Ambivalent inclusion: anti-racism and racist gatekeeping in Andalusia’s immigrant NGOs

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This article explores encounters between Andalusian NGO workers and immigrant clients in southern Spain. It traces how local ambivalence about pluralism, rooted in long-standing debates about the legacy of Andalusia’s medieval Muslim past, produces both inclusion and exclusion of migrants. On the one hand, Andalusian NGO staff have developed a discourse of anti-racism in which care for immigrants is a means of constructing a modern, progressive identity for a historically marginalized European region. On the other hand, widely circulating racialized and gendered discourses about immigrants also result in the exclusion of those deemed undeserving, particularly Muslim, Moroccan men. The Andalusian case thus highlights the vagaries of social life that complicate implementation of policies and programmes for migrant incorporation. In the process, it demonstrates that modes of immigrant inclusion and exclusion in Europe are deeply intertwined with regionally particular anxieties about social difference.

One afternoon in 2007, a Sub-Saharan African man came through the door of ‘Immigrant Services’ (IS), an NGO in Granada, Spain, and asked my coworker and research participant Gema about obtaining a ‘tarjeta sanitaria’. These ‘health cards’ granted undocumented immigrants access to health care otherwise reserved for legal residents. Handing over his passport, he explained that he had entered Spain ‘en patera’, meaning illegally by boat, and his passport thus lacked a dated stamp to prove he had the three months’ residence required for the health card. Gema was undeterred. She often granted health cards to undocumented immigrants with unstamped (or fake) passports, claiming she felt for the Sub-Saharan Africans who travelled in long, precarious boat trips to Spain. Despite the passport problem, she continued to process this man’s request. Days later, Gema responded in an entirely different manner to a Moroccan man’s request. Mimo informed us that he needed help renewing his temporary visa, which was about to expire. Before leaving Morocco, he had paid a large sum to a Spanish job placement company to procure him a year-long work contract, making him eligible for a coveted residence visa. He arrived in Spain to find that the company was a sham. Now, with no work contract, he was ineligible for a residence visa, and would become undocumented once his temporary visa expired. Gema indicated with raised eyebrows...
and rolling eyes that she did not believe Mimo’s story. She told him she would not be able to help, explaining, ‘That’s what happens when you go about things the wrong way’.

Gema cast the Sub-Saharan African man’s undocumented status in Spain as emblematic of his victimhood and broke the rules of the health card programme in order to help him. In contrast, she assumed that Mimo, a Moroccan, had knowingly broken the law by purchasing a fake work contract and she refused to help him. What led her to see these cases so differently, and to feel entitled to make such distinctions in judgement and services? One could assume that Gema simply saw health care as a more vital service than visa renewal, and thus was more inclined to prioritize health card requests over legal problems. However, during my fieldwork, it became clear that Gema’s and other NGO workers’ decisions followed a social logic in which they evaluated the people making requests, not the services they requested.

This article explores encounters between Spanish NGO staff and immigrant (mainly Muslim) clients who seek their services. It shows how, despite the self-consciously pro-immigrant, anti-racist political stances that NGO staff espouse – indeed, that they construct as emblematic of their own modernity – subscription to widely circulating imaginaries of essentialized racial and gender categories often shapes their decisions about whom and how to help. This results in both inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes, as staff find ways to bend the rules of policies and programmes in order to help sympathetic clients not legally eligible for certain services, while simultaneously excluding clients deemed undesirable or undeserving even from those services for which they are legally entitled. Gema’s admonishing of Mimo turned out to reflect a larger pattern in which NGO staff invoked notions of Moroccan men as dishonest, criminal, or oppressive, and refused them services routinely procured at all costs for Sub-Saharan African men and immigrant women from around the world, understood more sympathetically as victims.

Yet the Andalusian case is peculiar for the degree to which NGO staff conceptualized and enacted their encounters with immigrant and minority clients as a means of engaging with ideas about their own regional identities within Spain and Europe.
many European contexts, NGO staff and other gatekeepers articulate an ethic of care for immigrants or refugees that is rooted in purportedly universal discourses such as humanitarianism, human rights, or international law. They then assess clients’ claims and needs using means that range from linguistic markers, as in the case of UNHCR interpreters interviewing potential Kosovar refugees (Jacquemet 2000), to evidence of illness or suffering, as in asylum cases in France (Fassin & d’Halluin 2005; Ticktin 2006). Refusals to provide services often stem from disjuncture between gatekeepers’ explicit subscription to universalizing moral discourses and their unreflexive use of nationally particular understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion in their judgements of migrants and refugees. In Granada, NGO staff similarly made decisions about which clients’ claims were valid and deserving of services. Yet my Andalusian interlocutors’ ethic of care was rooted in a discourse explicitly about Andalusia’s history of debating pluralism and regional particularity, which I explore below. Their articulation of a moral imperative for social inclusion and care for immigrants was overtly a discussion of how to conceptualize regional history and how to enact new ways of being modern Andalusians.

Ambivalent regional logics of race and history

Scholars have argued about how to understand discrimination in Europe and the United States in the wake of scientific racism’s demise, parsing the meaning and analytic utility of terms like ‘neo-racism’, ‘cultural racism’ (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991; see Stolcke 1995; but also Ong 1996), or, increasingly, ‘Islamophobia’ (Shryock 2010). In Spain, ongoing debates about multiculturalism make these terms highly variable – race, religion, culture, nationality, gender, and other dimensions of social difference are constantly melded but not always in uniform ways. I find it less necessary to diagnose a root or ‘type’ of discrimination that governs all Spanish practice than to pay close attention to how different categories are imagined and deployed in encounters, and to what ends. In Andalusia, my NGO interlocutors conceptualized social difference largely in terms of what they called race and racism, though this category subsumed many others and contained a strong religious dimension as concerns about immigration often zeroed in on Muslims.

In fact, a language of racism characterized both Andalusians’ discourse of anti-racism and the racially motivated allocation of services they enacted. This seeming contradiction between inclusive and exclusionary practices is an extension of a long-standing ambivalence about racial belonging and alterity in Andalusia. Known (sometimes pejoratively and sometimes jokingly) as the ‘Muslim’ or ‘Arab’ part of Spain owing to its relatively long Moorish period, Andalusia has struggled to reconcile narratives that both celebrate and silence that history (Soifer 2009). Both inclusive and xenophobic discourses about social difference have resurfaced periodically, always transforming to reflect the contexts of their manifestations at different historical moments. Today, rejection of outsiders, particularly Muslims, clearly carries gendered and fear-driven valences that suggest current, globally circulating discourses of the war on terror and Islam’s supposed misogyny. Calls to pluralism similarly reflect contemporary concerns with managing social difference in a way that marks Spain as European and progressive, in opposition to its recent fascist past.

Despite the resonance of global discourses, I found that residents of Granada most often approached questions of immigration and diversity by making explicit reference to Andalusia’s specific history of pluralism, but in decidedly non-uniform ways. Some
subscribed to a Castilian narrative of Spanish homogeneity that denies the place of religious or cultural difference in the country's history, casting medieval Muslims as invaders, and migrants, particularly Moroccans, today as reinvaders. This view is in conflict with narratives that have cast Spain, especially Andalusia, as racially and culturally non-European owing to its Muslim past. My Andalusian interlocutors spoke often of their region’s recent history of political marginality and expressed sensitivity about perceptions of regional ‘Muslimness’. Under Franco, Andalusians found themselves stigmatized within long-standing racial hierarchies that cast southern Spain as the ‘most Moorish’ region, and marginalized by high levels of political repression, poverty, and mass emigration that further fed essentializing notions of ‘Andalusian backwardness’ which my interlocutors were keen to leave behind (cf. Collier 1997; Mozo González & Tena Díaz 2003; Suárez-Navaz 2004).

Other Andalusians have articulated alternate views of pluralism, casting Muslim and Jewish influence in particular as a distinctive and positive feature of their region. After years of enforced Catholicism, during democratization this view returned to the fore in politics and public debate. Many Andalusians came to see themselves more fully as members of the nation, their legal citizenship for the first time seeming to imply a legitimate relationship to the state, replete with rights, benefits, and civic responsibilities. As Liliana Suárez-Navaz (2004) has convincingly argued, particularly for those Andalusians involved in the expanding arena of NGO work, this new sense of their own belonging in Spain came to figure as a key point of difference between themselves and foreigners, an important distinction as the region transformed from one of emigration to a destination for immigrants (Caballero 2005; Cornelius 2004; de Lucas & Torres 2002).

As Andalusians themselves became less marginal in Spain, those voicing a narrative of regional history and identity that embraced pluralism became louder. Some, including leftist politicians and local converts to Islam, advocated the celebration of Muslim heritage as a source of regional pride, a basis for demands for political autonomy, and a theme for the growing regional tourist economy (Dietz 2004). In Granada, celebrations of the city’s history of convivencia, the supposedly harmonious coexistence of Jews, Muslims, and Christians, do more than positively value pluralism in regional history. Such affirmations of ‘al-Andalus’ (Muslim Spain) also stake a claim for Andalusian history as the model for multiculturalism and tolerance par excellence. It is perhaps ironic that this historical narrative found renewed, vocal support in the wake of democratization, as this period saw new, exclusionary immigration laws and the first episodes of racism towards North African immigrants (Suárez-Navaz 2004).

The comingling of these divergent ideas of how best to approach current regional diversity, always in relation to the past – either by relegating Islam’s historical role (and Iberia’s plurality in general) to ‘perfunctory’ status, by celebrating it as central, or by myriad positions in between – weighs heavily on how Andalusians think about and engage with immigrants. They are seen as both a dangerous ‘return’ of the Moors (particularly visible in the greater antipathy expressed towards Muslims than others) and as an opportunity to showcase the region’s ‘natural’ capacity for tolerance (Rogozen-Soltar 2007).

This ambivalence suffuses media production, social encounters, and even the physical landscape of Granada, pervading many scales of daily social life. On a societal, city-wide scale, this ambivalence is instantiated in electoral political campaigns for or against immigrant rights, and in annual debates about local festivals. Every January,
neo-fascists and history buffs celebrate the 1492 Catholic ‘reconquest’ of Muslim Granada in costumed battle re-enactments at the Toma (Taking) festival. Meanwhile, self-declared progressives hold a counter-celebration called the ‘Day of Tolerance’. Regional colloquialisms reflect this ambivalence in daily language use, with racially inflected phrases like ‘to have Moors and Christians’ (to have a fight) existing alongside a plethora of Arabic toponyms throughout the city centre. Emergent debates about the merit of Muslim requests for halal food options or permission to wear the hijab in schools share newspaper pages with photographic reports on the interception of clandestine or ‘drug-smuggling’ migrants at Granada’s coastline, each eliciting both sympathy and outraged fear from different readers. Sometimes ambivalence about pluralism colours individuals’ attitudes and practices. For instance, the same Granadinos who proudly shuffled global tourists (and me) to the Moorish-built Albayzín neighbourhood, recommending falafel stands and Moroccan pottery shops to visit, also encouraged me to avoid Moroccan neighbourhoods because of the dangerous ‘moro’ (epithet for Muslim) men there. In short, ambivalence about outsiders – especially migrants and Muslims – shapes debates between opposing political sectors, as well as individual Granadinos’ complex efforts to consume, display, but also regulate migrant, Muslim presence. This ambivalence also plays a pivotal role in conceptions of Andalusian history and identity, circulating widely and permeating everyday social interactions in Granada.

Such ambivalence also clearly structures the interplay of anti-racist narratives and racist practices in Granada’s immigrant NGOs. This article thus maintains that transformations in Andalusians’ understandings of regional identity, and the complex inclusion and exclusion of new residents of the region apparent in NGO contexts, cannot be understood apart from one another. The remainder of this article describes the NGO fieldwork context, the reshaping of NGO workers’ understandings of what it means to be Andalusian through NGO work, and their stratified caregiving for and gatekeeping of immigrant clients.

NGO fieldwork
Spanish NGOs emerged on a grand scale during the 1980s and 1990s, alongside Spain’s transition to democracy, the creation of a welfare state, and the nation’s first comprehensive immigration law. The 1985 ‘Alien Law’ marked new legal divisions between citizens and non-citizens, establishing visa requirements for foreigners. Subsequent revisions of the law have included large-scale amnesties, but also greater restrictions on immigration, increased detentions and repatriations, and more militarized border surveillance (Calavita & Suárez-Navaz 2003).

Immigration-focused NGOs have emerged and evolved in this political panorama. Many arose in response to new legal restrictions on immigration that systematically pushed immigrants into social, political, and economic marginality, creating a need for specialized social services (Alegre Canosa 2000; Blanch 2005; Calavita 2005). The founders of many NGOs came from social sectors disillusioned with the ‘pact’ of the democratic transition. Fearing resurgence of the bitter polarizations that had fuelled the bloody 1930s civil war, transition leaders embraced a politics of reconciliation and consensus to secure democracy (Aguilar 1996; Benedicto 2004; Edles 1998). The resulting political centrum and demobilization of Spanish society disappointed those hoping for radical change, and many turned to non-governmental frameworks for activism. New NGOs were nevertheless linked to the state: they depended on subsidies, were
conditioned by immigration laws, and had to collaborate with local politicians for programme implementation (Dietz 2000; García-Cano Torrico 2004).

I will call the two NGOs where I conducted research from 2007 to 2009 Immigrant Services (IS) and Pro-Equality (PE). IS is a prominent organization with excellent connections to government agencies and local media outlets. With lawyers, social workers, language instructors, and job training specialists on staff, IS offers more services than smaller NGOs. The largest groups of clients during my tenure there were Moroccan men and women and Sub-Saharan African men, but clients also included immigrants from elsewhere. PE is smaller and devoted more broadly to fighting racism. Its clientele thus includes, but is not limited to, immigrants. Despite offering fewer services, PE is quite active, organizing multicultural education programmes in schools and providing technology education and access for immigrants.

At both places I interviewed staff members, volunteers, and immigrant clients, observed meetings with clients and local government actors, attended media appearances and social events, and worked as a volunteer. I gained a detailed sense of the kinds of scenarios, questions, and crises that staff faced on a daily basis, as well as the emotional fatigue and stress they accumulated. Thus, while this article critically analyses how, despite good intentions, NGO-immigrant encounters were often shaped by racial and gendered prejudice, I do not want to erase those intentions. I did not agree with all of my coworkers’/research participants’ actions, but I respect their commitment to providing necessary, sometimes lifesaving services that the Spanish government ‘outsources’, as NGO staffers like to put it, to these underfunded, hard-working organizations.

NGO staff: performing regional modernity

Through a variety of activities at these NGOs, staff self-consciously reconfigured their narratives of regional identity, positioning themselves as new, transformed Andalusians whose modernity lay in shouldering the responsibility for care and defence of immigrants. NGO staff included ageing nuns, former political agitators who had protested against Franco, and middle-aged, left-leaning professionals. The vast majority, however, were college students or graduates in their twenties and thirties who became newly politicized in the NGO context. Most described themselves as politically apathetic prior to entering the NGO world, and as having little previous knowledge of or interest in issues of social justice or immigration. Reiterating common tropes about Andalusian ‘retraso’ (retardation or slowness), these young people explained that because their parents had been labour emigrants, or had suffered unemployment or political oppression under Franco, they had been raised not to look beyond what some called Andalusia’s ‘closed’ (cerrado) society. Indeed, Andalusians often mapped the distinction between being cerrado or abierto (open) onto being old or young, historical or modern, identifying ‘abierto’ attitudes as a marker of a new, democratic, cosmopolitan modernity.

Many NGO staff members described their involvement in NGO work as initiating a transition from apathy to activism. Despite their upbringings, my interlocutors felt that because they were the first generation in Andalusia to experience upward mobility, to reasonably expect employment, and to live in a democratic, European Spain, they were uniquely suited to creating a modern, ‘Andalucía abierta’. At the same time, many confessed to feeling disempowered by their own experiences in the labour market. Despite widespread teleological narratives of economic and social progress under
democracy, most of these young adults still experienced underemployment. Prior to coming to NGO work, many had worked several temporary jobs at once, or had been unemployed for long stretches. As a result of government subsidies to NGOs that stipulate hiring from local unemployment offices, many of my Andalusian interlocutors were unexpectedly thrust from unemployment into NGO work. They pinpointed finding work in NGOs, where they became engaged in political and social projects and for the first time saw themselves as ‘the privileged ones’ (los privilegiados) in relation to immigrant ‘have nots’, as the catalyst for fully realizing a sense of ownership over and motivation for shaping Andalusian society (for Catalan and French comparisons, see V. Dubois 2010; Peró 2007). The Andalusian NGO workers who participated in my research thus moved from being economically disempowered and relatively uninformed about immigration, discrimination, and state and local governance, to seeing themselves as outposts of the government, on the front lines of shaping Andalusia’s cultural and political future.

Agents of the state

NGO staff quickly began to see themselves as lay agents of the state, as they became familiar with the maze of local government branches throughout the city whose work pertained to immigration policy and/or social services. Shortly after I began fieldwork at PE, Mirai, a new volunteer and recent college graduate, brought me along to a series of meetings with politicians and funcionarios (state employees) one week. We spent most of the week lost, on the bus or on foot, trying to locate government buildings. Once Mirai managed to meet with the officials she was looking for, they often told her she actually needed to go to a different office, far away, to speak with someone else instead. When this happened a third time in one day, Mirai said to me in exasperation as we trudged down yet another government hallway, ‘Mikaela, how am I supposed to help immigrants when I spend all day in the hallway?!’ But within a few months, Mirai knew these offices well and often returned rather gleefully from meetings, armed with ‘free stuff’ – pens, notepads, and calendars stamped with the Junta de Andalucía (regional government) logo. She revelled in amassing and dispensing these bits of paraphernalia, joking, ‘They make us seem so official!’

While Mirai’s experiences led her to envision herself as an extension of the government authorities with whom she frequently conferred, Nieve, a paid staff member at IS, reluctantly became an extension of local government’s surveillance of immigrants through her work with an employment programme. Nieve matched prospective Spanish employers with immigrant job-seekers. Her government-subsidized position required that she enter information about each immigrant client into a spreadsheet made available for government perusal. Nieve was astounded by the extent of this government oversight, and remarked, ‘They ask you for so much information, it’s incredible’. She explained how officials analysed the data on clients when making decisions about granting residence visas or citizenship, saying,

There’ve been cases when they’ve read it and said, ‘Hey, you said this person was working at such and such place, and it turns out they aren’t’. Oh yes, goodness, they have this thing very secured, controlled. So I have to be careful with what I put and don’t put!

Nieve tried to protect and help clients by entering information that achieved the appearance of a productive work history, at times finessing how long clients had held
certain jobs, or the circumstances under which they were dismissed. Yet she also tried to keep information accurate enough that the state would not become suspicious and decline requests for papers or cut her funding.

Nieve thus became a reluctant agent of the increasingly governmentalized incorporation of immigrants. Michel Foucault identified the intersection of security and political economy as the cornerstone of governmentalized power. Nieve’s work exemplified what he called ‘the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections’ (Foucault 1991:102) that police populations through regulation, particularly through scrutiny of the degree to which individuals become entrepreneurial, economically productive subjects. Yet even as she was required to participate in the employment programme, she routinely attempted to subvert it by manipulating what she reported about clients.

Experts on race
Another crucial aspect of my NGO research participants’ re-creation of themselves as responsible for, and capable of, mediating between the state, immigrants, and wider Andalusian society was their self-conscious cultivation of an enlightened sensibility about race and racism. In encounters with clients and conversations with coworkers, NGO workers learned about racism. In the process, they developed politicized anti-racist sensibilities that helped them solidify new understandings of themselves as responsible, modern Andalusians.

In fact, NGO staff explicitly linked the development of anti-racist sensibilities to their new conceptions of themselves as a kind of vanguard of modern Andalusian identity, drawing on the ambivalent discourses of regional identity and pluralism discussed above. They often decried racism among their fellow Andalusians, chalking it up to lack of education, insular life experiences, or poverty, all familiar tropes from long-standing, essentializing Spanish narratives about Andalusians. In this way, NGO staff members’ construction of new selves was as much in relation to ideas of their region’s past, and to other Andalusians (those deemed unmodern and unsophisticated for their racism), as it was in relation to clients, state agencies, or identification with universal discourses of anti-racism. A PE volunteer in her early twenties explained to me that Andalusia had a long history of racism, specifically towards Muslims, causing local Muslim history to be systematically erased. She went on to say that working in the NGO context had encouraged her to meditate on issues of racism, and argued that Spain’s Muslim past was not something embarrassing to be silenced.

Instead, she felt it was precisely this silencing of the region’s Moorish roots that held Andalusian society back. She argued, ‘Granada has been al-Andalus. So there shouldn’t be racism here’. For many of my Andalusian NGO interlocutors, a key step in solidifying Andalusian modernity was to apply this anti-racist corrective to historical readings of the region’s past. By appreciating the coexistence of Jews, Muslims, and Christians as foundational to regional history, they positioned Andalusia as uniquely suited to tolerance, which they saw as a hallmark of modernity and a disavowal of the ‘closed’, Franco-era intolerance that they felt had isolated Spain from Europe.

These self-consciously progressive attitudes about race were not natural to NGO staff, but rather were purposefully taught and learned, policed, and performed. Through their interactions at NGOs, staff learned how to talk about race in new ways, nudging each other along when anyone’s understanding of racism was deemed lacking. One morning at PE, a volunteer named Alba excitedly told me and several other
volunteers about some clients who had come in earlier, whose race she was trying to
decipher. ‘They were some group I’ve never even seen before!’ she exclaimed, describing
in detail their skin colour, the shape of their lips and noses (which she demonstrated by
contorting her own face), and their heights. She was confused and fascinated by these
clients who seemed ‘black, but not black; indigenous, but not indigenous’.

Xavi, a fellow volunteer, interrupted, ‘You know, the way you’re talking about race is
very problematic. Race doesn’t actually exist. I don’t believe that there are different
races, just ethnicities, nationalities, I don’t know’. Alba and the other volunteer stared at
him, dumbfounded. Xavi continued, ‘If you read anything about anthropology, you’ll
see that races, for example, aren’t real’. Sitting in a chair at the corner of the table around
which we were gathered, I had been observing silently up to this point. At the mention
of anthropology, all heads suddenly swivelled in my direction and stared, waiting.
Reluctant to interject with any kind of pronouncement, I was cajoled until I concurred
with Xavi that, as far as most anthropologists are concerned, race is a socially con-
structed rather than scientifically valid biological category. Everyone nodded and
another volunteer, Cecilia, launched into an extended speech about the social ills of
racism. She moved from a denunciation of slavery in the New World – ‘Slaves! How can
one person look at another person and see them as a slave and not as a human?’ – to an
admonishment of Europeans’ failure to address problems plaguing the African conti-
nent today. Through conversations like this one, in which they critiqued one another’s
expertise about racism, and in mediating between clients and other Andalusians, NGO
staff cultivated performances of anti-racism, understood as crucial to their authenticity
and authority as modern, professional Andalusians.

Caring for clients
NGO staff members also took on the new role of ‘pastoral’ caregivers, regulating clients’
behaviour, and this in turn solidified their new understandings of themselves as
modern, forward-looking Andalusians. In ‘Omnes et singulatim’, Foucault described the
social relationships inhering in pastoral power as a kind of mutation of those obtaining
between a church and its ‘flock’, in which a caregiver or leader secures not holy salva-
tion, but an identity and purpose for life, through the care and management of others.
This care is achieved largely through constructing detailed knowledge about, and
regulating the conduct of, those being cared for (Foucault 1980). A loose interpretation
of the concept is helpful for thinking about the NGO institutional setting, where staff
came to conceptualize themselves as caregivers for a group whose needs they claimed to
understand better than did group members themselves.

NGO workers’ most common stories were of struggling to manage ‘difficult’ cases. In
NGO parlance, the term difficult modified clients whose physical self-presentation and
behaviour (dress, speech, hygiene, punctuality, or decisions about parenting, where to
work, and where to live) did not align with staff’s conceptions of how modern, respon-
sible, integrated residents of Andalusia ought to behave. Staff often saw scolding clients
as the most effective way of helping them become less ‘difficult’. A volunteer at IS, for
instance, interrupted nearly everyone who came through the door by ordering them to
sign up for Spanish language classes. Upon learning that a Moroccan man who spoke
very little Spanish had lived in Spain for two years, she asked him in a slow, sing-songy
voice, ‘But what country are we in? What is the language here? Is it French? No. Is it
Arabic? No. No, it’s Spaaannnniiish, that’s right’.

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This volunteer’s persistence subtly enacted what scholars of neoliberal governmentality have called ‘responsibilization’, a tactic in which social ills like poverty, immigrant illegality, and other forms of inequality are constructed as responsibilities of individuals or social groups, rather than the state (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Rose 1996). Blame is placed on individuals’ improper self-care, rather than on structural problems that require political solutions. The contention that immigrants’ lives would be easier if they could communicate in Spanish was certainly valid. But when clients arrived with pressing concerns about workplace exploitation, financial woes, or police brutality, only to be lectured that the root of their troubles lay in their own failure to master the Spanish language, they became frustrated. In reordering these conversations, this volunteer substituted attention to the systemic inequalities that conditioned immigrants’ lives with an insistence on instead blaming immigrants’ (linguistic) self-presentation for their problems.

Elena: from unemployment to indignant activism
The story of Elena, a PE volunteer, illustrates the role of encounters with clients in NGO workers’ processes of self-formation, as well as the interaction of their simultaneous roles as new agents of the state and occasional critics of state policy. Like many of her colleagues, Elena came to PE despite a degree in an unrelated field. Near the beginning of my fieldwork at PE in 2007, she described getting her job there:

“I ended up working here in a super-random way. I came from INEM [a national employment office] ... I thought [PE] was like a nurses’ office or something. But I came in, and they really wanted someone with other qualifications, I mean, I’m a librarian! [Laughs]

Elena explained that when her contract ended, she would go back to looking for library work. But like other staffers, Elena gradually came to see herself less as an out-of-place librarian, and more as a person interested in creating a more just Andalusia, and importantly, as someone qualified to do so. The contrast between Elena’s initial view of her placement at PE as haphazard and her ultimate sense of authority and expertise is clear when comparing the quote above to her handling of a case near the end of my fieldwork two years later.

When I arrived at PE on an early summer evening in 2009, Elena was in the office with two 18-year-old Moroccans and a colleague. The Moroccans had entered Spain clandestinely as boys several years earlier, were picked up by the police, and held at a state-run centre for unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant minors in Granada. Upon turning 18, they were no longer wards of the state and had left the centre, but did not have jobs or homes waiting for them. Elena had been on the phone for over an hour trying to find them beds at a homeless shelter. Eventually, she found a shelter that would be opening its doors in the next hour, and if the boys got in line, they might have a chance of being admitted.

Elena immediately began a long speech, coaching the boys about how to behave when they arrived at the shelter, even as she hurried them out the door so they would not be late. In a stern, motherly tone she said:

“You really have to behave well. You have to be on time. If they tell you to be there at 7, you be there at 6:30. And you have to stand in line and wait. Do you know what ‘line’ means? You have to be polite, and don’t smoke, and listen – you can’t be getting in any fights with anyone, or giving anyone bad
Elena repeated each of these instructions and the boys nodded bashfully in compliance. As soon as the boys were out of earshot, Elena’s colleague turned to me and said that although they seemed ‘nice enough’, one already had a police record. She and Elena began to discuss the frustration of working hard to help immigrants who flouted their instructions about drug use, cleanliness, punctuality, and more. Elena sighed that it was tiresome to help people who did not seem interested in ‘getting their lives together’.

Yet Elena was just as angry at the Andalusian and national governments as she was disappointed in the Moroccan boys’ failure to embody the kind of self-presentation she felt was necessary for their social acceptance. She vented to me for over an hour, well past the time she would have normally left the office, about how the government was failing immigrant minors. She assailed the educational programmes at the centre where the boys had been living during their teenage years for failing to prepare them for the world. She charged the centre’s funcionarios with racism, saying that they ‘have no idea what life is really like in the world for an immigrant’. She feared the boys would fall into drug abuse or prostitution.

Elena had clearly developed her own critique of the state. Although she had become a conduit between the state bureaucracy and immigrants whose comportment she regulated on terms set by state agencies, she had also come to see herself as a broker of the ‘real world’ of immigrant life for clueless state funcionarios. When Elena’s contract ended, rather than leaving PE, she chose to stay on as a volunteer, working on campaigns to educate the public about immigration, and advocating for changes in immigration policy. Elena had gone from being an unemployed librarian thrust ‘randomly’ into NGO work to a confident dispenser of pastoral guidance, to a self-defined expert activist with an anti-racist critique of the government.

Gatekeeping: how prejudice overwhells anti-racist intentions
Through their enforcement of social norms and their gendered and racially inflected interpretations of clients’ stories and requests, NGO staff became gatekeepers of social services, determining who should receive the scarce resources available. In addition to encouraging clients to engage in particular practices of self-presentation, staff also used preconceived notions about certain categories of clients to determine whether and how to help them. Analysis of this gatekeeping activity demonstrates a marked contrast between NGO staff members’ self-conscious cultivation of anti-racist sensibilities – positioned as fundamental to being modern Andalusians and NGO experts – and their pervasive use of raced and gendered preconceptions to categorize, rank, and sometimes exclude clients from social and legal services.

Some NGO staff were highly aware of their role as gatekeepers, as those charged with choosing recipients for economic aid, housing assistance, job placement, health care benefits, and coveted spots in language and job training courses, all in a context of resource scarcity. Many explained this responsibility in terms of ‘prioritizing’. A social worker at IS told me that her job basically boiled down to prioritizing among clients to


looks or anything, and you can’t be doing any drugs, or even smoking. You’ve got to do a kind of bizarro Ramadan fast with cigarettes to get through tonight without smoking, ok? I don’t say all this for me; it’s for your own good. I’m saying this for you, because there are not a lot of spaces, and they’re not going to let you stay there if you’re smoking cigarettes, or causing problems with anyone, do you understand?
make sure the most important cases received attention. She was clear that not all clients were created equal, and that judging clients’ interior sincerity and motivation was crucial.

Among immigrants, there are also social classes. A lot of times, people come in and say, ‘Oh, woe is me, I’ve come here with nothing’, and who knows what else, and then later it turns out they had family, had a good income, no? But they come here crying. So, the issue of um, prioritizing among the people, I don’t know. [Laughs] It creates problems for me.

While staff often described the process of prioritizing among clients as a matter of simply determining whose situation was most dire, their decision-making processes were complex. I found that staffers routinely prioritized Latin American and Moroccan women, and placed men, especially Moroccans, in the lowest priority ranking. These decisions were both gendered and racially informed. Sometimes volunteers explicitly appealed to gender as a reason not to help men. One volunteer explained, ‘Whom do we prioritize? Well, whoever is most desperate. Always. Always whoever has it the worst. Although, to be honest, nobody prioritizes the men. It’s like, “You’re a man, so, get it together!”’

Other times, they spoke of de-prioritizing Moroccan men as Moroccans and/or Muslims, allowing widely circulating imaginaries of Muslim, Arab men as dangerous and untrustworthy to guide their decisions. European discourses about Muslim societies have long been shaped by a tradition of stigmatizing Muslim men (Abu-Lughod 2002; Hirschkind & Mahmood 2002; Spivak 1993). Currently, notions of Muslim otherness as defined by gender inequality dominate many media and political discussions of Muslim immigration in Europe, particularly with regard to headscarves and other gendered bodily practices among Muslim minorities (Bowen 2006; Ewing 2008; Fernando 2010; Scott 2007). In Granada, these gendered parameters for categorizing immigrants are further compounded by the locally resonant, historically rooted fears of a Moorish ‘reinvasion’, a militarized vision that is distinctly masculinized.

Staff frequently explained, justified, and occasionally critiqued the de-prioritization of Moroccan and Muslim men in resource allocation. The same social worker quoted above described how seeing Senegalese immigrants arriving in Spain in pateras ‘produces sympathy, rather than rejection’ in explaining why she was able to secure more job offers for Senegalese than for Moroccans. She began this discussion positioning herself as a sophisticated mediator between immigrant clients and racist Andalusian employers. Yet she revealed her own subscription to essentializing racial narratives by continuing on to say that she understood why employers preferred certain ethnic groups, reasoning that, ‘after all, you see Senegalese picking up old ladies’ wallets off the ground, and you never see a Moroccan doing that … and Latin Americans are just easier to work with; they tend to be very peaceful, very hard working’. Such ideas of clearly bounded, racial ‘types’ of immigrants led staff to conceptualize individuals in terms of ‘niche’ abilities according to their ‘group’, and to funnel them towards some jobs and away from others – in some cases, away from job placement altogether.

Widely circulating imaginaries of racial and gendered difference thus influenced how NGO staff members determined need and merit, with fear and distrust of Moroccan men, especially, leading to refusals of their requests. In addition to viewing men in general as self-reliant and invulnerable, and Moroccans in particular as unco-operative or sexist, NGO staff discounted Moroccan men’s abilities to be good workers, casting
them as lazy. One day at IS, a young Moroccan man I knew stopped by with his mother and requested job information from a volunteer. All three of us were surprised when the volunteer responded tersely, ‘The job situation is very tight right now, and it also seems to me that some people don’t really want to work. They’d prefer to rest, relax than to work hard.’ Stuttering with surprise, the young man insisted that he wanted a job. The volunteer asked him pertly if he had even finished high school. He said no, and she replied, ‘Well, we’re all going to see how much you regret that, aren’t we?’ She eventually was persuaded to give him some pamphlets about job training courses, but seemed unconvinced that he really wanted a job. Her prior understanding of Moroccan men as lazy circumscribed what was generally thinkable to her about Moroccans, and precluded her from hearing this specific client’s desire and need for work.

Even NGO staff well aware that Moroccan men were disproportionately losing their jobs during tough economic times and who wanted to help them were hard pressed to find work for these men owing to the gendered nature of employment opportunities at NGOs, which mainly broker placement services between immigrants and families looking for female domestic workers. An immigrant man once joked to me that he needed a job, and didn’t care about having to do ‘women’s work’, assuring me that he would ‘throw on a wig’ if I could just find him a job. Like other men, he was fully aware of his gendered disadvantage in the NGO context.

‘Haciendo trampas’ and navigating the care of experts

The following descriptions of two immigrant men’s NGO cases clearly illustrate these gendered and racial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in NGO programmes. Ahmed, a Moroccan man, was accused of lying in order to ‘cheat’ the health care system and was denied services at IS in an encounter that typified the racialized exception of Moroccans from services. A Sub-Saharan African man named Uthman received aid from PE’s staff, but through a disempowering process that illustrates the potentially negative, unintended consequences of Andalusian NGO workers’ self-identification as experts.

Ahmed

A common way in which NGO staff discounted Moroccan men was by interpreting their stories through prior understandings of them as criminals and swindlers, and thus dismissing their claims as attempts to ‘cheat the system’. A man in his mid-thirties, Ahmed came into IS one afternoon accompanied by a Spanish friend, Raul. Raul stated that Ahmed was from northern Morocco, was living in Granada illegally, and needed a health card. Gema, the woman who processed a Sub-Saharan African man’s identical request despite his lack of appropriate paperwork, asked to see Ahmed’s passport. She looked through it, frowned, and, shaking her head, said she did not understand why it contained so many stamps and expired visas. Ahmed explained that he had been going back and forth between Morocco and Spain for two years, but was currently in Spain illegally. Gema asked him if he had a job, to which he replied that he worked in sales and computers. With limited Spanish, he was unable to explain in detail and Gema put up her hand to stop Raul when he attempted to clarify, insisting that Ahmed must communicate for himself in order to integrate. When Ahmed could not elaborate, Gema threw her hands up in the air, turned to me and rolled her eyes, saying:

Oh! Well then, look, you’re a businessman. This isn’t for you. You’re not going to be able to have a health card. You have a job. This is for labour migrants, the ones who come here to live and work, and
don’t have jobs or financial means. People with jobs and who live part-time in Morocco can’t use this programme – we don’t have unlimited resources, and it’s paid for by the government, by our taxes here, by the taxes of all the Spaniards who live and work here ... 

Gema became visibly upset, speaking increasingly fast and loud. She told Ahmed to leave and come back the following week to talk to someone else because she could not help him.

Although I had been with IS for almost a year at this point, my schedule had changed and that day was one of the first that I was present during the hours allotted to health card paperwork. I did not understand why Gema refused to help Ahmed, but assumed I had misunderstood the programme’s rules. As Raul and Ahmed left, I said to her, ‘Gema, I’m confused. I don’t know if I understand the way the health card works correctly. I thought it was for all undocumented immigrants, including the ones with jobs’. Gema shook her head and replied loudly and purposefully, pausing between each word for emphasis:

The thing is, no tienen ningún derecho (they have no right). They. Have. No. Right. Ok, look, you’re right. Technically, he can have one. He has the legal right. The thing is, is that it’s not right for them to come here and take advantage of our programmes. It’s an economic crisis, people are suffering, and there are limited resources here and Spaniards, they’re starting to complain. We’re starting to complain ... This man, he needs [her boss] to tell him next week that the card is supposed to be for the people who really need it and not the people who are just here from Morocco haciendo trampas (cheating)!

As was often the case, our conversation was brought to a halt by a new set of people coming through the door.

In her explanation of why she had not wanted to give Ahmed a health card, Gema clearly used her racially informed and gendered judgement of a particular case to supersede the parameters of the law. In the quote above, note how Gema repeated the word right (derecho) many times, imbuing it with a multiplicity of meanings. She juxtaposed Ahmed’s legal rights to her estimation of his moral rights, which she ascertained according to her understanding of Moroccan men as crafty and dishonest. She concluded that Ahmed’s lack of a moral right disqualified him from access to the health card programme, despite his legal right to participation. This was, of course, in direct contrast to her frequent bending of the law for Sub-Saharan Africans who were otherwise ineligible (and with whom she occasionally spoke French, unlike her insistence on Spanish with Ahmed). Gema’s decision to exclude Moroccan men from social services was the result of her construction of herself – in lieu of the law – as expert protector and arbiter of justice. Ahmed’s frustrated request for medical services offers a useful reminder that even when legal rights are put in place, the law alone does not ensure their delivery to those intended to benefit from them. Imaginaries of immigrants, especially Muslims, as improper subjects of modern, European Spain ultimately shape what kind of political and social inclusions they can obtain, including their frequent exclusion from legally available social rights like health care (cf. Ticktin 2006).

Uthman

Like Ahmed, Uthman was in his mid-thirties, but from a Sub-Saharan African country. Trained as a social scientist, he was eager to have his political asylum case followed by ‘la antropóloga’ (the anthropologist). Uthman’s experience illustrates how Andalusians’
reconstruction of themselves as expert modern caregivers, their endeavours at moulding immigrant clients’ practices, and their prioritizing of certain ‘kinds’ of clients over others are mutually articulated in NGO encounters.

I was at PE when Uthman first came in for a meeting with a lawyer and two volunteers (all women younger than him) to discuss political asylum. Uthman told us that he had openly criticized his home country’s authoritarian government and had been imprisoned and tortured three times, prompting his decision to come to Spain. He showed us photographs of his wife and daughters, still at home, saying how much he loved and missed them. Uthman’s story fitted the bill of a believable, sympathetic client for the PE staff. He had come to Spain clandestinely ‘en patera’, was African but not Arab, and, unlike Moroccan clients, no one ever referred to his likely being Muslim. Staff members remarked on the shocking and sad nature of Uthman’s story; with a furrowed brow and shaking head the lawyer interjected, ‘Oh, you poor thing! Poor thing!’ The staff quickly decided to take on his case and got to work, putting Uthman in touch with a partner organization specializing in refugee cases.

Several weeks later I arrived at PE to find Uthman sitting silently with the same group of women in a meeting. Laughing and talking excitedly, the women explained that they were planning a ‘spy operation’ to retrieve supporting documents for Uthman’s case from his home country. These could not be mailed because of police inspection of packages, but a friend of a PE volunteer was planning a trip to Uthman’s country. The PE staff had told her about Uthman, and they had hatched a plan in which a member of his family would leave a suitcase of materials in a prearranged spot for the Spanish woman to pick up and smuggle back. These women animatedly talked through the plan, giggling in titillation about its James Bond quality. While they clearly aimed to help Uthman, in their excitement, the PE staff constructed the land of his political oppression as a hypothetical staging-ground for playing out their newfound identities as radicals who fought for justice in the name of others.

By the next meeting I attended with Uthman, months later, his asylum case had not progressed. He walked into the PE office and, appearing agitated for the first time in my presence, announced that he no longer wanted to work with the asylum lawyer at PE’s partner association. We called the lawyer’s office and, on speakerphone, Uthman spoke with the lawyer’s secretary, raising his voice and asking why the lawyer had not been prepared for meetings. The secretary assured Uthman that he should trust the experts, and the PE staff concurred.

The PE staff then congratulated Uthman on having obtained proof that he had been tortured in prison, in the form of expert signed medical documents. Such objects are increasingly seen as more valuable than asylum seekers’ own narratives, supplanting recognition of their political subjectivity in European asylum cases (Fassin & D’Halluin 2005). Uthman handed the PE lawyer the medical report and began attempting to explain his prison experience. In rudimentary Spanish, he described how he had been tortured. While he remained relatively calm, Uthman broke eye contact with us, looking at the floor as he spoke. At one point, one of the PE volunteers did not understand what he was describing and asked him a question. Clearly exasperated, Uthman responded in an agitated, shaking voice, ‘Look, talking about this … it’s embarrassing. They’re experts. You can’t even imagine the thousands of things they can do to you in prison’.

Thus, after months of being sent around Andalusia to multiple offices and being encouraged to ‘trust the experts’, despite his sense that their bureaucratic methods were
not moving his case forward, Uthman finally lost his temper when having to explain to a group of young women, in a foreign language, the bodily harm that had been inflicted on him in prison. I was surprised it had taken that long for him to become upset, and I could not help but notice the irony in his use of the word ‘experts’ in reference to the state prison guards. I cannot know whether, in his description of those who had tortured him at home, Uthman purposefully employed the same term – experts – that the NGO staff used to describe themselves in their efforts to reassure him and dismiss his concerns about his case. I tend to doubt it, but, either way, the repetition evokes the particular problem of refugees, who, in fleeing abuse at the hands of one nation-state, must enter the bureaucratic arms of another. In the Spanish case, this meant navigating the confusing maze of NGOs charged with managing refugee policy in liaison with the government. Uthman had repeatedly been told to trust in various NGO experts, a difficult task given that a total breakdown in basic trust in others is often a defining symptom for those who experience torture or displacement (Daniel & Knudsen 1995). Yet in the absence of a psychologist, or even a translator, Uthman had no other choice but to place his trust in these Andalusian women who were confident in having become ‘experts’.

Uthman’s frustrating experience demonstrates the complex inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes of racially motivated NGO practice. The fact that the exclusion of some – for instance, Moroccan men – coexists with the inclusion of others – here, non-Arab Africans deemed pitiable and worthy of help – does not mean that all is well for those who are included. The NGO staff’s image of Uthman as a rescuable victim certainly led to their sustained efforts to help him, but not always in ways that were particularly humanizing or effective.

Conclusion

This article has explored the complex intersections between processes of Andalusian regional identity formation and the exclusionary inclusion of immigrants to the region, in the context of NGO encounters. Andalusians’ reconfiguration of narratives of regional history and identity increasingly occurs through, and shapes, their encounters with immigrants in NGOs. Regional ambivalence about the place of pluralism in general, and of Islam in particular, coupled with processes of political and economic transformation since Spain’s transition to democracy, produces both inclusive and exclusionary outcomes for immigrant clients. The coexistence of a local desire to modernize by embracing pluralism, and a competing, equally pervasive fear of non-Spaniards, especially Muslims, creates a situation in which Andalusian NGO workers espouse rhetorics of anti-racism and inclusion as cornerstones of their own modernity, while also enacting racialized and gendered exclusions of Muslim, Arab men from social services.

The Andalusian case demonstrates that beyond being deeply intertwined, processes of immigrant inclusion and exclusion are often engendered by host societies’ regionally particular anxieties about pluralism and social belonging. In Andalusia, gatekeeping and restrictive incorporation of immigrants reflect struggles to redefine Andalusia’s place in both Spain and Europe, as well as a need to resolve highly local concerns about social difference, belonging, and exclusion. Andalusians’ exclusion of some immigrant newcomers from NGO programmes could be explained in terms of pan-European secular concerns about Islam, anti-immigrant sentiment, or restrictive immigration laws. Yet how that exclusion is unevenly directed at certain groups over others is clearly
also structured by Andalusian NGO workers’ active engagements with ideas about local history and concepts of Andalusianness. It is the differentiated treatment of immigrants according to their positions in a historically rooted, regionally specific racial hierarchy that helps determine who is slotted for inclusion, and who is not.

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1 I use pseudonyms for all research participants in this article.

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Les ambivalences de l’inclusion: antiracisme et obstacles racistes dans les ONG d’Andalousie œuvrant pour les immigrés

Résumé


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