From Reactive Religious Identities to Camouflage: Exploring Daily Encounters with Racism and their Impact on Identification Strategies for Spanish-born Descendants of Moroccans

Desde la religiosidad reactiva al camuflaje: El impacto del racismo cotidiano en las estrategias identitarias de jóvenes españoles de origen marroquí

Cristina Rodríguez-Reche
INMIX-Lab Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
E-mail: cristina.rodriguez.reche@uab.cat
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6646-7605

Author

Abstract

The rejection of the North African community in Spain, chiefly from Morocco, constitutes one of the most deeply rooted expressions of racism in the country. This racialisation process relies on visible and stereotypical markers perpetuating a colonial, homogeneous and essentialist category around the image of the "Moor". However, the relationship of experiences of individuals within this community in dealing with everyday racism, their protective resources, and the resulting impact on their identification strategies remain underexplored. Based on 31 in-depth interviews with descendants of Moroccan immigrants and children of mixed couples, this paper aims to explore the role daily Islamophobia plays in identification processes and survival strategies. The findings highlight the main patterns from this analysis: reactive religious identity, misrecognition with horizontal hostility as the leading cause, camouflage and passing and, finally, self-chosen identification. This contribution underscores the often-overlooked role of everyday racism in people's lives and emphasises its impact on the sense of belonging among the young people interviewed.

El rechazo hacia la comunidad magrebí en España, mayormente de origen marroquí, representa una de las manifestaciones más arraigadas de racismo en el país. Este proceso de racialización se sustenta en marcadores visibles y estereotipados que perpetúan una categoría colonial, homogénea y esencialista en torno a la figura del "moro". Sin embargo, el impacto identitario que tienen estas experiencias de racismo cotidiano, así como las respuestas de las personas que lo experimentan, no han sido suficientemente explorados. A partir de 31 entrevistas en profundidad con descendientes de migrantes marroquíes y con hijos e hijas de parejas mixtas, este estudio

se propone analizar el papel que desempeña la islamofobia cotidiana en los procesos de identificación y en las estrategias de supervivencia. Los resultados permiten identificar varios patrones clave: en primer lugar se explora la religiosidad reactiva, en segundo lugar señalo como la hostilidad horizontal determina la pertenencia, exploraré las estrategias de "passing" y camuflaje y, finalmente, analizo la identificación escogida. Esta contribución pone de relieve el papel, a menudo invisibilizado, del racismo cotidiano en la vida de las personas y enfatiza su impacto en el sentimiento de pertenencia de los y las jóvenes entrevistados.

1. Introduction

Negative attitudes and mistreatment towards Muslim communities in Europe have increased dramatically, especially since the September 11th attacks. In the aftermath of these events, right-wing political groups have invested heavily in anti-Muslim rhetoric, making it a central element of their political campaigns. These narratives combine long-standing biases against Islam and nationalist antagonism towards Arab/Muslim immigrants with growing contemporary fears regarding the status, identity, and future of the traditional nation-state (Kallis, 2019). Berntzen (2019) also highlights the connection between rising political violence and anti-Muslim sentiment with the rise of right-wing populist factions and anti-Islamic movements. Consequently, parties such as France's National Rally, the U.K. Independence Party (UKIP), Hungary's Fidesz, and Austria's Freedom Party have woven anti-Muslim rhetoric into their agendas, promoting themes of invasion and the decline of Western values. They portray Muslims as outsiders to Western culture, historically perceived as adversaries and invaders.

In Spain, Islamophobia is also a notable example of racialisation deeply rooted in the country's historical and colonial context. One of the leading groups in Spain subjected to Islamophobia is the population from the Maghreb, mainly Moroccan people, pejoratively referred to as "Moors" *(Moros)* (Martín Corrales, 2022). The image of *Moro* includes, but is not limited to, the Islamic religion; this racialisation is primarily associated with characteristics such as physical traits, accents, and names/surnames (Mijares et al., 2021). *Morofobia* in Spain constitutes the racial dimension of Islamophobia when it is directed against the Maghrebi population. This term, which will be further defined in this study, reflects the Spanish collective imagination's portrayal of a colonial figure based on specific stereotypes linked to visible ethnic, racial, and religious markers.

Morofobia is so deeply embedded in Spanish society that its frequent occurrence is undeniable, extending beyond blatant incidents into the realm of everyday racism (Essed, 1991). In this study, I will be inspired by Philomena Essed's concept of "everyday racism" as outlined in her work, "Comprehending Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory" (1991). Essed's

analysis highlights the nuanced and often less visible aspects of racism that manifest daily. According to Essed, the experience of everyday racism varies significantly between minority and majority groups. For individuals from minority backgrounds, everyday interactions with both strangers and acquaintances often involve repeated exposure to racist behaviours. Conversely, individuals from the majority group often do not perceive these actions as racist. This failure to recognise racism arises from their capacity to normalise such behaviours, rendering them seemingly harmless as racist ideologies become ingrained in their everyday experiences.

Thus, it is crucial to transcend the micro level of this racism, as society's political, economic, and cultural conditions shape the nature of racism. The structures that perpetuate power relations influence the processes of individual identification within those relationships. As Grosfoguel (2004) points out, in this hierarchy of power relations, the positions occupied by different groups lead to some identifications being situated at a higher level of the hierarchy than others. Thus, racialised individuals, particularly those who have contributed to this research, are aware that their recognition as part of the "us" is conditioned by their position within the racial identity hierarchy. Based on this premise, this article aims to contribute to the discussion on how identification processes, understood as relational rather than isolated (Anthias, 1999, 2008), are shaped by social interactions where everyday racism plays a significant role in structuring society.

Based on 31 in-depth interviews with descendants of Moroccan immigrants and children of mixed couples conducted between 2017 and 2023, this paper will analyse how daily encounters with racism influence the identification processes of these young individuals and how they deal with these experiences in terms of identity. The following section theoretically exposes the framework in which terms such as Islamophobia and *Morofobia* are understood and operationalised in this research, considering the participant population and the Spanish context. This section will explain how Islamophobia is a contextual reality and, therefore, framed by racial and religious dimensions tailored to different realities. Here, *morofobia* is defined as the racial dimension of Islamophobia when it concerns the Maghrebi population in Spain, without forgetting that religious discrimination intersects as another axis of oppression. I then introduce a section on research methodologies and participants to provide information about the interviews. A final concluding section relates the results to the theoretical framework that underpins this work, justifying its choice. This section also discusses the implications of my study for a broader understanding of Islamophobia in Spain and the identification impact on individuals experiencing this specific manifestation of racialisation.

2. Unpacking the Intersection of Race and Religion for a deeper understanding of Islamophobia

With this contribution, I propose to conceive Islamophobia as both racial and religious discrimination, focusing especially on how the racial dimension has been socially constructed in Spain. However, as Hancock (2007) cautions, these dynamics must not be framed as an "oppression Olympics," where different forms of discrimination are pitted against one another. Instead, an intersectional approach, considering race and religion, is essential.

Campos (2012) defines racialisation as the social process through which racial characteristics are attributed to individuals or groups based on perceived physical, cultural, linguistic, or other differences. This process involves the creation of racial categories that do not exist natural-

ly but are social constructs. Following these statements, Muslims can be racialised. As Meer (2013) also observes, religion is not merely sidelined but often essentialised and racialised, becoming a core axis of discrimination. This aligns with the definition of Islamophobia offered by Farah and Khan (2017) as anti-Muslim racism, emphasising that Islamophobia cannot exist without racism and, therefore, without racialisation.

Modood (2005) reinforces this view, arguing that the racialisation of Muslims subjects cultural characteristics to a process of "othering," which explains their marginalisation. Similarly, Grosfoguel and Mielants (2006) assert that anti-Muslim prejudice represents a distinct form of racism explicitly targeting Muslims, illustrating the intertwined nature of anti-Muslim sentiment and racism in shaping Islamophobia. To racialise Islam is to attribute socially constructed stereotypes to Muslim individuals to place them in a socially subordinated category. The process of racialisation operates by essentialising a single category: religion.

Following contextualisation of how the religious dimension of Islamophobia is racialised, it is necessary to reflect on what the racial dimension entails, and here, contexts are important. In fact, Garner and Selod (2014) underscore the importance of addressing localised forms of Islamophobia in order to fully comprehend its manifestations. Islamophobia in Spain can be interpreted both as part of broader European/global patterns and through the idiosyncratic specificities of the Spanish context.

At the European level, studies such as those by Cesari (2011) and Meer and Modood (2009) highlight how Islamophobia is closely linked to discourses of security, cultural integration and challenges to perceived national identities. However, in the Spanish case, this dynamic is intertwined with a specific historical past, creating a particular narrative of "historical otherness" that continues to influence the collective imagination. Moreover, recent research (Griera and Burchardt, 2022) underlines how the Spanish political and media configuration has led to a more fragmented expression of Islamophobia, often articulated locally. Consequently, although Spain shares with other European countries the tendency to associate the Muslim presence with issues of identity and security, its historical and socio-political evolution introduces distinctive factors that frame the racial dimension of Islamophobia in an idiosyncratic way.

Following these premises, Gil-Benumeya (2023) and Rodríguez-Reche and Cerchiaro (2023) highlight that Islamophobia in Spain is deeply embedded with forms of racialisation. Here, people from the Maghreb, as will be detailed in the subsequent section, are homogenised and ascribed inherent traits, such as violence or danger, which serve to justify discriminatory practices based on racialisation (Douhaibi and Amazian, 2019). While this process of racial construction can operate independently of religion, whether these people are Muslims or not, it also encompasses a distinct dimension of religious discrimination because, in Spain, there is a strong association between Muslim identity and the idea of Moor (Gil-Benumeya, 2023). Such intersectionality reveals how cultural, ethnic, and religious markers are essentialised and weaponised to sustain systems of exclusion

In summary, the study of Islamophobia requires an approach that integrates its racial and religious dimensions. By recognising these intersecting forms of oppression, it becomes possible to address the mechanisms through which Islamophobia operates, particularly in contexts where race, religion, and also culture are inextricably linked.

2.1. Contextualization of *Morofobia* towards Maghrebi people as the racial dimension of Islamophobia in Spain

Racialisation generates group categories that function according to the distinct postcolonial contexts of the European continent (Fanon 1952, 1956, 1961). Here is where the historical, social, and political context plays an important role in the construction of racial categories and, therefore, in the racial dimension of Islamophobia. In Spain, a racial category subordinated within the social hierarchical structure has been attributed to the Maghrebi population, primarily from Morocco. Throughout history, the figure of the "Moor" has been portrayed through stereotypes that have been extensively highlighted, framed, and contextualised in Spanish literature.

Various historical periods, from the 8th century through the Christian Conquest of the Iberian Peninsula to contemporary times, have perpetuated a negative image of Arab Muslims in general and Moroccans in particular. The term *moro* broadly encompasses, in the Spanish imagination, the Islamic, Andalusian, Arab, and North African, persisting to this day and characterised by an Orientalist veneer (Gil-Benumeya, 2018).

During Spain's colonial period, perceptions of Moroccan people were often framed by notions of barbarism, exoticism, and brutality (Mateo Dieste, 2018). In contrast, during Franco's regime, the portrayal of Moroccans shifted to that of trusted allies, reflecting a narrative of historical camaraderie between Spain and the Arab world (Martín Corrales, 2004). These shifting perceptions have prompted Spanish scholars like Martín Corrales (2002) and Gil-Benumeya (2018) to discuss the coexistence of both admiration and aversion within Spain towards the Moroccan population, particularly during colonial times. Consequently, *maurofobia* and *maurofilia* have coexisted in a complementary relationship, alternating depending on the conveniences of the context (Martín Corrales, 2002; Mateo Dieste, 2018; Gil-Benumeya, 2018).

This racialisation of the figure of the "Moor" in Spain constitutes an essential component of Islamophobia in the country. In Spanish society, the image of the "Moor" extends beyond religion to include racialising individuals based on their presumed origins (Rosón, 2012). This term has come to represent a racialised identity closely tied to perceptions of Islam, cultural differences, and ethnic otherness because, in Spain, there is a strong association between Muslim identity and the idea of the *moro* (Gil-Benumeya, 2023).

This racialisation forms the core of *morofobia*, which remains a significant aspect of Islamophobia in Spain, reflecting broader patterns of exclusion and discrimination against the Maghrebi, especially the Moroccan population. The intersection of these racial and religious dimensions demonstrates how cultural, ethnic, and religious markers are employed to sustain systems of exclusion and marginalisation within Spanish society. Thus, *morofobia* is not a distinct or opposing category to Islamophobia but rather a racial dimension of the latter, acquiring its specific meaning when considered in the context of Spain and a specific population.

2.2. Racialisation and Identification Processes: Power Dynamics, Social Constructs, and Self-Perception

Understanding identification processes requires consideration of internal notions of the self and objective characteristics like country of birth or mother tongue. As Anthias (2008) points

out, identity is not only a social construct; its formation process always involves relationships with "others," the construction of collectivities, and a sense of belonging. Therefore, identity is a social, relational, and contextual construct that can only be understood in contrast with the different. This notion of difference is fundamental in the literature on identity, highlighting that self-identification and identification processes are strategic in constructing "otherness" and "equality" (Anthias, 1999). In the contextual relationship in which identification processes develop, it is also essential to consider the unequal power relations within these mentioned elements.

Grosfoguel (2004) notes that dominant groups in these power relations have the authority to establish social classifications. In these classifications, characterising social relations, the construction of race, and hence the racialisation of certain groups, is central. Roth (2016) explores the notion of "observed race," which is the race tacitly assigned by others, and how this classification can conflict with an individual's self-identification. This identity mismatch, where self-identification and socially assigned identification do not align, is particularly relevant for ethno-racialised individuals facing integration challenges and racial discrimination. Ibrahim (2003) also agrees that the social importance of racial attributes sometimes constrains autonomous self-identification due to these social processes and dominant public discourses. Visibility and phenotypic differences become practical markers of identity boundaries, limiting choice for those with marked and "other" bodies (Rummens, 2003). Also, Rumbaut (2008) highlights that pervasive discrimination against certain groups can significantly impact cultural preservation and identity formation.

Therefore, as we will see in this contribution, identities are not merely a matter of personal choice. Some identity attributes cannot be chosen, and a person's identity largely depends on how others identify them. Suppose a category (such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religion) is associated with power distribution, resources, status, or respect in a particular context. In this case, that category will influence the person's identity. Nevertheless, racial and ethnic identities, while they can be bases for prejudice and discrimination, can also be sources of pride, meaning, motivation, and belonging. The influence of race and ethnicity on identity and behaviour depends on a wide range of personal and social factors, including how others in a given context perceive the ethnic, religious or racial group with which a person is associated and whether they consider that person to belong to the group. An example is found in the uses and meanings of the hijab for young women who wear it with pride, but also as a form of agency against racism (Afshar, 1994). Some research suggests that religious identity can become especially significant when a person's sense of safety and security is threatened (Rumbaut, 2008). From the viewpoint of social identity theory, threats to self-esteem or well-being could be alleviated by increasing affiliation with a group that offers substantial status and support (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Finally, identity and belonging interrelate and influence each other in a complex social and political context. Constructing otherness and equality, visibility and phenotypic markers, and power relations are crucial elements in forming individual and collective identities. Belonging is affected by visibility and phenotypic markers, limiting identification options and exacerbating exclusion. The literature on identity mismatch and (mis)recognition (Aspinall and Song, 2013; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Song, 2003; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021) is particularly pertinent to this discussion. The disparity between one's self-image and external perceptions, often rooted in physical appearance, constitutes a form of misrecognition, presenting challenges to identity validation (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002). However, as Aspinall and

Song (2013) noted, this identity dissonance or mismatch can elicit a range of responses, from feelings of being misrecognised to a sense of indifference, as well as strategies such as covering (Goffman, 1963) or "passing"[1].

3. Methodological Approach of the Research

This article explores the findings of an empirical study conducted in two distinct phases: the first spanning from 2017 to 2020 and the second from 2022 to 2023. The research focuses on the intricate processes of identity formation, particularly regarding religion, gender, and racialisation, among descendants of Maghrebi immigrants[2]—the primary demographic characteristics of the study population centre upon age and place of birth. Particularly, in this work, many participants have mixed heritage, with one member of the couple being of Moroccan origin. This phenomenon is primarily attributed to the significant influx of immigrants from the region into Spain. The study involved interviews with young people between 18 and 30, aligning with the Spanish government's definition of "youth."

All participants, except one, were born in Spain. Of these 31 participants, 24 were descendants of mixed couples, and seven had both parents of Moroccan origin. Additionally, out of the 31 participants, only eight were men, with the rest being women. Regarding religious affiliation, 17 of the 31 identified themselves as practising Muslims. Of the 17 Muslim participants, five were men, 12 were women, and eight were wearing the hijab at the time of the interview. Twenty-three participants were pursuing university studies at the time of the study. However, as is evident from this information, my objective was not statistical representativeness but to attain analytical depth and context-specific insights.

The interviews followed an extensive biographical format comprising open-ended questions designed to extract the personal narratives of our interviewees. Notably, nine interviews occurred in Granada (southern Spain), while the remaining twenty-two were conducted separately in Barcelona (northern Spain). It is worth mentioning that, according to UCIDE (Union of Islamic Communities of Spain, 2023)[3], Catalonia (Barcelona) and Andalusia (Granada) continue to be among the Spanish regions with the largest Muslim populations.

Spanish was the primary language during most interviews, chosen for its familiarity for the young women and the interviewer. Catalan was also utilised in some instances. The interview sessions delved into multifaceted realms, exploring family migration history, daily customs, socialisation patterns, religious observances, sense of belonging, and encounters with discrimination. Participant recruitment employed diverse strategies, including personal net-

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1   The concept of "passing" cannot be attributed to a single author, as it has arisen and evolved through the lived experiences of many people and has been discussed by multiple scholars and writers over time. Nella Larsen's novel "Passing" (1929) is one of the best-known works exploring racial "passing" in the United States, where two light-skinned African American women can pass for white.

2   During the research process, I participated in a research project interviewing sons and daughters of mixed couples. For various contributions and my doctoral thesis, participants with one parent of Maghrebi origin, not exclusively Moroccan, were selected. This is why Maghrebi is used in this contribution, even though the narratives chosen are predominantly from descendants of Moroccan immigrants.

3   Available at UCIDE Annual Muslim Population Report 2023. Link Accessed: 11/05/2024

works, advertisements, and collaborations with migrant associations. Interviews, typically lasting around an hour and a half, were conducted in participants' homes or public venues such as cafes, libraries, or university campuses. Navigating discussions on sensitive topics presented notable challenges, requiring the cultivation of rapport and trust.

Name	Family origin	Age	Place of birth	Religion
Paula	Moroccan father and Spanish mother	19	Barcelona	NO
Ainara	Moroccan father and Spanish mother	24	Barcelona	NO
Nawal	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	21	Barcelona	YES
Malika	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	26	Barcelona	YES
Fátima	Moroccan parents	19	Barcelona	YES
Marian	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	24	Granada	YES
Nadia	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	22	Granada	YES
Shilah	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	19	Barcelona	NO
Farisha	Moroccan parents	23	Granada	YES
Samira	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	19	Barcelona	YES
Nur	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	21	Granada	YES
Carina	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	29	Barcelona	NO
Farah	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	23	Barcelona	YES
Eva	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	30	Barcelona	NO
Mouna	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	28	Granada	YES
Jusaima	Moroccan parents	28	Granada	YES
Jamila	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	29	Granada	YES
Nabila	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	19	Barcelona	NO
Fadia	Moroccan parents	22	Granada	NO
Irene	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	27	Barcelona	NO
Najat	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	25	Barcelona	NO
Zahira	Spanish mother and Saharaui father	23	Barcelona	NO
Amina	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	21	Barcelona	NO
Marc	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	21	Barcelona	NO
Joan	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	23	Barcelona	NO
Guillem	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	20	Barcelona	NO
Anwar	Moroccan mother and Spanish father	25	Granada	SI
Rafik	Moroccan parents	27	Barcelona	SI
Abdul	Moroccan parents	22	Morocco	SI
Hassan	Moroccan parents	19	Barcelona	SI

Name	Family origin	Age	Place of birth	Religion
Lluís	Spanish mother and Moroccan father	27	Barcelona	SI

Sample table, own elaboration

3.1. Positionality and Limitations of the Research

The researcher's position had a substantial impact on this study. Participants perceived me as a young, white, Western, non-Muslim woman in a position of privilege investigating the "other". This perception could influence how comfortable participants felt sharing their experiences, affecting the transparency of the interview process. My positionality also led to critical reflections on ethical issues, the reciprocity of research, and the self-examination of my privileges. The manuscript also highlights a limitation: there were more women than men interviewed, which could reflect a bias in expressing experiences of racism, as Muslim women who wear hijabs face different stereotypes compared to Muslim men (see Rodríguez-Reche and Rodríguez-García, 2020; Rodríguez-Reche and Cerchiaro, 2023; Gashi and Essanhaji, 2023).

It is important to note that while gender is not the primary focus of analysis in this work, the fact that most of the interviewees are women means that gender must be considered as an additional axis of discrimination alongside racial and religious dimensions. An intersectional approach was crucial to analysing and understanding these narratives. This approach suggests that the intersection of identities should not be viewed merely as an accumulation of burdens but rather as "the sum that produces substantively different experiences" (Symington, 2004: 2). In this way, intersectionality uncovers aspects that would remain hidden if these categories were examined in isolation. Thus, in this study, intersectionality helps highlight the distinct experiences of being women, Muslim, and often visibly so. Moreover, most participants had university or postgraduate education and belonged to a medium to high economic class, introducing a potential bias related to social class. Participation was voluntary, and the research objectives were shared with members of the Muslim Students Association.

In relation to "visibility" (Jenkins, 1997), although only eight women wore hijabs, all participants displayed markers of their ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds, such as names, accents, or physical features. This "Muslimness," whether real or socially attributed (Rodríguez-García and Rodríguez-Reche, 2022; Rodríguez-Reche and Cerchiaro, 2023), was a crucial identifier in the reported racist interactions. Interviews were fully transcribed and encrypted using Atlas. Ti software for coding and analysis. All participants signed informed consent forms to ensure anonymity, and pseudonyms were used in this study. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the research. Additionally, efforts were made to use language that avoids biases and any racist or sexist constructions.

4. Findings

In this study, I explore how experiences of Islamophobia in Spain impact the identification processes of descendants of Moroccan immigrants and those with mixed heritage. The examined narratives reveal a wide range of experiences linked to their racialisation. Despite being born in Spain and sometimes having at least one Spanish parent, these individuals frequently struggle with an imposed identity that labels them as "the others," leading to uncertainties about their sense of self.

My research has revealed notable differences in how individuals perceive and manage their identification processes, influenced by various factors, including religion, gender, and even the place of birth. However, the critical factor affecting these dynamics is the level of visibility, which Jenkins (1997) describes as perceived differences based on physical appearance, often reinforced by ethnic stereotypes associated, in this case, with the image of the "Moor."

In my interviews, I have been able to identify, primarily, four models of identification processes: reactive religiosity; non-recognition with horizontal hostility as the main factor; camouflage, which is also more related to a survival strategy in response to experiences of racialisation- and, finally, self-chosen identification, in which the privilege of whiteness plays an important role. It should be noted that, although its analysis has not been one of the main objectives of this article, gender also has great importance in the experiences of racialisation and dramatically influences the observed identification processes. As we will see below, those examples of self-chosen identity in which whiteness is a privilege are mainly attributed to men.

4.1. Reactive Religious Identification

Following the contributions of Ingrid Storm (2017; 2024), I have classified this identification strategy as Reactive Religious Identification. This term, however, is merely an extension of what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) described as "reactive ethnicity" when they discussed the persistence or increase in ethnic identification among second-generation immigrants in the U.S. Within a given context, numerous previous studies have linked the hostile reception of religious groups, specifically Muslims, to strong religious group identification. For instance, a study by Maliepaard et al. (2015) in the Netherlands demonstrated that perceived discrimination is positively related to mosque attendance and higher levels of religious identification. Similarly, Connor (2010) shows that the religiosity of Muslim populations is greater in societal contexts that are less welcoming to immigrants. In this contribution, I present similarly significant findings. For example, Fátima, a 19-year-old with Moroccan parents, expresses a profound identification with Islam due to not feeling recognised as part of an "us":

> One of the main reasons I started practising more and wearing the hijab is because... well, I was born here, but I cannot say I am from here, especially since people do not make me feel like I belong here. Islam, at least, I can say, is my way of life. It is very frustrating. When people ask me, "Where are you from?" I do not know what to say anymore; I say, "I was born here," but they look at me like... incredulously", and then I say, "But my parents are from Morocco," and then I have to explain it. Some people just assume I am not from here and do not even ask. That is why Islam is what truly gives me identity. I do not care if I was born here or there; what matters to me is that I am Muslim. (Fátima, 19 years old, Moroccan parents; Barcelona)

As mentioned above, the theory of reactive religiosity incorporates findings from the reactive ethnic identity thesis. According to this line of research, the practice and identity of Muslims are strengthened in hostile environments, forming a distinct identity as a response to social exclusion and experiences of discrimination. Additionally, this sense of misrecognition aligns with the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), which posits that a minority group member's experience of rejection by the majority group can lead to more robust ingroup identification, thereby mitigating the adverse effects of discrimination. Marian's case, a 24-year-old from Granada, can also be analysed through reactive religiosity.

> Yes, I believe so. Mainly because I have travelled a lot, having lived in Morocco, Spain, France, and London… However, here, people see me as coming from Morocco, especially because I wear the hijab and I am perceived as Moroccan. I often wondered where I am really from— So, yes, I think I identify as a Muslim; it is the most stable aspect of my identity. (Marian, 24 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Granada)

Marian's religiosity functions as a "dematerialised homeland" (Schmidt, 2004), offering a sense of belonging that transcends national boundaries. This role of religion as a refuge for identity is further supported by social identity theory, which suggests that threats to personal or group interests can lead to a stronger identification with one's social group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Correll and Park, 2005). The reinforcement of Muslim identity as a result of tangible experiences of discrimination and racism is also evident in Nadia's narrative;

> I believe that, above all, I am Muslim. It is something that can be anywhere. I have always felt like myself, but the more people try to make me into someone I am not, the more I assert who I am. The more people comment on the hijab, the more I want to wear it. I know that, in the end, I am breaking stereotypes, you know? (Nadia, 22 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Granada)

Several studies in the sociology of religion and related fields similarly indicate that insecurity or threats to an individual or their social group can lead to increased religious identification, belief, and practice (Chen, 2010; Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Therefore, it can be expected that experiences of harassment and other adverse situations related to religious or ethnic group membership would lead to heightened religious identification and increased religious practice. As a form of group identity, religiosity has been associated with enhanced well-being and reduced stress from adverse circumstances and life events (Storm, 2017). However, it is crucial to note that this strong, significant, and proud Muslim identity is not necessarily framed in opposition to or in conflict with other identities (Torrekens, 2021).

> When I am in Morocco, I feel more Spanish; when I am here, I feel more Moroccan. I feel more like a foreigner. It is because when I am with my friends and they start talking about drinking and such, it is like, "Why don't you drink?" The difference becomes more noticeable, making me feel even more foreign. I might not be able to say that I am Moroccan, Spanish, Arab, or Maghrebian or have doubts about it. Nevertheless, I only have one religion, and in a way, that makes me feel more secure, as if I belong somewhere. (Nur, 21 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Granada)

Here, belonging carries substantial importance, as Anthias (2008) highlights the interconnectedness of identity and belonging. Belonging extends beyond simple identification to include shared values, networks, and practices. The seemingly straightforward question, "Where are you from?" exemplifies a persistent micro-level tendency to categorise individuals by ethnic origins, often marginalising those who do not associate with a single origin within their environment. This can lead to feelings of alienation and a lack of recognition (Anthias, 2008). As a result, this inclination towards rigid and mutually exclusive identities obliges young people to take the initiative to redefine, express, and reconcile their diverse affiliations.

> I feel more from here, Catalan and Spanish, although many people relate me to Morocco (…) Here [in Spain], they make me feel, not always but sometimes as if I am from outside.

> Fortunately, I have my religion. I am Muslim, and that is something that no one can take away from me. (Samira, 19 years old, Spanish mother and Moroccan father; Barcelona)

In conclusion, as Storm (2024) states, religiosity serves as a vital source of resilience against ethnic and racial harassment for three main reasons. First, it enhances well-being by creating a strong sense of belonging and social support, akin to other forms of social identity. Second, religious practices and beliefs provide psychological protection against various insecurities and stressors. Third, religiosity can symbolise and strengthen ethnic or religious group identity, especially when such identities are challenged by harassment. Thus, religiosity not only helps individuals cope with discrimination but also reinforces their group identity amidst adversity.

4.2. Horizontal Hostility's Influence on Identity Formation

The majority of the narratives presented in this contribution, twenty-four, involve individuals who are the offspring of mixed couples, where one partner belongs to a relatively minority group. In these narratives, I observed that many of these women felt "neither from here nor there," which made it challenging for them to experience recognition and a sense of belonging in any particular group.

> In Europe, they do not consider me European; in Morocco, I am not Moroccan. Moreover, luckily, my name is Ainara, because if I were named Muna as my father wanted… imagine that. However, it is tough because I do not fit in much. (Ainara[4], 24 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Barcelona)

The concept of horizontal hostility (White & Langer, 1999) illustrates how divisions and prejudices can develop within oppressed groups (Kennedy, 2001). Experiences of rejection among mixed-race individuals frequently stem from their perceived inability to conform to distinct, monolithic racial and ethnic categories. Ainara's mixed identity exposes her to prejudice not only from the majority group but also within minority contexts.

Similarly, Carina's experience highlights the impact of horizontal hostility on her identity formation. Despite living in Spain her entire life, she feels like an outsider and is constantly compelled to prove her belonging.

> In neither place do you feel at home. You are treated as a foreigner, but the positives outweigh the negatives. In the end, you build your identity. Yes, of course, I have lived here all my life. However, how people treat me often makes me feel like an outsider, constantly having to prove myself. (Carina, 29 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Barcelona)

In mixedness research, significant efforts have been made to define concepts related to experiences of displacement, including terms like racial invalidation and multiracial microaggres-

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4   The names used are pseudonyms that mimic real names. If a pseudonym is a Spanish name, as in the case of Ainara, it is because the participant had a Spanish name. If the participant had an Arabic or Muslim name, an effort was made to respect the equivalent of their pseudonym.

sions (Song and Aspinall, 2012). Despite this, there is a notable lack of thorough analysis regarding how the impact of these prejudices varies depending on who is delivering the rejection. Understanding these dynamics is essential in order to gain a deeper insight into how individuals respond to "non-belonging," particularly regarding the identity of those enacting the "misrecognition" and invalidation. Nur's experience vividly illustrates these challenges, as she feels like a tourist in Morocco and Spain, struggling to find a sense of belonging within either culture.

> No, I feel like a complete tourist [referring to Morocco]. I feel like a tourist entirely; I do not see it as... and even though I have been with my cousins and all, four months a year —between Christmas and summer, four months a year—but still, no. And I do not feel like I belong here either; it is strange. I look at the profile of a Spaniard and think, "I am not like that"; at home, we do not have either ham or wine [laughs]. These are things where you do not know where to place yourself. However, they do not let you belong, neither one side nor the other. You are never entirely whole; you know what I mean? (Nur, 21 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Granada)

Farah's example can also illustrate how horizontal hostility influences identity processes, this time coming from within the family itself. Rejection by one of the two families in the case of children from mixed families has been a recurring issue, often linked to religious aspects, as we can see in this example;

> With my father's family, I have always felt that way. They are Moroccan, and two of my uncles came here a while ago with their families. Honestly, we do not have any contact with them. I see some of my other "Moorish" friends and feel envious. I mean, they have been taught to value that part of themselves, you know? They can stand up for themselves when someone says something because they have those tools. That is something I lack. And then, to top it all off, when I am with my mother's family, my aunt serves me lentils with chorizo (she does not eat pork) ... I laugh about it, but it never fits in anywhere. (Farah, 23 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Barcelona)

Unlike the more familiar experiences of racism and exclusion, which many participants could understand and address, horizontal hostility often presented itself as a less easily articulated or comprehended issue. Above all, it was not understood as proper racism operationalised in this research. Consequently, these encounters with horizontal hostility profoundly impacted their self-identification processes, particularly concerning their mixedness (Campion, 2019). Although many participants identified as mixed throughout their lives and were aware of their minority status, it was through these experiences of horizontal hostility that their complex, mixed identities were most clearly realised.

4.3. Camouflage as a strategy of identification and survival

As previously noted, experiences of stigma are directly linked to processes of exclusion that contribute to identity dissociation and a lack of sense of belonging. At the same time, they also shed light on the capacity for reaction, as mismatches often serve as the preliminary stage and impetus for adopting specific strategies to counteract the effects of categorisations and limiting experiences. As we will see below, mismatches that involve an awareness of inequality and oppression promote strategies of resistance that reflect the most common notion of

agency. The collected narratives show us that visibility becomes crucial in this regard, as specific stereotyped markers such as skin colour, accent, or clothing, and even non-visible markers like names and surnames, have been perceived by participants on numerous occasions as barriers to inclusion and, therefore, as elements to "hide."

> In many contexts, you hear comments about this group, especially here against Moroccans, and I remember hearing a conversation about Santa Coloma [a neighbourhood in Barcelona], that there are many Moors there and they steal... Of course, at the residence where I work, I once heard that something had been stolen from a patient, and I did not want to say that I had Moroccan heritage. Ultimately, their prejudices rubbed off on me, didn't they? I thought it was not good to say that part of my origin was Moroccan. I did not have the tools to understand those were my prejudices. I ended up adopting them myself and hiding this whole part. I mean, if I could avoid being asked where my parents were from, well, not my father in this case, but if I could avoid it, it was better. (Eva, 30 years old, Spanish father and Moroccan mother; Barcelona)

Accent or even language are markers that have also served to convey stereotypes directed towards the figure of the Moor. These elements, characteristic of a specific culture and origin, are essentialised by native society to such an extent that the young people interviewed were reluctant to speak it in public or even learn it.

> Well, there is much racism. I felt ashamed to speak Arabic. So, I have talked about this a bit with my sister; I think it was one of the reasons why we did not even try to learn more. We avoided speaking Arabic because we had already perceived it at school, which was generally negative. (Mouna, 28-year-old woman; Moroccan mother and Spanish father; Granada)

The denial and rejection of Islam is another process experienced by several of the interviewees, which is directly related to the feeling of not being recognised and not belonging. Blending in with the majority to be recognised as part of an "us" often involves shedding religious elements that might identify these young people as different.

> When I was fifteen or sixteen, my father would get furious. My mother was more lenient, but my father was rigorous. I used to change my clothes in the elevator and smoke. They were things that did not make me feel good. Deep down, I knew that was not me, but if I did what I was supposed to, I would be the weird one. (Jusaima, 28-year-old woman, Moroccan parents, Granada)

A study by Lems (2020) on Muslim reactions to hostility in Madrid highlights how they often remain silent in the face of racism to avoid issues with authorities and fear of punishment. Understanding how young Muslims respond to anti-Muslim hostility as a form of everyday resistance requires consideration of the context and relationships involved. These responses are shaped by specific social environments and are directed towards particular actions and individuals. Another frequently observed camouflage strategy in the narratives has been the conscious concealment of one's true name. One's name, along with one's surnames, are also among the most common stereotyped ethnic markers;

> School... let me tell you, I even changed my name. I did not say my name was Jamila because we always had... well, now I am older and proud of my origins, but we had a

bit of a complex when I was younger. [Tell me about that] "We had a bit of a complex because you would say Jamila, and where does that name come from?" and then "It is because my father is Moroccan," and then they would ask you, "But are you Muslim?" and you would say "yes," and automatically they would categorise you. Some people did not; others loved it, but many did not. Especially the parents of the children, especially. I remember that many of them automatically did not treat me the same as the others. (Jamila, 29 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Granada)

This raises the idea of passing and acting white, where individuals intentionally mask specific traits and take on a white identity to avoid racial discrimination (Kennedy, 2001). The "acting white" phenomenon is a one-way transition from the marginalised group to the dominant one (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2013). The discussion on the impact of acting white on passing strategies is critical, emphasising the systemic power dynamics between whiteness and the non-white category (Habimana-Jordana, 2023). At an individual level, these strategies can cause significant internal conflict. People who attempt to "pass" as members of a dominant group or adopt behaviours from another culture may experience internal dissonance, feeling that they are betraying their true identity. This constant effort to hide fundamental aspects of their identity can lead to self-alienation and generate feelings of shame and guilt (Tatum, 1997). Additionally, maintaining a facade can be emotionally exhausting, generating chronic stress and negatively affecting mental health (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002).

4.4. Chosen Self-Identification and the Privilege of Whiteness

In the realm of identity processes, some people choose to identify more closely with the white, native part of their heritage. Notably, these choices often involve mixed individuals, where visibility (Jenkins, 1997) is not a primary factor in their identification. Studies by Dawkins (2012) and Waters (1996) have revealed similar patterns, indicating that white Europeans have greater flexibility and options in choosing their ethnic identity compared to black individuals of mixed heritage in the U.S. Gilliéron (2017) has also observed similar trends among binational youth in Switzerland.

Oh no, I have always enjoyed saying, "My father is from Morocco," since I do not look like it, people would be shocked, well, not shocked precisely, but they would say, "You do not seem like it." I liked to give my friends that mental puzzle because I was very fair-skinned and blonde when I was younger, so they would be like, "Oh". [Paula, 19 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Barcelona]

Paula's account vividly illustrates the ability to choose, even framing it as a "game." In this context, whiteness emerges as the fundamental racial category (Lentin, 2020) that commands power and privilege. Conversely, racial categories associated with the non-white one are defined and understood in direct opposition to whiteness (Lewis, 2004).

I would say that I am from here. Maybe I feel more like I am from here because I was born and grew up here, but I am very proud of having Moroccan roots. I am not embarrassed about it at all; on the contrary. However, the truth is, if I have to tell you something, I am Catalan. [And how do you think others perceive you?] Well... I do not know. However, the truth is that people who do not know me or do not know where my father is from have never asked me anything [Marc, 21 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Barcelona].

References to whiteness as a crucial element in identity strategies are particularly noteworthy, as they underline the inherent systemic power disparity. Whiteness is seen as the primary racial category—far from neutral and deeply racialised (Lentin, 2020)—while Blackness (in this context, Muslim or Moroccan identity) is associated with subaltern status and stigma (Giliberti, 2013, 2018).

> Of course, I feel more Spanish than anything else. If you think about it, there is nothing that gives me away. Everything feels quite normal since my father no longer lives here at home. I mean, typical, as we do nothing related to Morocco. Even when my parents were together, we did not do Moroccan things. Moreover, fortunately, my father does not look very Moroccan, you know (Joan, 23 years old, Moroccan father and Spanish mother; Barcelona)

One of the main identity choices we observe stemming from the privilege of whiteness is the response, "I feel like a citizen of the world." From my data, I infer that this response also represents, in a way, an identity privilege, as participants with specific visibility cannot choose to feel like citizens of the world. Their identities were socially assigned based on visibility, and social perception influences how they perceive themselves.

> I could not really say, maybe I would say I feel like I am from everywhere and from nowhere at the same time, a bit like a citizen of the world. I would not say European or African, maybe Spanish... but more from everywhere because you never really know in the end. I do not have deep roots tied to any place; I have moved so many times that it is difficult. (Nabila, 19 years old, Moroccan mother and Spanish father; Barcelona)

5. Conclusions

This research investigates the impact of daily Islamophobia among descendants of Moroccan immigrants and mixed couples in Spain on their processes of self-identification. It seeks to uncover how societal constraints and coping mechanisms shape identity development amidst challenges of identity discordance. In addition, I explored the intersections of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender, which serve as markers of difference or foreignness. While these factors may intersect, they can also operate independently. Addressing the transformation of race, religion, and gender in contemporary society necessitates confronting structural injustices and power dynamics that perpetuate patterns of marginalisation.

One significant factor influencing these dynamics is how individuals are perceived and their visibility within a postcolonial context. The enduring history of stigma faced by Maghrebian Muslims in Spain has associated specific visible characteristics—such as skin tone, accents, names/surnames, or attire indicative of "Muslimness" or "Moorishness" (according to Mateo Dieste, 2018)—with lower social status. This immediate categorisation results in differential treatment and restricts individuals' ability to assert their identity and sense of belonging, particularly impacting women. In Spain, being labelled as a "Moor" aligns with Taguieff's (2001) concept of a socially unassimilable group, perceived as incompatible with and threatening to society and the national project (see Bravo López, 2013). Nevertheless, in a societal context where Islam has been historically stigmatised, the enduring stigma associated with being Muslim persists across generations.

Thus, considering the entire framework of constructing racialised categories within a justified postcolonial context, my study reveals how Islamophobia influences the identity experiences of these individuals in distinct ways. Through religious reactive identity formation, I have observed that Muslim identity emerges, not uniformly but in response to experiences of discrimination, as a means of asserting belonging—a symbolic response to hostile attitudes from the majority society. Conversely, I have also identified specific strategies employed by individuals to avoid identifying themselves as Muslim, mainly due to the pervasive impact of racism on their daily lives. The analysis has also revealed individuals' difficulty belonging to the "here" or the "there." In this sense, non-belonging has been related to the concept of horizontal hostility (White and Langer, 1999), which highlights the difficulty of acceptance faced by individuals who are children of mixed couples or immigrants, particularly in belonging to the group with "minority status." Finally, some individuals who participated in the research could "choose" their identification almost exclusively. The common characteristic among these individuals was their whiteness. In other words, the "non-visibility" and privilege of not having their belonging or recognition questioned.

Additionally, my research underscores that these individuals are active participants in navigating their assigned status of otherness; they have developed coping strategies that reflect introspection and social acumen, empowering their agency. While some may adjust their visibility through assimilation tactics, such as not wearing the hijab to avoid discrimination, the majority demonstrate a deliberate resolve to confront and resist stigma. The cultural markers used to marginalise them are thus reclaimed as expressions of self-governance and autonomy. This invites contemplation on transforming stigma into a symbolic emblem, echoing Goffman's (1963) and Sayad's (2010) insights, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between stigmatisation and its enduring presence.

These results also aim to shed light on various aspects that characterise the global academic debate surrounding the use of terms such as Islamophobia, as well as their adaptation in different contexts, such as in Spain. They also seek to open new avenues for debate and research. In this study, the term *moro* has been used, which is well-established in the literature (Gil-Benumeya, 2018, 2023; González Alcantud, 2002; Martín Corrales, 2002, 2004; Mateo-Dieste, 2018). However, I would like to highlight that here, it also serves as an *emic* term, used by the research participants with a symbolic re-signification that is completely opposite to its socially established usage. For this reason, the decision was taken to use this term throughout the work, which is an important aspect that explains how *morofobia* makes sense in discussions of Islamophobia in Spain.

This work leaves some unresolved questions, encouraging subsequent researchers to revisit the debate and dialogue surrounding using terms to describe realities that, although dynamic and changing over time, still have significant social repercussions in people's daily lives. One of the questions that warrants reflection is what happens with Spanish Muslim converts, who, therefore, are not racially identified as *moros* at first glance. In this case, the racial dimension of Islamophobia, which we have been exploring, shifts into a racial dimension of religion itself, also addressed in this article, potentially leading me to think of the concept of "Islamoracialism[5]." This aspect has been explored in contributions such as those by Moosavi (2015)

5   It is a concept that I am reflecting on, based on references such as Meer (2013), Rana (2011), and Meer and Modood (2009), who suggest that religion itself, like ethnicity or culture, can be racialised.

and Galonnier (2015). They note that white converts do not experience discrimination to the same degree, but they are not entirely exempt from it. Indeed, their conversion can have racialised implications when they express their Muslim identity, and they are also subject to religious discrimination. Is that Islamophobia without racism? What happens with the racial dimension in this case? How does the exclusion of Islam from the public space operate in this instance? This convergence challenges the traditional racial and religious boundaries, suggesting the need to explore further how these identities are constructed and experienced globally and, of course, in Spain.

Acknowledgements

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