new political processes.

2b. The discursive space of street vending

As Porras and Espinosa (2016) show, the attempts at regulating informal street work in Barcelona have systematically failed; and, when they have succeeded, it was only through demobilizing or co-opting self-organization. Very soon after their election in 2015, the self-proclaimed "government of change" (BeC) ended up writing the latest page of that history of failures. The newly-elected cabinet continued the fierce persecution of street vending using the Civility Ordinance and the riot branch of the city police, thus failing to deliver on one of their main electoral promises (see section 2). And while that happened, large segments of the public opinion continued to see them as the "friends" of street vendors. That image was carefully built by the opposition parties, mainstream media and the local commerce, which viewed the ascent to power of BeC as a threat to the established order. A political-media battle started on the issue of street vending in which BeC yielded to pressure by hardening police controls. So, street vendors' black bodies became the field on which the battle over city power was fought.

Taking these dynamics as our site of ethnographic-participant observation,[5] we draw on Heller's (2007) idea of "discursive space" to delineate a space where access to discursive resources and tensions about whose account is more valuable determine social actors' positions and the value of those positions. Within this discursive space, we observe, on the one hand, the struggles among the powerful actors in the city, i.e., mainstream media, businesses, police and the various political parties - including the party in office. On the other hand, we witness the emergence of the Union as a new political voice pushing to make its way into that space and to actively participate in the discursive struggle despite the vendors'

racialization and silencing. These have been the main speaking parties in an openly conflictive dialectics. Characterizing street vending as a city "public order issue", the first group of actors have harnessed discourses such as "tax evasion", "security and coexistence", or "improper occupation" of the so-called "public space". The SVU counter-discursive activity, in turn, has been carried out by the vendors themselves and a series of allies. Right at the center of the space, however, we observe the struggle of the organized vendors to be able to construct a discourse of their own. This chapter will focus on examining one portion of that discursive struggle, more specifically, the attempts by the progressive actors to impose their discursive (b)orders in the act of "giving voice" to the vendors.

In the next section, we will expound our general thinking around the notion of voice drawing on a number of theories from various disciplines in the social sciences. We shall also present our theoretical and analytical tools, taken from the fields of critical sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, which allow us to operationalize the concept of voice and empirically trace the processes through which it gets materialized.

3. Our theoretical and epistemological approach

"Voice" is an under-defined concept from a linguistic/discursive perspective – where it is often reduced to the act of speaking and/or to the provision of an individual point of view. Our take on the notion of voice, by contrast, goes beyond that rather reductionist stance. Drawing on contemporary thought in the fields of philosophy, anthropology and communication studies we characterize voice as something that occurs between constraints and possibilities in socially established orders. More specifically, in our study, voice is understood as the process by which certain claims to justice enter the public debate. This view enables us to shed light on the SVU's discursive possibilities and strategies for political action, as well as on the many (b)orders it encounters and their nature.

Since the fabric of voice is woven in interaction, the materialization of the Union's voice and its emergence in the discursive space is the outcome of different interdiscursive encounters where street vendors have to "give an account of themselves", what Butler (2015) defines as the act of taking responsibility by narrating one's life in front of others who ask for it. The narrative form of the account implies not only a plot but the presence of an audience that has to be persuaded. The "you" that asks the "I" for accountability, Butler argues, needs to consider the agency of the "I", whose precondition is "having a voice", in other words, having the narrative capacity to produce that account. But the "you" interpellates the "I" from "historically changing horizons of intelligibility" (Butler 2005: 134) ruled by norms and values of narrativity. These are the normativities that we dissect in this chapter. Along similar lines, Malkki's seminal fieldwork on misheard refugee accounts also focuses on the analytical relevance of the audience. For this author, the notion of voice is linked to narrative authority, that is, "the authority to give credible narrative evidence or testimony about their own condition in politically and institutionally consequential forums" (1996: 378).

The SVU fight to have a voice of their own is inscribed into those horizons of intelligibility or instances of interpellation that will, to a large extent, determine what is credible and what is not. As we shall see, the main type of narrative evidence that the *manteros* offer to give an account of their own circumstances is the structural and historical link between colonialism and racism. However, their audiences often only validate their personal experience, a depoliticized and dehistoricized version of the story (see biographization in section 4.1). These are audiences that treat *manteros* as victims and not as political subjects. But, as Butler advances, the norms of narrativity can be critically discussed in the search for intelligibility, thus giving way to new subjectivities. It is through that process of critique that the SVU forges its autonomous voice. This issue is intimately linked to the political dimension of social justice put forth by Fraser (2009).

Fraser conceptualizes the political dimension of justice as tied to representation, that is, as the possibility of equally participating in a political space and in its procedures, that is, in the mode of political deliberation. Representation entails an elucidation of *who* counts as the subject of justice and *what* the appropriate framing is for this subject's constitution and justice claims. What Fraser calls "parity of political participation" (2009) is the democratization of the process of establishing the proper frame within which to consider questions of social justice. Thus, Fraser's politics of framing are the "efforts to establish and consolidate, to contest and revise, the authoritative division of the political space" (2009: 18). As we will see, the normative national framing imposed on *manteros*, which relegates them to a position lying between criminality and victimization, is contested through the SVU's historical and transnational narrative, as an attempt at redefining the rules and practices of political participation in the city of Barcelona (section 4.1). Likewise, the denial of racism (in favor of classism or other political framings) rejects the validity and legitimacy of the *manteros'* main historical demand (section 4.2). In all these cases, "having a voice" amounts to attempting to participate equally in the politics of framing and for the organized vendors to constitute themselves as subjects of justice in a globalized world.

In the realm of sociolinguistics, the concept of voice is intimately related to the notion of inequality. Thus, Blommaert (2005) dissects the conditions of possibility of one's voice. He proposes a theory of voice that draws on the tension between success and failure in trying to make oneself understood. The balance depends on the available discursive resources that speakers deploy in interaction. Blommaert analyzes the nature and effect of those resources in the context of the totally asymmetrical interaction that occurs between asylum seekers and migration control officers, who gatekeep the access of the former to European legal protection through complex processes of institutional entextualization. Voice stands for "the capacity to accomplish functions of linguistic resources translocally, across different

physical and social spaces. Voice, in other words, is the capacity for semiotic mobility" (2005: 69). If that semiotic mobility does not occur, Blommaert considers it to be a failure and he identifies "pretextual gaps" (Maryns and Blommaert 2002) as the reason for the resulting "narrative inequality" (Blommaert 2001).

But the political potential of voices such as those of the Union and its attempt at enregisterment (Agha 2005) also draw on entextualization as one way to ensure the circulation of their alternative political framing (section 5). In our study, thus, the notion of entextualization can adopt liberationist overtones that are absent in the work previously cited. For this reason, while the notion is understood in the literature as "...the process by which circulable texts are produced by extracting discourse from its original context and reifying it as a bounded object [...] [it being] an indispensable mechanism for the construction of institutional authority" (Park & Bucholtz 2009: 485), our case study requires expanding the concept to a political praxis that aims to intervene in the discursive space by constructing a voice worth hearing. This semiotic praxis is misaligned with respect to the stereotyped criminal and illegal migrant. By enacting an emergent and positive figure of personhood, that of the *mantero,* the narrative entextualization that we dissect in section 5 - as an example of the SVU wider practice of constructing texts - seeks to expand the cultural values added to the hegemonic registers of vendors and transnational African migrants (Agha 2003).

Similarly, in the kind of interactions we analyze in section 4, where the voice is elicited according to the unequal distribution of discursive resources (especially narrative ones) the notion of pretextual gaps requires a theoretical extension. Defined as "socially anchored and often invisible differences between what is expected in communication and what people can bring and deploy" (Maryns and Blommaert 2002: 11), pretextual gaps are considered to embody an unbridgeable narrative distance causing a failure in the attempt at making oneself understood. In our examples, while failure is still a possibility, it is the gap

between a synchronic (dominant) and a diachronic (alternative) vision of the same social reality that defines each actor's position and account. In other words, it is by grabbing a chronotopical contrast – opposing depictions of time-space-personhood (Agha 2007) – that the Union defends its voice in uneven participatory frameworks.

The uneven distribution of narrative resources between migration officers and asylum seekers has been conceptualized by Blommaert through the idea of "narrative inequality" (2001). While this concept is useful to show structural forms of injustice articulated by narrative circulation, entextualization and language ideologies, it fails to capture the possible strategies that migrants might apply in their favor in the process of construction of a new political subjectivity. We imagine narrativity as an "order" or even a "border" that can be contested or crossed by migrants' subjective practices. This is the kind of process we observe in encounters between the organized vendors and journalists, activists and scholars (section 4) where the authorized positions of these actors impose narrative (b)orders to Union accounts, while unionists struggle to keep their voice out of those and orient it to new registers. In a similar vein, the "speechlessness" or "muteness" of refugees depicted in the humanitarian discourse that Malkki describes does not exactly correspond with the "not committed listening" processes that we want to shed light on. Again, there is a difference in subject production. While the refugee is constituted in the realm of humanitarian aid, the *mantero* emerges from assembly-driven, autonomous, anti-racist and anti-colonial politics. But probably the most relevant difference has to do with cultural politics.

Indeed, as we have advanced in the opening vignette, current progressive stances towards migrant and subaltern voices need to display a willingness to listen to them. In other words, silencing, muting or practicing any form of explicit narrative inequality in the public space puts the legitimacy of left-wing politicians and progressive sectors at risk. We claim that the path adopted to keep (b)orders active is the politics of "giving voice". This idea can

be better understood in relation to what Couldry (2010) calls "apparent spaces for voice" created by market rules in our neoliberal media-saturated age. In this context, the individual himself and his personal stories are the ones that become valuable commodities. But the counter-neoliberal narratives have no room to emerge in those spaces and this is why they are just apparent spaces of voice; otherwise, the real voice would "interrupt" the neoliberal narrative (Couldry 2010: 2). We think it is in this very scenario that the Union − as it tells a counter-narrative − has to push to have a voice even when it is supposedly given the opportunity to do so. This is what we will try to show in what follows.

4. Attempting to give unionists a voice

The attempts at materializing the Union's voice often get entangled in a web of dissimilar interests. The physical presence of SVU members in the communicative events to which they are invited can be explained in relation to those intersecting endeavors. While part of the Union's struggle is discursive − to convey the message of colonialism and racism as a historical continuum − for other actors, such as journalists, politicians or even academics, the need to have vendors' first-person testimonies may not mean an actual will to listen to that message. In the next pages, we will show some examples of what happens to the Union story when it gets inserted into others' attempts to give them a voice. These forms of elicitation by different actors in the discursive space imply deracializing, dehistorizing and biographizing discursive moves.

4a. Between victimhood and criminality: Individual biographizing as a narrative (b)order

The activist and MP we introduced in the opening vignette, also a founder of a refugee solidarity organization, is a public figure especially concerned with "giving the Union a

voice" and during the last few years he has been making efforts in that direction. Using his position and visibility, he voiced the *mantero* struggle in the media or by organizing discussions such as the political debate we showed in the opening vignette. He usually presents himself as one of the few people who listens to the vendors; he imagines the *manteros* as vulnerable subjects that need advocacy (Wagensberg 2018). In December 2018, he and one of the Union's spokespersons were interviewed on the Catalan national TV channel.[6] Expectedly, the activist deployed his role as *mantero* defender and "voice giver" when he first took the floor to introduce the reason for the interview: having the opportunity to listen to "a group that is frequently talked about but rarely listened to".[7] He was construed (and construed himself) as an expert, speaking about vendors' legal problems in third person, denying rumors of criminality around them, and even exposing their decisions, desires or goals. The pre-electoral dimension was also left to him to discuss. He foregrounded the failures and responsibilities of both the Barcelona city hall and the Spanish government. Meanwhile, the Union member's contributions were confined to answering questions about his individual life experiences, as we will see in the next section.[8]

The form of biographizing called for by journalists tends to foreground individual accounts rather than collective, structural problems that might be denounced through one's life experience. Union members are often asked to narrate the same lived episodes by answering questions from a personal - often intimate - angle, which fluctuates between victimhood and criminality. Unionists are compelled to perform imposed forms of social personhood, either the always-migrant persona (through detailed re-telling of their suffering journey) or the always-vendor one (through the scrutiny of their work and living conditions). A case in point is the interview we examine here, in which the always-migrant framing is imposed right from the beginning. Even when the arrival of the interviewee happened more than a decade ago, the decision to migrate still needs to be explained. Interviewed unionist's

effort to escape this narrative (b)order is clear in the next excerpt, where he repositions himself from migrant to citizen status, and he moves from an individual to a collective frame, from forced to autonomous decision-making, from personal to historical reasons:

J: journalist; UM: union member[9]

J: *tú eres de Senegal/ naciste en Senegal\ por qué te fuiste de tu país/*

J: you're from Senegal/ you were born in Senegal\ why did you leave your country/

UM: *bueno\ yo:::\ llego aquí hace 12 años/ ((sonriendo)) [...] me considero parte de esta ciudad/ porque llevo aquí::/ desde los 16 años\ [...] yo era un alumno rebelde/ [...] me castigaban/ por no hablar francés\ [...] lo que nos enseñaban/ de los libros que estudiábamos\ la cultura francesa/ lo más bonito/ nunca te dicen que\ [...] nos han quitado la riqueza/ [...] muchos de los compañeros han venido aquí/ por lo que nos enseñan\ ...*

UM: well\ I:::\ I got here 12 years ago/ ((smiling)) [...] I consider myself part of this city/ because I've been he::re/ since I was 16\ [...] I was a rebel student/ [...] they punished me/ for not speaking French\ [...] what they taught us/ from the books we studied\ French culture/ the most beautiful/ they never tell you what\ [...] they've taken our wealth away from us/ [...] many mates have come here/ because of what they teach us\ ...

The Union member's answer was longer than we can possibly show here. For example, at one point, he attributed the lack of jobs in Senegal to Europe's extracting activities (see section 2). This point led him to ironically comment on the claims that migrants take Europeans' jobs away, suggesting that it is actually the other way round. Indeed, irony is the

main strategy employed by the unionist to contest imposed (b)orders in this particular interaction. The unionist's historically grounded account of the reasons to migrate did not fit the narrativity norm expected to be fulfilled by the answer; so, the journalist deactivated it by repeating the question, insisting in the search for a personal reason:

J*: ... y te vas/ por qué/ porque no ves futuro/*

J: ... and you leave/ why/ because you see no future/

Questions such as "why did you abandon your country", "how old were you by then", "what did your parents say about it", recreate the well-known stereotype of the migrant who runs away. Within this narrative (b)order, the narrative elements that always circulate in SVU interactions (i.e. Senegal, the *cayuco*, the *manta*) lack the political depth of the Union story when it is autonomously constructed (as we will see in section 5), as they were appropriated and construed by the journalist. Thus, Senegal is just the poor place to be abandoned and the *cayuco* a means for running away as an irrational child. Since being sixteen is problematic for the horizon of intelligibility the journalist was asking from, the responsibility of his family was also evoked in another part of the interview. Trying to redirect the account towards a larger picture, the Union spokesperson's answer pointed to a different abandonment, i.e. that of the Spanish State regarding unaccompanied migrant children. He collectivized his personal experience, denouncing the impossibility of accessing a residence permit when minors come of age and the state protection ends.

As we just said, the roles alternate. A migrant is both a victim and a law breaker who acts illegally in order to land and stay in Europe. The explicit reference to *mafias* in the next excerpt reframes the decision to migrate in that oscillating (b)order. As in the previous case,

the answer was unexpected and constituted a new attempt to keep autonomy in the center of the debate:

J: *tú/ tuviste que paga:r a::\ a alguien/ a alguna mafia/ para hacer este viaje\ para llegar hasta aquí/*

J: did you/ have to pa::y so::m\ somebody/ some mafia/ to do this journey\ to get here/

UM: *no hay mafia/ yo no lo veo mafia\ [...] yo:::\ estuve trabajando/ [...] ahorrando dinero\ y:::\ yo mismo/ tomé mi decisión/ de viajar/ de buscar dónde tengo que ir/ [...] pagué el viaje/ y:::\ vine aquí*

UM: there is no mafia/ I don't see a mafia\ [...] I:::\ worked/ [...] and saved money\ a::nd\ I myself/ made the decision/ to travel/ to find out where I had to go/ [...] I paid my journey/ a:nd\ came here\

We again see how the unionist rejected the narrativity norms imposed and vindicated his unconstrained decision to migrate. Later in the interview, the interviewee's vendor identity was introduced through the following question: "how did you end up becoming a street vendor?", where the use of the verb "end up" permeates street vending with a sense of it being a morally inappropriate course of action only justifiable out of desperation. Again, the realm of victimhood evokes the inability to make a better decision. Despite the efforts of Union member to causally expose the historical and political reasons linking colonialism, illegalized migration and racism with street vending, and after conceptualizing it as a collective solution chosen by the Senegalese community, what remains for the journalist is a dubious activity that needs scrutiny. Questions such as "how much money do you earn?" or, "what do you spend it on?" create a hierarchical social interaction where the upper position −

that of the journalist − is legitimized to ask whatever it takes to clear up suspicions, and ultimately reinforces the victim-criminal frame. In turn, the lower-positioned interlocutor − the migrant-vendor in this case − has some of his elementary rights, such as a person's right to privacy, not respected. Once again, irony worked as a way out when unionist answered that his daily earnings depended on police persecution; the money they earned, he insisted, they spent back in Barcelona, as a reminder that he and his community are also part of the city.

What we are trying to argue in this section is that journalism, even when it aims to listen to the voice of the Union, tends to present facts in a flat, static, frozen-in-time chronotope. This has implications for the perceived production of subjectivity, if we consider the notion of subjectivity as one "which oscillates between the subject as subjected by power and the subject as imbued with the power to transcend the processes of subjection that have shaped it" (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 83). While becoming autonomous political subjects is the most remarkable outcome in the Union's version of story (see section 5), media portraits build on two static images: the "distant sufferer" (Chouliaraki 2006) who arrives in the *cayuco*; and the "illegitimate outsider" (Hepworth 2016: 30) who dares to sell pirated goods in the *manta*. Here, *cayuco* and *manta* appear as disconnected elements and are considered only in their negative value: the first one as linked to risk, mafia and illegal border crossing, and the second one as an issue of public (dis)order. The loss of dynamism in this elicitation leaves no room for causality relations among narrative blocks (unlike what we will see in the Union version, section 5), but most importantly, it erases political activism, unionism and cooperativism. A sort of chronotopical lag is created that constantly relocates Union members back to the sea or in the streets.

The focus on the suffering and the problematic versions of the *cayuco* and the *manta* is not exclusive of journalism, though. Progressive politicians tend to take the same stance, particularly in a (pre)election context such as the one under scrutiny in our ethnography. This

was also the case during the YouTube pre-election debate cited in our initial ethnographic vignette. By the time of the debate, the same "voice-giver" activist and organizer considered that there had been enough talking *about* street vendors and that the time had come to talk *to* them. The event was widely promoted on social media with the name of *Debate Mantero*; it was broadcasted live and covered by several local and national news corporations. Despite that, the unionists themselves - as representatives of street vendors - were the least represented actors, in a very unbalanced distribution of the floor. Although, this time, the activist kept behind the scenes, he managed to have the same journalist we analyzed above back to moderate the event and to recreate, six months later, the same personal questions with the same Union spokesperson in the initial ten minutes of the debate. Being interpellated again as an individual victim rather than as a representative of a political organization, this kind of biographical elicitation left little room for unionist to deploy his political subjectivity in front of the mayor and other candidates. He was again left to the difficult task of overcoming, in his answers, the narrative (b)order being imposed on him.

The situated structuring of the event and the timing of contributions advantaged politicians and disadvantaged the unionists. While politicians had an initial round of turns to define their position in relation to street vending and took another one after each unionist's turn, the Union members had only one - and shorter - chance to articulate everything they wanted to say; this was an almost impossible mission taking into consideration the multiple discursive threads and issues at stake. So, the very structure of the event worked to silence the Union's voice that struggled to convey the message of colonialism, structural racism and police violence as the explanatory grounds for their situation and as point of departure for any eventual discussion or negotiation among political parties.

The proposals of the different candidates cited in the debate revolved around welcome and integration policies, on the one hand, and the regulation of public space (or the

disciplining of vendors), on the other. As in the media interview analyzed earlier, two difficult-to-reconcile versions of the figure of the *mantero*, i.e. the victim and the criminal, underlay these proposals: politicians' accounts did not acknowledge causality, as the *manta* was not considered a consequence of illegalized postcolonial migration (unlike in the story told by the Union, section 5). This point was made especially clear by the social democratic party candidate, when he first took the floor and laid his foundations for the debate: to separate the "*topmanta* phenomenon" from "the migration phenomenon". The left-wing mayor, along with the Catalan Republican center-left and centre/right-wing candidates, defended an increase in police control together with socio-labor insertion programs. Tellingly, the silencing of the Union's present time and their already found alternatives ran throughout the debate. In fact, none of those present pronounced, not even once, the words "union", "cooperative" or "TopManta Project". This way, the debate imposed, once again, the just-arrived-migrant and the always-street-vendor chronotopical figures that worked to invisibilize their current anti-racist activist, unionist and coop partner forms of personhood.

4b. The denial of racism

In addition to journalists and politicians, some leftist, politically committed academics also tend to focus exclusively on the *manta* element of the story, but with a different goal. They want to contest the disciplinary discourse (and practice) of not permitting certain activities in common/public spaces. But, like the rest, these attempts also erase the dynamic nature of the story by not considering the historical causality, the vendors' organization around the Union or the TopManta Project. This is because this contestation also relies on the always-vendor chronotopical persona who does not evolve but ultimately dignifies the vending practice. The *mantero* that some intellectuals imagine is someone who, through vending, contests the capitalist system by widening imaginable forms of working and living.

One notable case is that of a critical Catalan anthropologist whose theories have been largely cited in studies of exclusion strategies in urban contexts. His presence is even required in grassroots debates about the current persecution of street vending. "The mantero embodies the truth of the street as opposed to the lie of a public space that, incidentally, does not exist any longer, since everything in it has been privatised,"[10] he said in the progressive-liberal newspaper *El País* (Delgado and Espinosa, 2018).

In March 2019, the anthropologist and a few colleagues gathered with some of the Union's representatives for a public debate[11] organized by a migrant squat in the inner-city neighborhood of Raval. The anthropologist began by stating his willingness to talk *about* vendors' persecution, as a "civil servant"[12] (indexing his professional "duty"), but not *on behalf of* them: "only the vendors are interested in solving the vendors' problems",[13] he said, claiming to quote Marx. He confessed to a "certain feeling of imposture" in deploying a voice considered worth hearing. As in the pre-election debate, the voice appears as an ambivalent category that forces interlocutors to take a stance. In his attempt to answer the question, "why are street vendors persecuted?", the anthropologist challenged the concept of public space in advanced democracies; according to him, the mere presence of the street vendors questions the supposedly democratic and egalitarian values attached to that idealized notion of public space, which, in fact, obscures the capitalist operations behind the persecution of vendors (and of poverty more generally).

This synchronic and economy-focused view of the problem contrasted with the diachronic and subjectively vivid experience of racism that the Union's voice, once again, exposed. For the anthropologist, police persecution is caused solely by the unexpected presence of poor people in a highly commodified space; thus, for him, the color line does not cross-cut the criminalization of vendors. To reinforce this argument, he cited the migratory experience of his parents' generation, from southern Spain to Catalonia. Escaping poverty,

they were also detained and deported despite their national status. This way, the persecution of the *manteros* was re-affiliated to a different History: a homogeneous war against the poor. An explicit denial of racism was conveyed through the anthropologist's ironic and deracializing statement addressed to unionists: "if you were US Marines, you wouldn't have any problems."

By contrast, for the Union, the long history of segregation of African peoples explains the legitimation of police violence on their bodies: "racism has forgotten history,"[14] said one of the Union's spokespersons present. A careful reading of this encounter allows us to observe that, even in a climate of collusion and comradery, a deep, ineffable disagreement lies: that of class vs race as the proper frame to discuss the *mantero* stigma. Despite the initial respectful position towards the Union's voice taken by the anthropologist, he ended up deliberately denying the Union's main argument and reframing the discussion along the social class axis, which, according to his authorized speech, was the appropriate one. This way, the anthropologist did not acknowledge the relevance of intersectionality - which black politics has historically claimed for the specificity of their oppressions.

All through this section, the most salient narrative (b)order is related to what Bucholtz (following Squires) considers a case of "indexical bleaching", used as a technique of deracialization, that is, a process through which an indexical form loses its racial affiliation (2016: 275). In this case, the figure of the *mantero* is not recognized as a racialized political subject but as an ambivalent victim-criminal figure or an embodiment of street poverty. By explicitly deauthorising or reframing unionists' claims and even by not naming the Union itself and its political work, the voice of the Union does not get to index historical and structural intersecting systems of oppression and subordination. That way, the topic is not even discussed, thwarting the SUV's aspired parity of political participation. In what follows we will analyze the attempts at enregistering an alternative voice indexing a political

subjectivity that fights for narrative authorization and legitimation, and ultimately, parity of participation in the public discursive space of Barcelona.

5. The story of the *mantero*: A politically resignified voice

After the failure of their negotiations with the municipal authorities in 2015-16 and the toughening of police persecution, Union members and their allies started a process of rethinking their struggle. As we have advanced, they came up with the idea of organizing themselves as a worker cooperative. This was considered to be the most feasible option, and one that was coherent with their communitarian philosophy. The cooperative would not only be a means of economic survival but also a way to solve the legal issues they faced, most notably in relation to obtaining a work and residence permit. Yet creating the cooperative would not be a rapid or easy process. After a period of collecting money by offering cheap Senegalese food in street fairs and other grassroot events, they managed to print a small number of t-shirts with a design of what would eventually become their clothing brand's logo (see Fig. 12.1b). Soon after, in the summer of 2017, the brand was launched. This move was certainly surprising for the general public and it was widely covered on (social) media. Following the advice of designers, the brand logo represented three elements at once: the *manta*, the *cayuco* (see section 2) and the sea waves of their migration journey. After a battle against the Spanish Patent Office, they were finally allowed to name their brand TopManta. This provocative gesture was a key initial step in the process of anti-racist resignification (Chun 2016).

The idea of the brand caught the attention of the department of social impact and innovation of a digital cultural magazine. This media outlet offered unionists basic training on fashion design and brand communication. A few months later, a designer line of tote bags, t-shirts and sweatshirts came to light. They had original designs printed on them that

synthesized the story of the *mantero* (see Fig. 12.1a-e). The project was then ready to be launched on a Spanish crowdfunding platform. A set of promotional videos and a social media campaign publicized the initiative; the main TV, radio and digital channels also interviewed the SVU spokespersons. Thus, the circulation of this version of the story was transmedial and multimodal. The fast and unexpected big success of the fundraising (it was supported by almost two thousand five hundred people from all over Spain and Europe) allowed the kickoff of the project. Contributors received a piece of clothing containing a piece of a story. From then on, in a small shop located on an alleyway in the district of Raval hangs a TopManta sign. There the Union continues its political work while printing and selling t-shirts.

These designs are an excellent semiotic site for analysis. The story is condensed in five very simple images (see Fig. 12.1a-e) that work as visual metaphors (Feng & O'Halloran 2013) along with the short texts that accompany the images and that serve as emic interpretations of each image. It is when analytically placing these elements in a temporal relationship that a narrative structure (Lavob 2010) emerged, one that was very similar to the biographizing accounts analyzed in section 4.1. However, this entextualization of the Union story added to its structure key political values that did not usually appear in the media elicitations, thus, reappropriating it performatively (Chun 2016) as an alternative way to gain narrative authority. This analytical instance is also meaningful from an emic perspective, because it includes what the SVU considers the capacity of the *mantero* to surprise, a stage of overcoming adversity in their struggle for rights (see Fig. 12.1e). This aspect also works as a sort of moral conclusion or "coda" from a classic narrative perspective (Labov & Waletzky 1997). The analysis of this multimodal production of the voice allows us to see a rich ambivalence of meanings and causality relations in its added values that distinguishes this articulation of the story from those elicited by the mainstream media.

The story plot can be rewoven as this: a set of little colored houses (Fig. 12.1a) stand for the union members' geographical origin, Senegal; the already mentioned logo (Fig. 12.1b) represents the sea journey to Europe; an unfolded blanket or *manta* with its ropes - as used for vending -- with the motto: "legal clothing, illegal people"(Fig. 12.1c)[15] symbolizes the *mantero*'s means of survival but also the reason why he is persecuted; a black sad face with a tear running down (Fig. 12.1d) embodies the hardness of illegalized and racialized migrants' survival; and a *mantero* carrying the folded *manta* over his shoulders (Fig. 12.1e) is the main character in the storytelling and the agent of the final achievement, i.e. the overcoming of adversity, represented by the brand's logo and name.

Figure 12.1a

Las casitas [son] un símbolo de buena convivencia y de solidaridad mutua [...] puedes invitar a los vecinos y en unas horas te hacen la estructura. Para acabarla, haces otra convocatoria [...] Y la recompensa es solamente un buen café y unos granos de cacahuete en un ambiente de amistad y de fraternidad consolidada

The little houses symbolize peaceful coexistence and mutual solidarity [...] you can invite your neighbours and in a few hours they build the structure. To finish it, you gather them together again [...] And the reward is only a nice cup of coffee and some peanuts in an atmosphere of friendship and consolidated fraternity

Figure 12.1b

Cuando las grandes empresas multinacionales acapararon nuestros mares con grandes barcos, la mayoría de los pescadores no podían ganarse la vida por culpa de esa forma de pesca ilegal [...] que no dejaba nada en su camino. Razón para la que los jóvenes cogieron los cayucos para venir en Europa
(...)
TopManta es una marca con una historia profunda y real, es una marca solidaria, de resistencia y creativa que lucha contra la desigualdad, la discriminación y tiene por objetivo crear empleo (.)

When the big multinationals took everything from our seas on their big boats, the majority of fishermen could not earn a living because of that form of illegal fishing [...] that would not leave anything behind. This is the reason why young men took the cayucos to come to Europe (...)

TopManta is a brandname with a deep and real history, it is a solidarity brand, a creative brand of resistance that fights inequality, discrimination and has as its goal to create jobs, legalize the people forgotten by

legalizar a personas olvidadas por la sociedad donde viven [...] lleva el nombre Top Manta para dignificarlo y cambiar la mirada [...] lo cual provocó una gran sorpresa cuando se creó esta maravillosa iniciativa

the society where they live [...] it bears the name Top Manta to dignify it and shift the gaze [...] which caused a great surprise when this wonderful initiative was created

Figure 12.1c

La manta es una tela de cuatro puntas liadas con una cuerda que forma un nudo para sujetar y escapar lo más rápido posible. Es el medio de soporte, la compañera fiel, la oportunidad de trabajar para todas estas personas que están excluidas del sistema laboral

The blanket is a four-point piece of cloth connected by a rope tied in a knot to hold and escape as quickly as possible. It is our means of living, our faithful companion, the opportunity to work for all those people who are excluded from the labor system
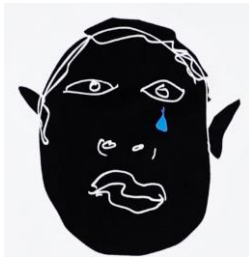

Figure 12.1d

La cara expresa la dureza del trabajo tanto en el plano físico como en el plano psicológico. Siempre vas cargado con una manta muy pesada y también muy nervioso por vigilar a la policía [...] la gota se podría interpretar a la vez como una lágrima o sudor de un guerrero luchador que está condenado a vivir en esta situación solamente por la falta de un papel

the face expresses the harshness of work, both physically and psychologically. You always carry a heavy blanket and are always anxious to spot the police forces [...] the drop could be interpreted both as a tear or as a sweatdrop of a fighting warrior that is forced to live in this situation only because he's missing a document

Figure 12.1e

El mantero es un refugiado económico que se fugó de una tierra llena de recursos naturales que sigue explotada por el colono [...] está expuesto a todo tipo de peligros, por ejemplo, abusos policiales, persecución, detención, encarcelación y multas [...] A pesar de todas estas dificultades, se resistió y decidió formar un sindicato mantero para luchar contra la manipulación mediática, [y por] sus derechos fundamentales; y creó una marca que sorprendió a todas aquellas gentes que tenían en mente que el mantero era una persona con las manos vacías y la mente vacía

The mantero is an economic refugee that fled a land full of natural resources that continues to be exploited by colonial settlers [...] he is exposed to all kinds of dangers, such as police abuse, persecution, detention, imprisonment and fines [...] In spite of all these difficulties, he resisted and decided to create a vendor union to fight media manipulation, [and for] his fundamental rights; and created a brand that surprised all those that thought that mantero was a person with empty hands and an empty mind

Although disseminated in a politically unconventional way, we claim that each of these narrative elements is not part of an individual story, but a socio-historically situated and political statement. This is clearly visible in the short texts written to describe the designs for the online shop.[16] One of the most interesting features of this storytelling is the ambivalence of its elements, as each of them articulates at least two distinct meanings. The colored houses − representing the traditional Senegalese form of communitarian construction − are more than a reminder of the land left behind because of its devastation. A metaphor for the *mantero* heritage and a key element in the symbolic construction of their identity, this design conveys values that the Union often holds up as exemplary to Westerners: the exchange of goods and tasks based on community work, as opposed to the individualism of a market-based economy. This moral representation of Senegal is part of a larger counterargument that tends to challenge the land of misery represented in media biographizations.

 The suffering entailed by the journey (the *cayuco* and the sea waves) also incarnates determination, autonomy and freedom of movement. The *cayuco* contests not only the European border regime but also the lack of work and resources in Senegal produced by multinational intervention; it represents an effective exercise of the "right to escape" (Mezzadra 2005), moving away from any victimization or criminalization reading of migrants' sea arrival.

The street vending (the *manta*) is not only the reason why *manteros* are persecuted and criminalized; it is their symbol of resistance and survival. It represents an alternative way of life and legitimate subsistence that the Senegalese community practices and that is grounded on their solidarity networks. It is the symbol of contestation of the legal inner borders that regulate work and space occupation; it represents an effective exercise of the "right to the city" (Harvey 2003).

The black sad face and the *mantero* are thought of as two sides of the same coin. The first one stands for racist violence, persecution, and the hardness of their work, represented by the weight of the blanket and the tear on a black sad face. The other side is the need for political organization, i.e., the Union and the projects that came out of it, and the *mantero* becoming a political subject.

Finally, as for the brand name and idea − the "surprise" of the *mantero* − they recall that this is not just a commercial project, but a political, symbolic and material one.

It is important to highlight the causal links among these narrative elements. Causality is the basis on which the re-historicization and re-politicization of the account is constructed. Each element in the story is the cause for the next one and those causes are historical-political. They can only be read as a continuum that started in Senegal and its process of (de)colonization; from this, a number of consequences derive. As an example, when they state that the *manteros* formed a Union and created a brand, they are pointing at their autonomous search for alternatives in order to overcome a legal system that excludes migrants from the regular labor market and, also, at the historical segregation of black people; in so doing, they are linking the *cayuco*, the *manta* and the *mantero* elements.

To recap, what we have tried to show in our analysis is that, in the case of the SVU, an autonomous voice is constructed through the political and semiotic re-appropriation of narrative elements. This is the way in which the *manteros* make themselves intelligible in multiple instances of interpellation. Following Butler, we can claim that with the political depth added to their story in the process of re-appropriation, the horizons of intelligibility widen, and the SVU's enregistered voice gets inscribed into the political and discursive space of the city of Barcelona.

6. Final remarks: Narrative (b)orders and "crossing" practices

Throughout this chapter we have tried to demonstrate that the practices of "giving voice" that characterize many a progressive endeavor are not neutral; on the contrary, they can actually encapsulate ways of doing that do not recognize the voice of the other, do not listen to them and do not establish any dialogue with them. In that case, the parity of political participation is called into question. Yet, we have also shown that it is necessary to analyze the specific shape of these discursive processes in close detail since, although they might end up silencing certain enregistered voices, they are quite different from the typical silencing strategies of the conservative sectors − which, as we have discussed, often criminalize vendors through false arguments (i.e., by stating that they are violent people or that they belong to a mafia-like organization) − nor do they have the same practical and symbolic consequences. In that sense, we discussed the ambivalence inherent in the politics of voice-giving: on the one hand, the voice-givers come across as well-intentioned actors whose privileged position in the discursive space remains, however, unaltered; at the same time, in the process of voice-giving (or rather of voice-getting) several cracks might open that will bring to the fore the contradictions involved. These are also the cracks through which the autonomous voice of the subaltern other might leak − as we clearly saw in the media interviews examined − and bring taken-for-granted narrative hegemonies into the open.

Our contribution to the sociolinguistic literature, then, goes beyond the detailed examination of subject positions in unequal power relations. Instead, we have underscored the multi-faceted, complex, and indeed capillary, manifestation of processes of oppression and subordination, in this case within the space inhabited by relatively progressive political parties and socially committed activists and academics. Our second analytical focus has been placed on the discursive trajectories and strategies of politicized subaltern actors, such as the members of the SVU analyzed in this chapter. While there has been abundant research on how migrants or refugees are subject to different forms of institutional power and control

(border, linguistic, legal, educational, etc.) that severely constrain their chances of "speaking" or "being heard", in this chapter we have attempted to understand what happens when subaltern actors attempt to cross those boundaries and take the floor. We have examined the ways in which discursive forms of control − including the appropriate framing for narrating one's own life − can and do get challenged.

We have suggested that the subaltern voice, as a counter-narrative political potential, can follow other paths, and in so doing, receive recognition or intelligibility outside of and beyond institutional sites or established political spaces. The case of the TopManta co-operative and the circulation of the project through the story of the *mantero* is a type of entextualization that, far from being trapped in a hegemonic discursive order, tries to enregister other types of social personae in different chronotopical scenarios. The national and international success of the crowdfunding initiative bears witness to that. Its patrons supported the launching of the brand name but also, and above all, the Union's political project − as the terms and conditions of participation specified. This is but one step in the recognition of the Union's voice, a socio-political recognition received autonomously outside the circuits of traditional power dynamics.

Through a process of slow sedimentation in the wider social arena, the *manteros'* embodied account of racism has increasingly been considered in various anti-racist and anti-colonial fora in which the union is interpellated as the main political actor in those struggles. This social prominence has forced a certain degree of institutional recognition of the Union's political narrative − although still mostly on the symbolic level. The discourse of colonialism, embodied and shared by the SVU, has permeated some of the debates in Barcelona in the last few years, and has had its correlate in some institutional measures such as the knocking-down of a statute of a famous Catalan slave trader. This was a historical demand of the pan-Africanist and other anti-colonial and anti-racist movements in the city. The SVU endorsed

these demands. Taking advantage of the window of opportunity that its new voice and the physical presence of its members created, it headed some of the several actions that led to the withdrawal of the infamous statue.

But far from these affordances, what we have seen is that the act of "giving voice" tends to impose norms and patterns of narrativity on recipients, and draws the boundaries of what is sayable within a given discursive space. Ultimately, we have argued that, as a potential carrier of social justice demands, the voice is not transferrable; it cannot be "given" − unlike what some actors imagine. Instead, an autonomous voice is constitutive of the subjectivities that struggle to participate equally in a political space.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOVpLRJPvuQ

[2] Original text in Spanish: "...[antes] no teníamos voz de denunciar, no teníamos voz de hablar y ara, desde que hemos formado el sindicat, ya tenemos voz de denunciar la discriminación, la persecución, el racismo…"

[3] Notice that what we discuss here has radically changed since the 2020 pandemic lockdown. Since our study depicts pre-pandemic scenarios, we reconstruct them here.

[4] The Organic Law on Public Security meant a setback in fundamental rights and freedoms such as those of protest and demonstration. Its application was controversial and criticized by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

[5] Our fieldwork traced the *manteros*' semiotic practices since the creation of the Union. They ranged from demonstrations in the public space to talks in different types of events, media contributions, and activities in the Top Manta workshop-shop. The spaces in which those practices took place got defined as the *manteros*' political agenda unfolded. For a detailed description of the ethnography conducted, see Menna (2022).

[6] https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/preguntes-frequents/lamine-bathily-i-ruben-wagensberg-a-preguntes-frequents/video/5808291/

[7] Original text in Catalan: "un col·lectiu que se'n parla molt, però que, en canvi, se'ls escolta ben poc".

[8] This sort of division of communicative labor between experts - knowledge and opinion - and unionists - experience - is recurrent in our corpus.

[9] Symbols used in the transcripts: \ falling intonation; / rising intonation; […] omitted talk; (.)short pause; a::: lengthening of sound; (( )) paralinguistic or non-linguistic behavior. Informed consent to conduct this ethnographic piece of research was obtained from the Street Vendors' Union, including permission to reproduce the images and texts analysed in this chapter.

[10] "El mantero encarna la verdad de la calle frente a la mentira de un espacio público que, por cierto, no existe, puesto que todo él está ya privatizado".

[11] Fieldnotes March 29th, 2019.

[12] Tenured academics are civil servants in Spain.

[13] "Solamente los manteros están interesados en resolver los problemas de los manteros".

[14] "el racismo ha olvidado la historia".

[15] The analysis of the brand mottos is left out of our endeavours here. Our emic perspective leads us to conclude that these slogans are not fundamental to the construction of the Union's narrative, and serve, basically, a commercial purpose – as does the use of English (to reach a global audience).

[16] Some of these texts are as yet unpublished. We collected them during fieldwork in January 2019.