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Public Denunciation of Heteropatriarchal Oppressions in Contexts of Racism and Immigration and Their Management by Social Movements: An Intersectional Challenge

La denuncia pública de las opresiones heteropatriarcales en contextos de racismo e inmigración y su gestión por parte de los movimentos sociales: un reto interseccional

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Abstract

In recent years, in Catalonia, several women who are daughters of families Arab countries and Muslim tradition have denounced, mainly through social media, a hetero-patriarchal repression that affects many aspects of their lives. According to these women, this repression is justified by principles attributed to Islam and is exercised by their families and social environment. They also denounce the lack of response to their complaints and the limited support received from social movements. This article aims to incorporate this issue into the academic and social agenda. To this end, we interviewed eight women linked in varying degrees to the collective *La Voz de la Infiel* which has led efforts to denounce these forms of oppression, or who align themselves with their demands. We reviewed interviews with members of the collective, and we contextualised the activists' narratives within a theoretical framework. Finally, we examined the difficulties social movements face when trying to address these complex situations.

En los últimos años, en Cataluña, varias mujeres hijas de familias de países árabes y de tradición musulmana han denunciado, principalmente a través de las redes sociales, una represión heteropatriarcal que afecta a muchos aspectos de su vida personal. Según estas mujeres, esta represión está justificada por principios atribuidos al islam y es ejercida por sus familias y su entorno social. También denuncian la falta de respuesta a sus quejas y el escaso apoyo que han recibido de los movimientos sociales. Este artículo pretende incorporar esta temática a la agenda académica y social. Para ello, hemos entrevistado a 8 mujeres vinculadas en varios grados al

colectivo La Voz de la Infiel*, que ha liderado la denuncia de estas opresiones o que se alinean con sus demandas. Hemos revisado entrevistas a miembros del colectivo y hemos contextualizado teóricamente las narrativas de estas activistas. Por último, hemos examinado las dificultades a las que se enfrentan los movimientos sociales cuando intentan abordar estas situaciones complejas.*

Gender; anti-racism; intersectionality; religion; social movements

Género; antirracismo; interseccionalidad; religión; movimientos sociales

Key words

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1. Introduction

For decades, studies from different disciplines have connected immigration, identity and intersectionality, but in the last decade we have witnessed an intensification of these studies (Mügge & de Jong, 2013; Rogers & Syed, 2021) and the introduction of a special emphasis in considering that identity has a direct relationship with intersectionality, since the variables that intersectionality deals with are also those that shape identities (Azmitia et al., 2008; Bilge & Denis, 2010). Central to the processes of identity definition is how each person integrates the development of different structuring elements that influence the composition of their identity and social position.

Advancing towards self-realisation is, to some extent, related to the capacity and the way each person gives meaning to these tensions, and structures a response to those to which they are subjected and to the identity conflicts that may be associated with them. In these processes, variables such as religion, race, gender and others[1] are powerful forces that shape subjectivities, providing an overall sense of purpose, of being part of or rejecting a community, as well a sense of relatedness to others (Verkuyten, 2016). It is common to find certain interdependence and harmony even between apparently irreconcilable variables, precisely due to this response to the tensions referred to. A good example of this may be how many people relate to the concept of "Islamic feminism," in a way that positively combines religious adherence with feminist approaches.

Researchers from different disciplines have studied these processes (Bartlett, 2005; Sánchez & Carter, 2005; Cohen et al., 2005) and agree that when faced with existential questions and in situations of intense identity conflict, young people tend to favour one axis over the other. Social movements also tend to privilege some axes over others (Tarrow, 1998; Montoya, 2021). Many social movements are born precisely for this reason, to draw attention to the issues of

1 We understand and use all these concepts (gender, race and others) considering that they refer to socially constructed axes of power, oppression and identity and, therefore, the object of struggle, negotiation and tension between individuals and groups. This is especially important to be clear on the use of the concept "race," to which no concrete biological or cultural reality should be attributed, beyond the role it plays in designating certain human groups as different or unequal, in order to justify relations of racist inequality, or to point out the existence of an imaginary and social relations marked by racism.

oppression that are not receiving the necessary attention, and to demand that work be done on them. However, intersectionality, born out of academia and activism, has also challenged social movements, offering itself as a useful tool for analysing the oppression situations that movements work on.

It also placed social movements before the challenge of responding to intersecting realities, posing the problem of how they will act in situations where gender, race, class, age and other dimensions are combined. And the response to this challenge has not always been easy or satisfactory. Therefore, most social movements have been incorporating the concept of intersectionality and have been using it as an analytical tool, but the extent to which intersectionality has influenced the proposals and how social movements work on reality is no longer such an easy question to determine (Bilge, 2013; Irvine et al., 2019; Luna et al., 2020; Roth, 2021), especially when these social movements have to intervene in situations where it could be interpreted that different axes of oppression and their denunciation could contradict one another.

This is the case of the situations we analyse in this article. Situations of oppression that have been denounced by some young daughters from migrant families and, according to them, have not deserved the attention of social movements that were supposed to be concerned about it. For this reason, these young activists have also raised their voices against social movements which, due to their inability to react to complex situations (marked by religion, immigration, hetero-patriarchy and community closure), or to avoid playing along with the extreme right and racism, have tended to ignore the violations of rights that many of these women have denounced and which were exercised by people from their immediate environment.

In this article, we first review the literature related to intersectionality, gender, religion and other variables that may be acting in rights violations in immigration contexts. Secondly, we pay special attention to the rights violations reported by some women organised around the collective *La Voz de la Infiel (The Voice of the Unfaithful*, hereafter: *LVI)*, and we analyse the discourses of some of these young women which highlight the tension generated when addressing racism and patriarchy in contexts of immigration. Finally, we try to understand what makes it difficult for social movements to articulate both logics (anti-racist and feminist), even when these movements identify with them both.

2. Gender and religion in contexts of migration and racism

Academic literature focusing on the experiences of migrant women in Spain has grown significantly over the last two decades. Much of this literature has sought to highlight the diversity of situations experienced by migrant women and their ways of coping with them. It has tended to challenge hegemonic representations of these women and affirm their agency and capacity for political action and advocacy (Carrasco, 2004; Dietz, 2004; Gregorio & Arribas, 2008; Carrasco, Pàmies & Bertran, 2009; GIIM, 2010; Gregorio, 2010; Arribas, 2018; El Mouali, 2021). Most of these approaches are based on an intersectional perspective, but they tend to overlook references to situations of rights violations that occur in certain contexts. When addressed, the focus is on the violations perpetrated by the social majority (employers, institutions, etc.) against women who suffer subordination due to class, racism, or gender (Parella, 2005; Amnistía Internacional, 2007; AIETI, 2018; Moriana, 2018; Marey & Del Pozo, 2020). There are exceptions such as works on FGM or forced marriages. Regarding the latter, Parella et al. (2023) does not hesitate to identify them as a form of sexist violence to which "an ap-

proach strictly framed in culturalist terms is not only essentialist, but also ineffective in terms of capturing the complexity of the phenomenon" (2023, p. 155), and to consider that religion "does not constitute the cause in itself; but rather it is an effective instrument that, in certain contexts, feeds and helps perpetuate misogynistic values that produce, justify and sustain violent practices against women" (2023, p. 142).

However, what happens when someone considers that religion ceases to play a marginal role in justifying certain forms of oppression and violence? Then, both research and social denunciation have been much more cautious. Dealing with religious diversity (especially if it belongs to other groups) falls outside the comfort zone of both anti-racism and feminism. Two movements—anti-racism and feminism, on the other hand, in which decolonial thinking occupies a very important space (especially in the field of anti-racism, and with more resistance in feminism, although this does not mean that it does not influence the whole movement, which may feel judged or attacked for being ethnocentric, middle-class, white, etc.).[2] Moreover, Islamic feminisms[3] have developed within feminism, which adds even more complexity to positions when Islam (or what some may misinterpret as Islam) comes into play.

In any case, both decolonial approaches and Islamic feminism tend to orient their gaze, concerns, and analysis toward the established relationship between the majority (social, cultural, institutional) and othered individuals and groups, and prevent that what happens within "communities" becomes subject of social intervention and public debate. This is the communitarian and identitarian drift that some authors have denounced (El Hachmi, 2019). This respect for identity, this communitarian shift, makes it difficult to recognise, analyse and act on forms of violence that would be unacceptable if occurred in contexts of non othered, non-minoritised, and non-racially affected people. This inhibition also stems from the threat of this violence being exploited by far right and racist groups. But this strategic calculation (if that is what it is all about) leads us to a paradoxical situation: it is common to work on these topics when they occur in third countries,[4] but we are much more reticent in front of research, public reporting, and intervention against rights violations occurred within the othered groups living in European contexts. Some women do not hesitate to describe these silences as racist (Amara, 2005).

In any case, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to situations in which practices that some attribute to religion come into conflict with individual rights and freedoms, and specifically with aspects related to gender and sexual freedom. There are obviously experts in the analysis and management of religious diversity, but tensions occurred within immigrant communities or identified with Islamic religious practice remain out of their focus. This limited academic attention is reproduced beyond our borders. Thus, the IMISCOE Research Series volume dedicated to "Migration and Religion" (Otterbeck & Nordin, 2023), explores the intersection between both fields, but references to these issues are tangential and unspe-

2 Mohanty (2008), Medina Martín (2013), for example.

3 See Sibai (2017) as an example of Islamic and decolonial feminism, and Traidi (2022) for a review of the different ways of understanding Islamic feminism.

4 See Martín Muñoz (1993), Pérez Beltrán (2004) o Slimani (2018), on gender issues, human rights, social movements in Arab countries; Kugle (2014), Rahman (2015) o Zahed (2020) on rights violations against LGTBQI+ people in countries with a Muslim tradition. In contrast to these, Fernández (2019) describes the difficulties of activism in positioning itself against intra-community violations in migratory contexts.

cific. Despite interesting statements and the introduction of gender into the equation, the problems that can arise at this intersection tend to be treated with extreme caution, rather implicitly:

> Highlighting religious practices in migration processes also gives us the opportunity to understand more about how gender is negotiated and re-constructed. [...] The balance between change and continuity, the expectations of gendered minds and the tenacity of religious discourse and socio-economic conditions are interesting areas of research, especially when combined with gender. (Otterbeck & Nordin, 2023, p. 100)

The only two references to the conflict between religious practice and individual freedoms are limited to stating that "human rights ideals compete with other ethical codes like religious traditions (Ferrari, 2021), rights to divorce, equal rights in marriage and the right to change religion, among others, may provoke reactions" (Otterbeck & Nordin, 2023, p. 100). How does this tension between human rights and religious tradition manifest itself? As an intellectual debate or as coercion and violence? The vagueness of such scarce references may perhaps be explained if we consider the framework from which authors approach the analysis of the conflict situations they refer to:

> Practicing gendered religious morals, rituals and habits is particularly complex when the established consider—or when opinionmakers try to influence others to consider—the practices problematic or even provocative of political and social turbulence; these have also become crucial ammunition for populist, nationalist and racist politicians, as is evident in discussions about Muslim veils, Sikh turbans or reservations about shaking hands. (Otterbeck & Nordin, 2023, p. 47)

More importance seems to be given to the likely political instrumentalisation of violence than to allegations of rights violations reported by some women assumed to be of immigrant origin. Finally, when authors identify current research challenges, no reference is made to the analysis of potential tensions between individual freedoms—much less those related to gender and sexuality—and family or community pressure based (rightly or not) on religious practice.

Similarly, in an article dedicated to youth and secularism, it was stated that SOS Racisme advocates respect and equal treatment for all people, as well as the right to free exercise of culture and worship within a framework of respect and human rights. However, authors immediately warned that racism focused its discourse on certain religious practices or expressions to foster attitudes of rejection toward specific groups (Cuevas & Peñín, 2010, p. 129). Once again, attention was drawn to the political exploitation of these issues rather than to the complexity of the relationship between individual rights and religious practice, even if managing this complexity is at the heart of the organisation's mission and objectives.

In any case, the tensions arisen around the choices of some young people regarding religion, gender options, and sexual and personal freedom have not been explored in depth (Stewart, 2002). The strong adhesion of young people from immigrant families to religion can end up configuring a strong religious identity which, at the same time, can strain the relationship of this identity with other identities or options such as race, sexual orientation or gender, which are also structuring factors of identities (Kogan et al., 2019). Something similar happens to young people from families with Muslim tradition or practice who, due to their adherence to feminist theories, come into confrontation with religious conceptions of their environment

(Modood, 2021). Some studies highlight the importance of religion and describe the dynamics of its influence, also depending on the personal traits or existential needs that young people develop in the context in which they live. However, following Sánchez & Carter (2005) who deals with different elements of the religion-race intersection, we must recognise that identity conflict has an obvious psychological component.

Nevertheless, the fact that identity conflict becomes a collective issue is expressed publicly or is structured as a political discourse, which means that the individual element must necessarily be joined by the social or collective dimension and take the form of social conflict. This identity conflict must be understood as a process of negotiation of the individual with the structuring axes; a negotiation that is the grounding and condensation of the theory of intersectionality in the individual and reconstruction in the collective (Cole, 2009). And intersectionality should not only consist of analysing the experience of subordination, but also analysing how these experiences generate tensions and discourses on the different axes of oppression. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how this identity conflict manifests itself in order to analyse how the individual elaborates and expresses this conflict and how it affects collective positions.

However, when applying some of these reflections and approaches to the discourse analysis of young women who have denounced conflicts with their families and their immediate social environment, we are not trying to insist on the idea that their conflict is an example of the intersection of power and oppression axes; we rather aim to examine how their discourse comes into confrontation with some collective discourses that assume intersectionality as a valid theory to understand oppressions and privileges. For this reason, in this article we focus on analysing the criticism of feminist and anti-racist groups.

In what follows, we shall present the methodology and criteria applied for the literature review, the press analysis, and fieldwork (interviews). We will then introduce the collective *La Voz de la Infiel* and the main axes of their denunciations.

3. Methodology

In order to carry out this study, we combined a literature review, the analysis of articles and interviews related to *LVI* published in the press, as well as interviews with *LVI* members and people close to them.

The bibliographical exploration focuses on the academic production concerning intersectionality applied specifically to the analysis of situations in which racism, immigration, religion, gender and sexuality are particularly relevant. We have also examined literature addressing the intersectionality of social movements, with a special focus on anti-racist and feminist movements. The documentary analysis has focused on the assessment of articles by the LVI spokesperson (Sukaina Fares, 32 years old) and interviews given to her and published in the press (as ElDiario.es (Luque, 2022), La Directa (Cantero, 2023), Tv3 (Segura & Carreras, 2023), Laicismo.org (Coronado, 2023), *Revoleo* (Lauper, 2023), among others). Finally, we interviewed seven of these young women, as well as a feminist and anti-racist doctor who supported them and has a particularly relevant perspective on the debate that these young women generated. Interviews were conducted between June and mid-October 2024.

The seven interviewed women are young immigrants from Morocco or daughters of families of Moroccan origin (and one from Algeria) and a Muslim tradition. As explained below,

some of them claim to be atheists and others criticise the patriarchal values by which Islam is interpreted, which they continue to practice. Some of them are involved in *LVI* or have participated in meetings or activities organised by *LVI*. In fact, some of them are not formally part of the collective but identify fully with it as they have had similar experiences, feel close to it and share the general ideas it promotes, although without explicit adherence or active participation in its activities. This diversity reflects the plurality of experiences and positions within the movement and enriches the view on the oppressions denounced. These are some of their personal and context characteristics:

Table 1. Personal and Contextual Information of the Interviewees

Identifier code	Age	Country of birth / Age of arrival in Spain or nation of parents	Occupation	Additional context
#1FD	31-35	Morocco. 4 years	Works	She confronted his family at age 16. She was taken in at a child and adolescent protection centre
#2AT	21-25	Morocco. 2 years	Studies (CFGS)	She was taken in at a child and adolescent protection centre
#3IT	21-25	Spain. (Fam. Morocco)	Studies (CFGS) and Works	She confronted his family at age 18
#4WB	21-25	Spain. (Fam. Algeria)	Studies (Univers.) and Works	She was taken in at a child and adolescent protection centre
#5SH	26-30	Morocco. 4 years	Works. Studied at University	She was taken in at a child and adolescent protection centre
#6AA	26-30	Spain. (Fam. Morocco)	Works. Studied at University	She was taken in at a child and adolescent protection centre
#7JM	21-25	Morocco. 6 years	Works. Studied at University	She confronted his family at age 18

Source: Authors' own elaboration

We interviewed all the young women who agreed to do so, and it was difficult in many cases. Some of them accepted to deal with the public exposure and renounced anonymity, but others continue to live in fear of reprisals for their criticism or personal choices. In both cases there is resistance to exposure or simply to allow their activism to end up generating too invasive dynamics in their lives, which have already been quite altered. Interviews aimed to clarify doubts appeared during the documentary research and the analysis of the published interviews, and they served to delve deeper into some aspects of their experiences, their speeches and their relationship with anti-racist and feminist movements.

Throughout the article we use interview excerpts verbatim, referring to them with the indication "#number + two fictitious initials," to ensure their anonymity. We also interviewed a woman who does not belong to the *LVI*, but who has contact with the women of the collective and has a deep knowledge of the denounced situations. For this reason, the interview was extremely interesting to contextualise and contrast some of the ideas expressed by the women of *LVI*. This woman is a Catalan (native) doctor who participates in feminist and anti-racist activism, and who provided medical and personal support to many young immigrants who have required it. She is identified here as "#Doctor."

4. *La Voz de la Infiel*: religion and conflict with the family

La Voz de la Infiel (*LVI*) appeared as an Instagram profile in 2019. Today, it describes itself as "The voice of a secular, feminist, and anti-racist North African woman." Sukaina Fares created it to publicly express the rights violations she and other young women suffered due to their choice of laïcité, feminism, and anti-racism. Behind the Instagram profile emerged a network of mutual support, guidance, training, and reporting. In 2022, *LVI* was constituted as a collective to formalise all the work done in support of those shunned for being feminists, atheists, lesbians, dissidents, and daughters of Muslim families. Hence, *LVI* organises events, participates in actions, and files complaints on both social media and the media, in which it denounces:

1. Rights violations suffered by many young daughters from predominantly Moroccan families, when making personal decisions conflicting with family and social norms linked to certain interpretations of Islam.

2. The silence and solitude in which they must confront these rights violations, as they believe neither institutions nor social movements (mainly anti-racism) are giving them support and attention.

LVI defines itself as secular. Within the group, we find women who declare themselves atheists and consider that Islam is an expression of patriarchy incompatible with feminist and emancipatory values. There are also young women who criticise patriarchal interpretations of Islam, but not religion itself. They defend a vision of Islam compatible with human rights and individual freedoms, advocating for more progressive or feminist interpretations. Some of them are closer to atheism and critical of the patriarchal values of Islam but prefer not to publicly identify themselves as atheists nor make public statements against Islam.

Despite these ideological differences, experiences of family or communal oppression have acted as a unifying element within the group and have led to reflections on Islam, a more comprehensive analysis of patriarchy, and a debate on how to articulate a critique of patriarchal values present in Islam without giving rise to racist or Islamophobic discourses. In the case of *LVI*, the articulation between feminism and anti-racism has been facilitated by what they interpret as an alliance between far-right racism and Islamic fundamentalism, the fact that both extreme positions need each other to justify their mutual antagonism.

However, *LVI* does not reduce racism to what the proclamations of far right, nor do they link their oppressions solely to radical Islam. Therefore, they have not given up on making public the oppression they suffer as women, confronting their families and facing reprisals:

> Yes, I faced retaliation from my family when I began to question some rules they imposed on me. I remember that when I decided to stop wearing the veil, my older brother told me I was dishonouring the family and no one would respect me. He started controlling who I talked to, where I went, and even forbade me to leave the house unless I was with him or our parents. (#3IT)

> There were also physical controls: checking my things, like my cell phone or clothes; limiting my study hours or even preventing me from going to social activities with my friends because they didn't want me to be influenced by other ways of thinking. (#7JM)

> I remember one time when my brother physically threatened me because I had gone out without telling anyone. He told me that if I ever did it again, I would regret it. (#2AT)

In the contrasting interview we conducted with the #Doctor, she provided many more accounts like those of these young women, and she described experiences that are even more striking than those shared by themselves:

> The main target is the community. Because I have to tell you, I have to tell you... Some women have been raped to put them in their place. Especially if they are lesbians. [...] I know two who have been raped. By guys from the community. [...] So, here we have a big cover-up. Yes, yes. And everyone has been silent about it. Everyone. In order not to do it, they haven't even filed a complaint. Because they have not dared to. (#Doctor)

In an interview with *La Directa*, Fares explains that since they made their complaints public, social harassment has significantly increased: "We have been threatened here because of publications, protests, and interviews, and we've had to get an escort" (Cantero, 2023). But let us be clear: we are not saying this is the norm, we are saying that these situations do occur and they deserve our full attention. And we cannot simply assume they are isolated exceptions.

> There is a widespread idea that our situations are "exceptional" and therefore cannot be addressed like those of other children. But this exceptionality only serves to justify inaction. If we were indigenous children, I am sure that the institutions would have acted more quickly and forcefully. (#4WD)

The interviewees frequently complained about the loneliness they felt in these situations of conflict with their families and social environment. The presence of external allies, such as trusted friends or teachers who believe in them and support them, can be decisive for their personal development and autonomy. However, structural racism often limits access to diverse social networks and adequate institutional support. Hence the importance of groups like the one created around *LVI*, which served to accompany the young women in the process of accepting their situation and facing it both personally and collectively.

> The group of girls with whom I share experiences through spaces like LVI has been key to making me feel less alone and understanding that it's not me who is wrong, but the patriarchal system in which we live. (#5SH)

5. Conflictive intersections and elaboration of discourse

In the young women's discourse, we can identify two related stages and processes that marked their personal development and awareness of their reality, until they publicly denounce it. The two processes represent the evolution from personal to relational and structural, according to the analysis proposed by Rogers & Syed (2021).

The first process encompasses elements of an internal and identity (personal) nature. We observed through the analysis of the interviews that this process has two main interrelated factors that made the young women revise their reality in terms of identity. On the one hand, they identify as a negative issue the limitation of their individual freedoms by their families, caused by their conception of tradition and Islam. On the other hand, they experience partic-

ularity and otherness in relation to other girls in their environment, especially at school and out-of-school activities. Fares, in an interview for *La Directa* (Cantero, 2023), provides a clear example of this experience. Her family, she states, would not let her go to school or on school trips, and she could not do extracurricular activities or attend birthday parties: "I knew they wouldn't let me go, but I asked them. There are many of us who don't know how to swim, for example. They were having a good time, we weren't, we were the spectators of their fun."

The second process is consequence of the first one and has a relational character. According to the women, this stage goes through three phases. The first one is to group together to share individual experiences, to deal with loneliness and to free themselves from the feeling of guilt resulting from the family relationship. Fares herself, this time on *Laicismo.org* web portal, describes the feeling of guilt as follows:

> The damn guilt. It is such an aggressive feeling for your mental health that it ends up being corrosive and very destructive. The patriarchal complex to which you are subjected is so great that all the social circles that surround a person end up exerting pressure on them. (Coronado, 2023)

The second phase is to develop an understanding through training and to look for references about similar realities. The fact that their experiences are particular and not shared by most of young women of their age and environment, and the lack of close references, has meant that reading feminist authors helped them to understand and give meaning to what happened to them, as well as identifying the oppression they have been subjected to.

The third phase is to make their discourse and positions public through a forceful criticism of different sectors of society (public administration, feminist groups, anti-racist groups, and a large part of the "Muslim community"). Some of these young women opted to step into the public eye and share their personal experiences and those of other women who experienced similar situations. Others preferred anonymity, due to fear of being persecuted and to protect their physical integrity. However, what is their forceful criticism of society? Their critical position is directly related to their life experience in which Islam has a very significant relevance. The strength of their discourse is that they consider themselves as victims of the religious practice of their relatives and they provide evidence based on their own experience. According to #1FD: "our case is proof that Islam violates women's rights. I'm not against people having beliefs, [...] my mother is a believer. I am against the dogma of Islam."

There are two main ideas in their discourse. The first one is of feminist nature: they consider Islam to be a patriarchal religion which guides the sexist practices of individuals, families and migrant "community" to concern women in terms of limiting their rights (control over virginity, control over sexual freedom, forced marriages, obligatory veiling). Members of *LVI* point out that Western society romanticises cultural and religious diversity without questioning its patriarchal dynamics and this leads to an infantilization of Muslim women, presenting them as passive victims or, on the contrary, as free agents who "choose" the veil or religious norms. It is precisely because of this stance against Islam that different sectors (especially anti-racist movements) consider them to be Islamophobes and, for the same reason, these anti-racist movements do not consider these women to be part of the "anti-racist family," even though criticism of racism is very present in the struggle and discourse of these women. #4WB reports with some outrage:

> They call us Islamophobes, and therefore racist, when we suffer racism on a daily basis. They have forgotten that we are Moors. And what happens? Can't there be atheistic Moorish women criticising all that has oppressed them as women? (#4WB)

The second idea is of an anti-racist nature: they claim there is a structural racism that affects migrants in different ways. This structural racism explains, according to them, the silence of progressive sectors of society on the violations they have suffered. #4WB argues: "The rights of children should be the same for 'autochthonous' children and for children from migrant families. But in our case, we have seen that our rights are not worth the same". They believe the reinforced structure of racism normalises the violation of their rights and tolerates it as an exception. They consider the use of cultural relativism when dealing with their situations as a form of racism, as Fares explicitly stated in *La Directa* (Cantero, 2023). This criticism is also directed at certain feminist sectors who, according to them, opted for silence in the face of their situation and point out the lack of real intersectionality. The crossroads at which these young women find themselves has meant they have had a discourse that problematised the positions and discourses of different feminist and anti-racist movements and brought to debate to what extent these movements are intersectional.

6. Family, social environment, institutions, anti-racism and feminism

At this point, they have also deployed their discourse towards institutions and social movements. Institutions are criticised for their inability to respond to their needs and complaints. Basically, they see ignorance in institutional agents (they are faced with realities completely unknown to them) and an excess of prudence that they attribute to fear or a lack of judgment when it comes to positioning themselves in the face of what has been called "cultural diversity."

> Institutions often see us as a cultural problem rather than as people with violated rights. This racist view makes our needs invisible and prevents anyone from assuming real responsibilities. (#3IT)

> I remember a teacher telling me that I had to understand my family and respect their culture when I explained that they wouldn't let me go on school trips. But why are the rights of native children non-negotiable and ours are put on the back burner? This is racism disguised as cultural tolerance. (#3IT)

The child and adolescent protection services in Catalonia are also the subject of criticism, both by young women of *LVI* and by #Doctor, who fully shares their complaints:

> When a native friend of mine had family problems, she received immediate support from social services and was even offered a special education plan. When I asked for help, they told me it was complicated because "our culture was different." This is nothing more than an excuse to do nothing. (#5SH)

> We talk a lot about racism, but when there are serious violations of rights, of children, from migrant families, the caution of the DGAIA is exaggerated. To the point that these children are often not protected. [...] We had a series of allegations of abuse in a mosque, with report of injuries, and this was dismissed and the families covered it up. And the

> children who reported it felt like we had left them in the lurch. [...] This double standard also happens with very everyday things. And I believe that when, as a society, we are unable to take our eyes off the type of family we are serving, we are making a mistake. (#Doctor)

Besides that, #Doctor and women of *LVI* explain how the professionals themselves are afraid of being considered racist, so that their questioning of institutional action also ends up linking them to the way anti-racism (and/or the communities involved) position themselves in the face of these issues:

> —There is a lot of fear that we will be attacked as racists. And this fear has silenced many things.
>
> —The social discourse.
>
> —In general, yes. I think there has been a lot of fear. (#Doctor)
>
> At school, many teachers avoid talking about our problems because they are afraid of being accused of being racist or Islamophobic. But this silence is also a form of racism. (#4WD)

That is why the anti-racist movement is also the object of their direct criticism, and this is why anti-racism must review the way it uses intersectionality when defining its positions:

> We feel as if intersectionality is just an empty word. This silence may be due to the fear of being accused of being Islamophobic or the complexity of dealing with religious issues. But that is no excuse for not acting. Anti-racist movements should be able to distinguish between criticising oppressive religious practices and respecting religion itself. (#6AA)

And the problem lies not only in the positioning of anti-racism itself, but in how professionals, institutions or other social movements understand what positions are expected of them if they want to be aligned with anti-racism. Regardless, in relation to the feminist movement, the criticism is much more nuanced than that made towards anti-racism:

> —You said they are not so critical of feminists, why?
>
> —Because, in a way, many of them know that there are feminists out there [in the sense of "willing to help them"].
>
> —And in relation to the anti-racist movements?
>
> —They consider that you have left them aside.
>
> —More clearly than feminism.
>
> —More clearly than feminism, in this case. Yes, yes. Because they know that if they need us, we will find each other. (#Doctor)

7. The intersectionality of social movements

In recent years, there has been a growing literature on the uses and incorporation of intersectionality in social movements, and this line of analysis opens new doors to the exploration

of this concept and allows us to apply it and test it, as well as confronting it with new realities (Chun et al. 2013; Collins, 2015; Broad, 2017; Montoya, 2021). In our case, we find it interesting to see to what extent this concept can help us not only to understand certain social problems and the positions of subjects who are at the centre of these problems, but also understanding the actions, reticence, doubts or inhibitions of certain social movements in the face of certain problems.

Thus, considering the situations we analyse (the *LVI* complaints), it seems necessary to understand why certain organisations that we can consider as sensitive to intersectionality (as they do not deny classism, racism, patriarchy, nor the power of religion over people's lives) often avoid positioning themselves in relation to these forms of oppression. The first thing that some authors point out is that "it is important to acknowledge that social movements do have a tendency towards single axis mobilisation" (Montoya, 2021, p. 3). Evidently, this starting point admits modulations in a way that the internal diversity within a social movement can lead it towards the recognition of it and towards clearly intersectional approaches to action. Other authors (see Roth, 2021) highlight the value of social movement coalitions to generate alliances between people who recognise diversity and join efforts to address it, as well as fighting to overcome the different forms of oppression they suffer. These latter processes, Montoya asserts, give rise to very genuine forms of intersectionality, insofar as intersectionality is incorporated into the analysis of oppressions, but also into the logic of the movement's activism, as well as into the identities of those who participate in them.

Beyond this, Montoya also notes that: "Community-focused organisations, even when organised around a particular issue rarely limit their activism in the way that other larger single-issue organisations might" (2021, p. 7). When the focus is community-based, it is more likely to develop holistic views which can be more favourable to intersectional developments than those developed by specialised organisations. This makes sense insofar as *single-axis-oriented* organisations can make use of intersectionality to better understand how the axis of oppression they are working on is introduced into different areas. However, it is unusual for a *single-axis-oriented* organisation to adopt positions on oppressive elements that are not the object of its own organisation, if these are not interacting with the element that does occupies them. It is necessary to work on these other elements to advance in the struggle that they have undertaken and that gives meaning and identity to their organisation.

But there is something more. In order to understand the inhibitions of antiracism in the face of the oppression suffered by some women who are victims of hetero-patriarchal dynamics stemming from what some consider to be "their own community," we have seen that it is necessary to introduce a central element: the oppression suffered by these women is defended on the basis of religious choices, basically by arguing that it is a matter of principles endorsed by Islam. In many cases, when it comes to taking a stance on issues where religious discourse or practice plays a central role, many of these organisations do so without having clear criteria. One possibility is that inhibition, in these cases, is due to an idea of caution in the face of complex realities which have yet to be reflected upon openly and in-depth in our country, unlike in other countries. There is great confusion between ideas related to non-confessionalism, secularism or the space to be reserved for religious practice in the public sphere and state institutions, and there is a lack of clear criteria on which religious discourses and practices are acceptable and which ones are not. Under these conditions, for most of these organisations, inhibition may be a good option.

There are two more factors to explain inhibition: the anti-racism of a more identity-based nature and the influence of relativism and culturalism inherited from times when there was a tendency to approach problems linked to migratory processes as problems of intercultural coexistence. Undoubtedly, the neoliberal context in which these proposals were developed has a lot to do with this tendency to recognise and manage "differences," while closing the door to any analysis of inequalities of a systemic or structural nature, especially those of "social class" (De los Reyes 2016). Now, antiracism should help overcome this culturalist approach to migration management, but the elusiveness persists due to the tension generated between the idea of defending equal rights for all people (the fight against discrimination), and the idea of protecting certain specific communities that have been historically discriminated (one orientation that retains a culturalist and identity logic). So, some antiracists opt for silence to avoid being labelled as Islamophobic or that their complaints of sexist rights violations could be used against the community they are trying to defend (when, in principle, that what should define well-founded antiracism is a commitment to equal rights for all people, not the defence of any "community" over others). The confusion of anti-racism (oriented toward equality) with community-based defence (which can take on differentialist or particularist forms) complicates the construction of a coherent discourse in support of equality. This is one of the traps into which antiracism (and social movements as a whole) has fallen, according to the denunciations of young women presented in the previous section.

The presence of this second tendency (which is attractive to people affected by racism) contributes to the doubts and inhibitions of anti-racism. It is a tendency currently on the rise within anti-racism (as a way of understanding decolonialism, the vindication of the past, and minority cultural practices shared by communities affected by racism). These demands are considered to underpin the cohesion of minority groups and help them to confront a majority that, according to them, continues to deny their rights, but also legitimacy. And this tendency tends to assume intersectionality, but the way intersectionality has developed among some sectors of activism has also given rise to uses of the concept in terms of identity; and this, despite the fact that there are ways of understanding intersectionality that precisely state that they can help us break with the dichotomy between recognition and redistribution. The key would lie in working to understand the role of racism, sexual orientation and gender in the processes of stratification. Yuval-Davis (2011) argued that the study of global processes of stratification (which are intersectional) would be more promising than a binary opposition between recognition and redistribution.

On the other hand, intersectionality may have been better incorporated into feminism, as it was generated within it, where it had much more time to mature and where very rigorous debates are taking place (Einwohner et al., 2019; Irvine et al., 2019; Luna et al., 2020; Roth, 2021); while in Catalonia antiracism is still being structured as a movement, and the debates that are taking place there on it do not have the depth and rigour that they have in other areas. Antiracism is an emerging movement, with all the advances, problems and shortcomings this entails. Hence, too, its doubts, inhibitions and errors.

And there is a third issue that we must also bear in mind. We see the very idea of intersectionality as a vague, imprecise and malleable idea (Davis, 2008). It is not clear to us if it can help, in practice, to resolve the existing tensions between different axes of oppression. It directs our attention to a field of reflection and work, it puts a question or an inquiry, but it does not give us an answer. It does not order the axes of oppression; on the contrary, it calls on us to understand their interrelationships and to examine why one axe may be more relevant than

others in a given context, or why certain actors feel more challenged or affected by some rather than others (Rodó-Zárate, 2021, pp. 191-197). In the end, it is a proposal that invites us to explore how the concrete experiences of individuals are shaped by structures, but it says nothing on the operating within these structures, on how different axes of power are combined, or on what logic can be applied to the analysis of conflicts and social tensions. It is with this approach that anti-racism must learn to work and overcome its contradictions between the logic of diversity and that of equality, the advocacy of principles and that of communities. It is in front of this that many of the interviewed young women speak up. These are the challenges that social movements (feminist and anti-racist) must respond to.

8. Conclusions

The analysis of the situation and the criticism presented by these young activists against feminist and anti-racist movements has led us to raise some reflections. The first one is that feminist and anti-racist movements in Catalonia assume the intersectional perspective as a theory that offers general guidance on the axes of oppression which include different variables and categories. However, these movements are unable to address the tensions generated by the discourse of these young women. In this sense, we are cautious but we would like to point out that, on the one hand, the problem lies in the fact that intersectionality as a theory does not offer clear guidelines on how to interpret and act on the tensions between the different elements of repression.

And, on the other hand, the term "intersectionality" is a malleable one, offering different interpretations of its meaning. Paradoxically, it is precisely its ambiguity and ductility that makes it so widely used and accepted (Davis, 2008). What does intersectionality do? How does intersectionality work? The application of intersectional ideas in new contexts leads to inevitable concerns about what intersectionality actually means and how it should be methodologically applied. In this sense, the case we have presented aims to move intersectionality away from debates of an eminently academic nature, and returning it to the sphere where it was engendered (that of social action and struggles for equality), as well as promoting its re-politicisation (Bilge, 2013; Chun et al.,2013; Collins, 2015; Broad, 2017).

Secondly, in line with other authors (Conwill, 2010; Rosenthal, 2016; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Pugach et al., 2018), we consider that if we find interesting that intersectionality is incorporated into the logics of denunciation and work of social movements, it is convenient that we reflect on it in terms of justice. It should become clear for those who want to make just or ethical decisions (or want to promote them, or engage in activism with certain ideals on rights or social justice) that it is absolutely necessary to take into consideration all axes of inequality (or injustice, or violation of rights). It is not clear to us that there can be something we can call "intersectional justice," but instead we are convinced that without an intersectional point of view, it is difficult to make fair decisions or promote fair policies. And we are also convinced that progress in this direction can contribute to social movements assuming intersectionality not only as a tool for analysis but also as a logic of operation, a criterion for action and an orienting guide for their positions.

The third reflection is on the role of religion. There is a permanent tension between religious beliefs and secular viewpoints. This tension is aggravated by the polarisation caused by a cultural war that makes it almost impossible to reach consensus on the accommodation of the conscientious claims of individuals and groups, and in which the right to religious freedom

faces misunderstanding and erosion. It is clear, as we have seen in the case we have presented, that there are influences and tensions between religion and variables such as racism, gender, sexual freedom, among others, but there are not many studies that address these influences and tensions, and that help to reduce the strength of the generalised polarisation. That is why we think it is necessary to continue working on this matter. And beyond this, we must retain the religion variable as an intersectional variable. Too often we tend to resort to a stereotyped repertoire of axes of oppression in which religion occupies a marginal space. Even more so in the debates, concerns and insights of many social movements. We have already said that religion is not located in the comfort zone of anti-racism. But only by stepping out of that comfort zone will these movements (and anti-racism in particular) be able to engage in debates and take informed positions on conflicts such as the one reported by the group of young women that gave rise to this article.

And finally, one last thought. We have explained some arguments that help to understand the inhibition of social movements (especially the anti-racist one), in front of the facts reported by the women integrated in *LVI*. However, we have not presented one of the arguments that might initially seem the clearest and most obvious of all: that they feel solidarity with them because they understand their problem, but that they do not position themselves as organisations because they consider that the problem reported by these women is not about racism, but about religion, gender or sexuality. However, if rather than focusing on the problem these women suffer from we focus on some of the arguments brought by those who do not take a position on it (based on a certain cultural relativism, a culturalist, identitarian or communitarian view), we may have to recognise that these arguments do concern anti-racism, as these people consider them anti-racist arguments. And we think that this is a misunderstanding that needs to be cleared up, even if it is just to argue that, at least some anti-racisms do not arise from these approaches, nor do they identify with them. Quite the opposite: they distance themselves from them. This is why we believe that the stance against the rights violations reported by these young women, in addition to being an exercise of coherence, justice and intersectionality, it can also be an exercise of clarification that the anti-racist movement must undertake and which, depending on how it resolves it, can contribute to its strengthening and to a better definition of its principles, criteria and objectives of struggle and work.

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