# SOCIAL SERVICES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN IN BARCELONA: A CRITICAL APPROACH

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Drawing on an ethnographic study of social services aimed at immigrant women in Barcelona, a critical analysis is done in terms of appropriateness and relevance of these social interventions in achieving equality of opportunities and participation. Attention to immigrant women is provided within the broader framework of the social and economic requirements of the host society, which leads to contradictions due to the process of discrimination which affect them in terms of gender and of their condition of foreigners. To question this framework is an urgent task in order to achieve empowerment of migrant women in the current migration conditions.

## Introduction

The exponential increase in population movements due to migratory processes has fundamentally transformed the present-day demographic composition of European cities. The phenomenon of international migrations is a topic that has become increasingly important in European states as a result of the increase in migrant flows which currently have the countries in this geographical area as their destination. In the case of the countries in southern Europe, since the nineteen eighties there have been transformations in migrant flows, with countries formerly emitting migrants becoming recipients of migrant processes from other parts of the world (Baldwin-Edwards & Arango, 1999; Venturini, 2001; Salt, 2002).

Present-day migrant flows fully reflect worldwide trends, since the direction in which people migrate is due, in part, to the enormous geopolitical inequalities generated by the complex social and economic processes present at this period in history (Bauman, 1998; Sassen, 2003). The consequences of this new world order are vast: immigration laws, processes of social exclusion in the host societies, social violence, discrimination and prejudice, lack of care resources, proliferation of mafias and people trafficking, etc. All these phenomena directly affect the possible trajectories of these people in the global society, and therefore the conditions in which people travel, arrive and live in the territories that at present are becoming recipients of the aforementioned flows. Analysis is needed to begin examining the specific relationships between the "community" or host society, and the state, and the way in which this affects people's citizenship in different ways (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

However, in referring to global processes we should not exclude

the need to reflect upon the local dynamics of living together in today's' multicultural societies, since, these processes are highly interwoven for the real lives of people living together in a determined space and time, within a host society. "This analytical approach is used to question the dual analysis of the international migration as expulsion/attraction, origin/destination, as a linear view that prevents observation of the diversification of migrant processes and the multiplicity of experiences – both individual and collective – of its social participants" (García, 2006:36). The arrival in a host society also marked by strong inequalities in terms of basic resources, job opportunities and living conditions, affects the ways in which people arriving in this new environment can develop effectively in it. Therefore, for host societies, the phenomenon of demographic transformation requires continuous in-depth analysis in order to propose specific short and long-term initiatives that deal with and guarantee equality in the conditions of life of all the inhabitants of these cities.

Specifically, within the diverse group of foreign immigrants, female immigration has particular characteristics that are not taken into sufficient account when it comes to analysing the migrant phenomena (Kofman, 2000, 2004; Nash, 2005; Bettio, Simonazzi & Villa, 2006). In general, immigrant women are a group who are at a double disadvantage in terms of their own rights as citizens within their host societies. On the one hand, their condition as women (a disadvantage associated with the gender), and on another, their condition as foreigners (often in precarious legal, economic and social conditions), situates them as one of the groups which currently need greater attention in terms of the support needed for processes of social insertion on an equal footing with others living in these societies (Burman & Chantler, 2003; Dossa, 2008 Miranda & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

The analysis of the "feminisation of immigration" needs to examine the processes of inclusion, coexistence and citizenship that are currently taking place in receiving societies. Following Elisabetta Zontini (2005), we realise that for an adequate analysis of the migrant processes it is necessary to carry out this examination on a "meso-scale", i.e. one that combines the perspectives on both a micro and macro level, in the analysis of the different units that she considers as being of key importance for the understanding of the migrant process: "the home, the family, social networks and the institutions of migration". In this case we have made an analysis, focusing mainly on the perspective of the host society (Zontini, 2005:99); specifically the public and private institutions that embody, in a variety of ways, the policies of the host society in terms of initiatives aimed at immigrant women groups.

The social services provided to people that have immigrated, are an area that public administrations and private initiatives (such as NGOs) are giving special attention to in order to promote processes of social inclusion, legal information, learning of the official languages and job insertion, among other activities. Nevertheless, one of the least explored fields in studies into immigration in Spain is that of the social resources and services provided for those who have immigrated. There are few studies into what kind of services are provided for migrants, which agents are involved, what characteristics the aforementioned services have, what the degrees of accessibility are to these services for the people that need them, what their relevance is to the demand

generated, and the degree of satisfaction felt by the users, and less still when considered from a gender perspective.

There is therefore a need to reflect on the social initiatives undertaken by these services, so that these can be culturally and socially relevant for the specific requirements of this group; a reflection that considers the present-day debate on citizenship, and the access to so-called universal services, in terms of the reality for women who have experienced the migrant process. For Yuval-Davis; "The interest in citizenship not only focuses on the formal and narrow aspect of the right to carry a passport, but on a general concept involving the relationship between the individual, the state and society" (1997:4). This in turn complicates the notion of citizenship, since the latter is not only conditioned to the differences of gender, but also to the specific affiliations of the women to dominant or subordinate groups, their ethnicity or country of origin.

Reflections presented in this paper arise from the study "Looking towards equality: The socio-cultural relevance of social services for immigrant women"; a research project which, adopting an ethnographic approach, looked into the characteristics of some of the resources aimed at immigrant women in the city of Barcelona. The aim of this project was to examine the frameworks of understanding and the practices of intervention that social services employ in working with immigrant women, with the purpose of evaluating them and making appropriate recommendations for better policies and practices for social work, by adopting strategies that incorporate the gender focus and are culturally relevant. Based on the results of observations and interviews carried out in a number of centres, the services were examined in terms of their accessibility for the people that need them, and the degree of satisfaction in the relationship between social services and immigrant women; obtaining conclusions regarding the social and cultural relevance of these services with respect to the real needs of the aforementioned group.

In this article, we shall begin with a brief review of recent studies into the phenomenon of female migration. Afterwards, we review some of the proposals currently being drawn up regarding the services and/or resources provided to this group in host societies. This will be followed by a detailed description of the main discoveries emerging from the research carried out; in order to finally establish some bases of reflection that arise from the exploration of the aforementioned resources in the city of Barcelona.

**Female migratory phenomenon**

The importance of women in migrations in Europe is demonstrated not only by its quantitative increase, but also by their contribution to the economic and social life of the receiving societies (King & Zontini, 2000; Kofman, 2000; Aranda, 2003). In the last twenty years, it has been seen how the "migrant woman" has come to play a leading role in family and social trajectories and projects. According to Solé (2000), at present women are often the ones that initiate the migrant trajectory; not only the project of emigrating to another society, but also, in some cases, initiating the family migrant chain, subsequently regrouping with husband and children. The members of the domestic group are under their economic responsibility and/or care, (Gregorio, 1998), and thus the

pioneer women commonly take responsibility for and support the arrival of other members of the family group. The traditional roles of a basically masculine migration are thus reversed.

However, the specificity of feminine migration is not dealt with in different contexts (political, institutional, quotidian); and this, as Nash affirms (2005), responds to a view biased towards a male-orientated model that denies the differences between women and the leading role they play. Thus, according to Ackers (1998), this tendency to obscure the dimension of gender in migrant flows has its origin in the analysis of the phenomenon based on the figure of the man working and gaining the maximum benefit from the migrant experience, which has dominated the studies on the phenomenon both internationally and on a European level. In this way, a social myth is reproduced that renders women invisible, since their presence continues to be restricted to the area of private life. Omitting the leading role of immigrant women has two facets: on the one hand, there is a denial of their possibility as an "agency", and on the other, the situations of oppression that they experience are silenced. Both facets have the effect of perpetuating the power relationships that subordinate these women.

There exists therefore an emerging field of study that seeks to discover the conditions in which the female migratory phenomenon mostly occurs. Juliano (1998) maintains that non-EU immigrant women find themselves in the host society with jobs in which they are discriminated by gender, precisely because they were the traditionally feminine workplaces that have somehow "liberated" European women. The women often find work in the services sector (in many instances as boarders) having jobs that are poorly paid, temporary and flexible jobs and with long working hours, in an irregular employment situation (Solé, 2000). The socioeconomic condition of female immigrant workers places them in a situation of social exclusion, or as Sawaia (2002) puts it, of "perverse inclusion"; they are included in the system as a result of the exclusion or denial of their rights. In this area, global relations and the exploitation in the social, sexual, geographical and racial division of work and consumption should be taken into account (Sassen, 2003). In this way, it can be said that, on a global panorama, women are performing a critical role: trans-national families, the foreign exchange flowing into poor countries from female immigrant work, and illegal trans-national activities, create what Sassen (2003) calls "counter-geographies of globalisation" that affect women in particular. In her words:

> «Women and immigrants» emerge as the systematic equivalent of the proletariat that develops outside of the countries of origin. In addition, the demands placed on the top-level managerial and professional workforce are such that the usual modes of handling household tasks and lifestyles are inadequate. As a consequence we are seeing the return of the so-called serving classes, made up largely of immigrant women. (Sassen, 2003: 50).

Immigrant women are playing an important role in the receiving societies as suppliers of services based on the traditional female role of caring both for the homes and for dependent persons. In this sense, there are studies that confirm recent transformations in the established types of care for the elderly, for children or the sick, within western societies, due

to the substitutive role that these are playing with regard to the traditional roles of European women (Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa, 2006).

The contributions made by immigrant women both in their places of origin (in terms of maintaining as much as possible the trans-national families' care and generation ties), and in the receiving societies (in terms of the functions which, as carers, they are performing in tasks related to reproduction and caring) means they are playing a singular role in the present-day global social landscape (Cuesta, 2007).

This transforming scenario, and the role that women are performing in it, is a challenge is for public and private institutions throughout Europe, with regard to the formulation of specific policies and actions that can respond appropriately to the needs, demands, rights and duties of the immigrant women grouping; since, as Kofman affirms (2000), immigrant women also are a group that receives, (or rather, should receive), the services in the host societies.

However, in terms of institutional care for immigrant people, there are various problems that need to be identified, in order to make it possible to direct initiatives towards a better attention for this group, thereby promoting more appropriate integration and coexistence processes. We share the view expressed by Juliano (2004) of the need to look towards specific policies that are generated with regard to these groups, that allow us to configure the types of behaviour that develop with regard to them, as a means of measuring the breadth and limits of the tolerance of the host society. Thus by analysing public policies regarding female immigration, it is also possible for us to discover in a specific way the attitudes, and actions that the host society develops towards the immigrant population, especially the female population.

**Services aimed at immigrant women**

The importance attached to the migratory phenomenon at present, is coupled with different public and private initiatives that provide services for this grouping. Specifically, there are programmes and institutions – although not many in number – that seek to provide specific services for immigrant women, in particular by verifying the difficulties that they have in their lives within the host society. A number of these services are working to help women enter the job market, and more generally, to acquire tools that may be of use to them in their development or their integration in the everyday life of the host country (health, training, language learning).

Nonetheless, we believe that some of these initiatives are carried out without adequately considering a gender and intercultural perspective. It is necessary thus to develop processes that deepen the knowledge with regard to the adequacy, appropriateness and relevance of social and occupational integration resources aimed at immigrant women, in order to foster equality of opportunities and the participation of these women, considering their socio-cultural diversity, along with their right to citizenship, as a universal value.

Very few studies have been carried out that analyse the services aimed at immigrant women in Europe. One example is that undertaken by Batsleer, Chantler and Burman, (2003) in the city of Manchester. They concluded that there are three ways of approaching the work involving initiatives aimed at immigrant women. Firstly, the neutral

approach with regard to the person's ethnic characteristics demanded by the service (i.e. the assumption that services are universally useful); secondly, the approach that has been dubbed "neutral with regard to gender" and which is based on the preponderance of topics associated with ethnicity or culture in which these characteristics are favoured in services sensitive to ethnic issues; and, a third approach to the phenomenon, which brings together in terms of "cultural belonging" both those providing the services and the users; but without taking into account other aspects such as gender or age. On showing these three approaches, the authors conclude that none of these solutions will in themselves enable an appropriate service to be provided to the women that have suffered abuse, since it is necessary to take into account the complexity of these women's positions with regard to their cultural and gender characteristics, their legal and socioeconomic situation or their age.

Based on these considerations, we undertook an in depth study to analyse the services provided to immigrant women, in order to be able to shed some light on their functioning and formulate proposals for adapting these to the needs of this group, taking into account to the differences existing within said grouping.

## An ethnographic study of services aimed at immigrant women

The aim of this project was to describe and analyse the frameworks of understanding and the practices of intervention that social services employ in working with immigrant women in Barcelona, with the purpose of evaluating them and making appropriate recommendations for better social intervention policies and practices, by adopting strategies that incorporate the gender focus and are culturally relevant.

The evaluation considered two aspects: "accessibility", understood as being the set of characteristics that an environment, product or service must have in order to be usable in conditions of comfort, security and equality for everyone (ACCEPLAN, 2003); and "satisfaction", which refers to the objective and subjective values of the relationship between the users and the services, considering the needs, experiences and desires of the women that have migrated.

As to the methodological aspect, the study favours a critical approach to social sciences, specifically to socio-constructionist social psychology and feminist epistemologies, and accordingly it was carried out using a qualitative research methodology and a hermeneutic interpretation approach (Gadamer, 1960). This approach considers social reality as a set of interpretable relationships between subjects (subjects and objects), in a particular socio-historical context that is complex and in constant transformation. Completing this hermeneutic point of view, the research team adopted a feminist epistemological perspective of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991). This proposal puts a special emphasis on the production of an embodied knowledge; always situated, responsible, critical and with the aim of influencing and transforming the social practices of discrimination in which we are immersed. Thus, there is an insistence on the political dimension and the transforming capability of research, and of the production of knowledge in general, favouring the inter-subjective as a unit of analysis, and recognising the constructive nature of discursive practices in their interrelation with

other social practices (Visweswaran, 1997; Hammers & Brown, 2004).

Specifically, an ethnographic approach was adopted for the study of 10 services aimed at immigrant women, by means of participating observation (of 6 to 8 sessions of observation in each service) and of semi-structured interviews (2 in each service: one with a professional and other with a user of the service).

Participating observation is based on the idea that, by using this technique, the researchers can acquire an understanding of places and practices in specific social action contexts; in this case, resources and services aimed at immigrant women. Consistent with the feminist epistemological framework, the ethnographic approach used in this study pays attention to the following aspects: an approach to everyday relations, an analysis and generation of practices and discourses, an openness to what emerges from research, embodied knowledge, and a critical perspective (Denzin, 2003; Clough, 2003; Adkins, 2004). The research is carried out necessarily in a force field, in which there are power relationships, and the aim is to bring about changes in this field (Callén et al., 2007). In this case, the study seeks to highlight the phenomena of gender and national origin discrimination that may occur in the resources aimed at immigrant women, in order to work towards an equality of conditions for those living in the host society.

In addition, semi/structured interviews were carried out based on a design that sought to discover the discourses regarding the accessibility and satisfaction that both professionals and users experienced in terms of the services studied. These interviews were analysed using discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Íñiguez, 2003). This instrument allowed us to categorise and systemise the information obtained from interviews, so to permit interpretation it in accordance with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that we are using.

The ethnographic procedure used therefore produced a number of analysis categories established by the research team, considering mainly the object of the study, the theoretical and conceptual reviewing of the object of the study, the information offered by the field diary kept and the interviews carried out, and the most important analysis of variables or factors deriving from all the preceding considerations.

## Accessibility to, and satisfaction with, the social services for immigrant women in Barcelona

As a general result regarding the services existing in the city of Barcelona, it should firstly be pointed out that the services aimed at immigrant women in Barcelona are not being categorised as "exclusive" attention resources for this group. Hence there are resources or services that attend to migrants in general, and which, as part of their specific services, attend to immigrant women (in some cases these services have a "women's area" or a number of programmes aimed especially at them). In addition, there are services aimed at women in general, which women from different national and cultural origins, receive as users. In these cases, depending on the geographical location of the resource and its method of diffusion (especially "by word of mouth" or deriving from other services), the immigrant women group is sometimes proportionally high in comparison with native women, although the service does not

stipulate it in this way in its mission.

With this overview, we can see that the resources and services in Barcelona, with regard to the target group are, either based on people's different places of origin, or based on services divided according to gender. In this sense, the results of this study coincide with the findings of the aforementioned Batsleer, Chantler and Burman, (2003) in the city of Manchester, in which either the "cultural origins" factor or the "gender" factor serves as a differentiator of potential users of the service. With regard to the factor of "accessibility" to the services by those who need them, we have established four indicators from the field work: the availability of the service (referring to the geographical and physical accessibility of the service), the availability in equality of conditions (regarding to whom the services are preferentially aimed), access to the relevant information about the service (referring to the channels and information provided to the users and potential users), and integration models that are worked with in the services.

In general, a great diversity can be seen in the ways the services aimed at immigrant women function; i.e. each one develops according to the specific policies of the institutions that provide them, which is why conclusions cannot be drawn that generalise the way these services operate. Nonetheless, we believe that there are a number of particular lines that can be specified as a result of the empirical work carried out. With regard to the geographical and physical accessibility of the service, we have found, on the one hand, resources that are in geographical locations of the city accessible by public transport or in areas with a large concentration of immigrant people; whereas there are services located in areas further from the centre of the city, making them very difficult to reach for potential users. We can also confirm that there are great differences in terms of the signs advertising the services, with some having signs indicating their existence or large window fronts with direct access, while others are barely recognisable from the street. These characteristics logically affect the ways that potential users are able to access these services, since the ease with which they can find a particular resource in terms of its geographic location and signposting, means that people walking along the street can be "invited" into the service, whereas to access poorly signposted ones it is necessary either to reach them via social networks - i.e. women that inform or take other women to be attended by the service - or by being referred there by other services aimed at them.

As for the availability of the service in equality of conditions, we have focused observation on the characteristics of the individuals that access the resources. In this area, we have seen than although almost all the services assert that they have no criteria for deciding to which people or group their service is aimed, people from certain specific groups tend to concentrate in the services. Thus, in the services studied, the people attended to tended to be Moroccan or Pakistani women, and in some cases Latin Americans (mainly Ecuadorian, Bolivian and Colombian). In the case of the services aimed especially at women, there are often both autochthonous and immigrant women; however, the latter tend to be from the same origins as those mentioned above.

Hence it can be seen that there is a tendency for the same groups to be attended to in the different services, with certain notable exceptions being seen, as in the case of Chinese, Rumanian, Philippine and sub-

Saharan women, among many others. Although, as we have seen, it is not that the services necessarily want to exclude attending to these groups. Nevertheless, given that the most frequent way that potential users get information about the service is through social networks within their reach, there is a tendency to reproduce the same groups in the different services, as a result of these networks, (including many non-public services come to be used by the same women on different occasions). In addition, based on the name of the service, its geographic position, as well as its "tradition", certain resources tend to become associated socially with certain ethnic groups, which results in a constantly reproduced tendency for certain groups to subscribe to these services. In short, factors like geographical location, social networks for accessing the services, the cultural identification with others users, the languages used in certain services, and the resources provided, influence the characteristics of the people that are attended to; generating process by which certain people are included and others excluded from the provision of services.

However, we can state that none of the services studied excludes people from attention based on their legal status, something that is extremely important due to the processes of inclusion that this generates, above all for people in irregular legal conditions in the host society. Nonetheless, this openness of the services can be seen to be limited when we observe the possibilities of specific programmes for the users. Thus there are programmes within the same services that are refused for women who do not have their papers in order. Occupational integration (job opportunities) or certain training resources that require an official certification, for instance, cannot be provided to individuals without legal residence. Thus, although the services themselves do not exercise discrimination towards people with irregular legal status, the legal system within which they do their work does indeed do so, thereby creating contradictions in their work and generating a process of social exclusion and discrimination towards this group.

With regard to access to relevant information about the services by potential users, we see that this information is scarce and often incomplete. The language problem is a recurrent one in terms of the difficulties encountered by immigrant women attempting to access the services aimed at them, together with the lack of knowledge of the different services offered by the public administration and private services available in the city. This leads to the existence of a sector of the immigrant population which fails to receive the information about the services available for them; with this group being perhaps those that most need the resources offered by the host society to support their arrival and daily lives.

Finally, with regard to the integration models used in the services, there is an enormous variability between them, since as we have already mentioned, each one is governed by the particular policies and practices of professionals within each service. In the interviews we observed that both professionals and users mention resources and services in which rejection is shown towards immigrants, occasionally verging on attitudes of discrimination towards this group. Nonetheless, in the services under observation no such attitude was seen.

In addition, in some services there is a tendency towards an integration model that seeks to encourage immigrant women to "adapt"

to the ways and conditions of the host society, without taking into account the potentialities with which these women arrive in this society. The very configuration of the system of services in the city of Barcelona, focused on language learning, training in socio-occupational integration and legal advice, among others, in general leans towards an intervention that attempts to provide skills and abilities for integration in the host society, without a critical stand toward discrimination relations within it. Hence, to a certain degree, and though not wishing to do so, the host society's own systems of oppression are reproduced towards immigrant people through services.

**Satisfaction**

With regard to satisfaction with services, the indicators by which we organised the collected information were: arrival and information about the services (referring to how users get to the services and the information that they have about them before being attended), evaluation (referring to how both professionals and immigrant women evaluate the services aimed at them) and quality of relationship (referring to the characteristics of the relationship between professionals and users within the services).

Firstly, with regard to getting to the services, as we have commented, users who access the resources arrive mainly by way of the social networks they already possess. This raises the issue of whether a part of the group of potential service users may not be accessing them due to a lack of social networks.

With regard to the assessment of existing resources, these are generally evaluated positively; since they represent a usually free and relatively good quality resource for the people that are attended to, in which different aspects are dealt with. On the one hand, the training programmes allow people to have more resources for their life in the host society, and on the other, they arise from a broad social network of known people and friends that is often viewed as positive. The professionals are largely satisfied with the work done, although they point to a significant shortage of resources (above all those services offered by private bodies) to be able to accomplish the aforementioned work in optimum conditions (for example, to be able to attend to all the demand they have, or give more time to each person being attended to). Professionals and users also point to the limitations of services and resources in general, which often fail to resolve the women's most urgent problems, such as regularising their legal status, which depends on the state, and the economic problems they may be facing or the different types of discrimination that they suffer as women and immigrants in the host society.

The quality of the relationship between professionals and women attended to is also highly rated. In general we have observed a close relationship between these parties, in which everything is done to make the women feel comfortable in the service, and wherever possible, that they use the resources on offer there. Nonetheless, the study has also revealed signs of a "paternalist" relationship at certain moments of the relationship. In this sense, a certain attitude of "protection" can be seen to be adopted by the services towards immigrant women using the resources. The action of the services for immigrated people assumes this

group to be somehow lacking or wanting with regard to the skills necessary for their incorporation into the host society. Thus, from the point of view of resources, the implicit proposal (by the programmes on offer and the way in which they are carried out) is to repair and replenish this deficiency in the people using the service.

In the specific case of women, there exists a majority discourse in which the needs of the immigrant women are understood by applying a logic belonging to the host society (Montenegro et al., 2004; 2005). It is assumed that the women that access the service are "trapped" at home, and the aim is to "get them out" of this environment so that they can discover the city's services, be shown the "means" and the way things are done in the host society, be taught the languages and the contextual customs, so that, once the intervention process is over, they can become independent; assuming the positive assessment of this type of independence, which is presented as a universal value.

In addition, both the professionals and users see the service as an intermediate event between their daily life and society in a broader sense. Thus a logic is produced that separates the service form the "outside", or in other words the host society, situating the service as this translation area between the women's needs and the demands of society in terms of the job market, behaviour expected of them as women in this society, everyday and social participation, etc.

Therefore, the services position themselves as areas in which the women are understood and attended to, and the host societies as that which requires them as women and immigrants for certain types of work, which, as we have mentioned above, situates them in the position of workers who usually have very little protection in legal, social and economic terms. To a certain extent, the host society's forms of social discrimination and exclusion thus continue to be reproduced, and the aim is to provide these women with tools that will enable them to integrate, i.e. to adapt or be somehow able to circumvent these forms of discrimination.

## Conclusions

In terms of accessibility to the services, we have seen that although the information regarding these fails to circulate widely in the public sphere, it is by means of social networks that potential users learn of their existence. This mechanism provides a good number of users with existing services, although it also results in clear exclusions of other potential user groups (such as people coming from geographical areas such as China or Rumania, or people that may not have access to information regarding the proper services due to their deficit position in present-day social networks or their lack of knowledge of the languages of the host society).

With regard to satisfaction, both of professionals and users, we see that there is a good level of satisfaction regarding the existing services and the treatment received within these, although there is a clear shortage of services other than the usual ones that provide training resources in languages, social and occupational integration, legal advice and mediation with the host society. Thus we see that the services offered to this group are quite restricted and predefined; hence there are not based on the demands and needs of the immigrant women, but

rather what it is possible to offer them from the point of view of the host society.

In this sense, we can say that one aspect which is present, although to varying degrees, in all the services is the lack of participation that users have in defining policies, actions and projects carried out by the services themselves, with the result that the women's voice is only heeded with regard to the demands they make of the services, yet not with regard to the ways in which they would like those demands to be attended to, or in terms of what other initiatives they might need to satisfy their real needs.

We can also say that the resources studied carry out their action in a legal framework that limits their possibilities for action and for attending to the users, so that legal status, for instance, differentiates between individuals that can access certain programmes and those who cannot; a situation that gives rise to power relationships that ensure that a whole group of people exist in the host society based on, as Sawaia (2002) puts it, their perverse inclusion; they participate in the dynamics of the host society in conditions of discrimination in terms of their basic rights as individuals. This fundamental contradiction is not intercepted by the services studied, since these limit themselves to providing resources based on the knowledge of the legal status of the people being attended to, without having opportunity to question this broad framework in which their action is carried out. It should be stressed however that the services attempt to alleviate this situation on an individual level, in many cases by offering legal advice aimed at seeking the greatest degree of legal incorporation for the persons being attended to, yet evidently their efforts come up against a restrictive legal framework.

In addition, they also carry out their action in the broader framework of the social and economic requirements of the host society, governed, for example, by the job market that is available for immigrant women - usually characterised by the most poorly considered workplaces in the host society, which in parallel leads to a process of subordination of this group. They are thus situated as an intermediate area that cushions the experience of the immigrant women in society, by attempting a "translation" and "socialisation" of these women in the cultural, legal, social and economic codes of the receiving society, and by practicing relationships of attention and care towards this group.

In short, we can see how the services are limited in their action both by the economic framework in which they exist, with regard to the resources they can gain access to (often taking the form of subsidies and aid conditional on projects and certain types of activity), and the legal and socio-economic framework of the receiving society that provides them. Thus, although the work they carry out is endowed with good intentions and professional practices that are more or less appropriate for undertaking it, the lack of a critical perspective of the conditions that the host society imposes for this work means that they sometimes find themselves in contradicting situations between the resources that they want to provide, the effective services that they can offer within the host society, the state's immigration policy and the needs of the women's they attend to or can attend to.

These services work within the axis of global domination relations, which construct the subject "Third world women", affected by

multilayered forms of oppression and exclusionary mechanism of colonization and exploitation (Mohanty, 2004). A feminist practice within this context must seek a critical stand toward the conditions of oppression that affect some migrant women, and the ways in which it is possible to struggle within them (Sa'ar, 2005). As Miranda & Ross-Sheriff (2008: 8) state, it is crucial for social work "to work with women to honor their unique, multidimensional womanhood, personhood, and agency, even as their personhood and agency are honored and devalued across the many contexts they must navigate".

An analysis that takes into account the ways in which global/local constrains related to legal, economic and social conditions in which immigrant women are perversely included in host society, are necessary in order to design social work projects that can promote participation and empowerment in current migration conditions.

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