"The word 'Machu Picchu' makes me very uncomfortable": Racialized Latinidades in Spanish Higher Education Institutions

"La palabra 'Machu Picchu' me pone muy nerviosa": Latinidades racializadas en instituciones de educación superior españolas

Glenda Vaillant Cruz
University of South Florida
E-mail: glendamariav@usf.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5020-7809

Antonia Olmos Alcaraz
Universidad de Granada
E-mail: antonia@ugr.es
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5852-6492

Beatriz Padilla
University of South Florida
Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
E-mail: padillab@usf.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2359-3369

Authors

Abstract

The paper examines the racialization processes experienced by a group of university students identified as Latin American, Latino, and/or Afro-Latin American in Spain. Through ethnographic work conducted in higher education spaces, the research identifies three coping strategies for dealing with racialization experiences. The first occurs when participants are aware of these processes and the resulting racism, recognizing that it goes beyond phenotype (especially in bureaucratic processes and in relation with gender). The second strategy involves minimizing these racialization processes by labeling them as misunderstandings. The third strategy entails adopting resistance strategies to confront these processes, either by forming ethnoracial and/or religious communities or by actively engaging in anti-racist groups. In the conclusion, the article reflects on the persistence of colonial imaginaries about Latinidad present in the racialization processes experienced, interrelating them with the coping strategies present in the testimonies and connecting them with our concept of situational global racial formation.

El artículo estudia los procesos de racialización que experimenta un grupo de estudiantes universitarios identificados como latinoamericanos, latinos o afrolatinoamericanos en España. A través de una etnografía en espacios de educación superior, la investigación identifica tres estrategias de afrontamiento de las experiencias de racialización. La primera, acontece cuando los par-

ticipantes son conscientes de dichos procesos y del racismo adyacente, e identifican que ello sucede más allá del fenotipo (especialmente en los procesos burocráticos y relacionados con el género). La segunda, consiste en minimizar dichos procesos de racialización, llamándolos malentendidos. Y la tercera, implica posicionamientos de resistencia para afrontarlos, formando comunidades etnoraciales o religiosas o implicándose activamente en grupos antirracistas. En la conclusión, se reflexiona en torno a la persistencia de imaginarios coloniales sobre la latinidad presentes en los procesos de racialización, su interrelación con las estrategias detectadas para afrontarlos y su conexión con la formación racial global situacional.

1. Introduction: Colonial imaginaries of Latinidad

Some of the logics of racism in Spain are rooted in the "main foundational historical myths of the nation" (Olmos Alcaraz, 2020), namely, the myth of the "Reconquista" and the myth of the "Descubrimiento" (Moreno, 1992).[1] Along this line, the myth of cultural proximity (Padilla & Cuberos-Gallardo, 2016) also explains the complex relations between the former metropolis and the colonies; while Latin Americans are "others", they are seen as more compatible than migrants from other origins. In this sense, the Spanish state uses policies, including migration policies, as neocolonial technologies to control. All together, these myths underpin the persistence of colonial imaginaries today, with a lasting impact on perceptions and treatment of migrant populations, especially those from Morocco and Latin America (Olmos Alcaraz, 2020). Official historiography presents this thread of events as unquestionable facts that laid the foundation for the creation of the "Spanish nation" (Moreno, 1992). However, this narrative simplifies and homogenizes historical and cultural complexities, ignores the existence of long-standing racialized communities resulting from internal colonialism toward the Roma people (Garcés, 2016), promotes a view that perceives these populations through a prism of inferiority and need for civilization, and significantly influences how migrant communities are conceptualized and interacted with. The idea of the "Descubrimiento," which

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1   The period known as the "Reconquista" is a long period (from the VII to the XV Centuries) in which the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula conquered the territory of Al-Andalus, which had previously been taken by the Muslims ("Moors") from the Visigoths (not the Spanish, since the Kingdom of Spain did not yet exist at that time). As a result, the territory of what is now known as Spain was reunified under the rule of the Catholic Monarchs. Only after the "Reconquista" was achieved, the Catholic Monarchs begin exploring a route to Asia, with the goal not only of gaining access to spices and silk but also of expanding Christianity, which ultimately led to the so-called "discovery of America". Therefore, the "Reconquista" (which was, in reality, a conquest) and the "Descubrimiento" (which was, in reality, both conquest and colonization) are connected as foundational myths of the Spanish nation, due to the strong religious mandate behind the political and economic enterprise of the Catholic Monarchs and their project of conquest and evangelization.

refers to the conquest of the Americas, is laden with paternalistic notions—reinforced by a logic of exotization—about the "other" as the "noble savage," a naive and primitive being waiting to be guided and civilized by Europe (Mignolo, 2007). Additionally, exotization turns into sexualization when it comes to gender (Padilla, 2007). The inherent Eurocentrism in this construction led to a process of homogenization of an "imagined society," a condition of modern nation-states under a pattern of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2020). This approach not only minimizes the violence and exploitation inherent in colonization but also perpetuates a racist and dehumanizing view that subjugates these populations culturally and socially. Moreover, the myth of the "Descubrimiento" contributes to a monolithic view of Latin America carried out from the perspective of the colonizer, ignoring the rich cultural and ethnic diversity found in Latin America, and establishing a narrative that erases pre-colonial realities represented both in indigenous roots, and postcolonial realities reflected in new migration patterns.

This colonial narrative is reflected in various spheres, including formal education in Spain, which often overlooks the linguistic and cultural diversity of Latin America and does not adequately address these realities in its educational policies. This omission contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the exclusion of voices and perspectives vital for a more complete and respectful understanding of these communities. Challenging these colonial narratives is crucial for combating racism and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. In addition to reevaluating and reforming how history and culture are taught and discussed in educational and social contexts, it is necessary to listen to the voices and experiences of those racialized as Latin Americans, Latinos, and Afro-Latin Americans. In this sense, Siqueira and Ramos (2021) suggest a decolonial perspective to challenge current research on higher education as being uncritical and eurocentric.

In line with decolonial views, in this article, we take an ethnographic approach to understand how a group of university students who identify as Latin American, Latino, and Afro-Latin American experience processes of racialization in their everyday interactions; and the different strategies they take to cope with this process. We first provide a theoretical reflection on the concepts of global ethnoracial formation and racialization. Secondly, we describe the methodology utilized in the study, participant profiles, and the fieldwork carried out in university and non-university spaces. Then we present the testimonies of the participants and our observations. Lastly, we conclude with a reflection of our findings through the lens of our theoretical framework.

2. Theoretical Framework: Intersectional Global Ethnoracial Formation and Racialization Processes

In previous works (Olmos Alcaraz, Vaillant Cruz & Padilla, 2023), we adopted the concept of racial formations, coined by Omi and Winant defined as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (2014, p. 55) and depart from their US-centric use of the concept to a more global and a situational scope, which we call situational global ethnoracial formation. Additionally, racialization is related to the formation of racialized groups (Goldberg, 1992) and we subsequently argue that it is potentially the result of global ethnoracial formation.

Barot and Bird (2001) traced the origin of the concept of racialization to the late 19th century to authors like Toynbee (1918), despite the prevalent idea that it is a recently created concept. However, they identified two different approaches in its use, from the periphery or from the center. Fanon (1952), an exponent from the periphery, in his effort to explain and understand the depth with which racism operates, provided explanatory elements of the processes of racialization, even without using the term but rather through symbolic attributes such as language, phenotype, among others. Fanon (1952) shows how phenotype is re-signified when intersected with the economics, language, culture, and/or social (social class). Miles (1993) and Small (1994), exponents from the center, use the term to avoid reifying race, deconstructing it, and linking it with social class relations. Foucault (1992) and Goldberg (1992), also from the center, understand racialization as forms of power that establish hierarchies related to the body resulting in multiple forms of exclusion from the structural to the psychological.

Last but not least, because racialization is context-specific and adaptable/malleable when subjects migrate to other societies, we believe that the concept of global ethnoracial formation better represents the process we are describing, and includes racialization as a possible outcome. Hall (2017) adds more to the understanding of racialization when he argues that:

> [...] socially, historically, and politically, race is a discourse; that it operates like a language, like a sliding signifier; that its signifier reference not genetically established facts but the systems of meaning that have come to be fixed in the classifications of culture; and that those meanings have real effects not because of some truth that inheres in their scientific classification but because of the will to power and the regime of truth that are instituted in the shifting relations of discourse that such meanings establish with our concepts and ideas in the signifying field. (Hall, 2017, pp. 45-46)

In other words, racialization occurs when language attributes meanings to race—or other categories or markers—and these meanings are internalized at the cultural level, guiding the ways in which we relate socially. Racialization, then, is not merely an act of external categorization but rather a continuous and dynamic discursive process that structures social reality and is embedded in everyday practices, the distribution of power, and forms of subjectivation. It is shaped in relation to other signifiers and through systems of social representation. This is what Hall calls "racializing discourses of difference" (Hall, 2017, p. 52), which are intimately linked to structures of power and not only define who belongs to which group but also shape opportunities, the distribution of resources, and access to institutional spaces. In this sense, racializing language is not just a matter of symbolic representation but a mechanism of material and political exclusion.

In this work, we understand racialization as a series of meaning attribution processes (Hall, 2017), functioning in a complex, continuous, and contextualized manner, through which categories are interpreted—becoming naturalized and biologized. Moreover, we argue that racialization is intersectional as gender, class, ethnicity, migration status and other categories are relevant and structured by power relations (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2004; Olmos Alcaraz, 2020). By discussing racialization, or ethnoracialization,[2] as a process, we assume it is ongoing, contingent, and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of

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2   When we use "racialization," we always imply ethnoracialization, to be coherent with global ethnoracial formation.

how racial and ethnic dynamics from the country of origin are translated and adapted to the host country; in our case, people of Latin American origin who consider themselves Latin Americans and Latinos, including Afro-descendants (Olmos Alcaraz, Vaillant Cruz & Padilla, 2023).

Masferrer (2023) argues that racism, as other forms of oppression, can be felt, heard and observed, both by people who suffered it or practiced it:

> Racism are practices, attitudes, discourses and ideas that justify and reproduce systems and structures of inequalities, oppression and exclusion that derive from hierarchical classification of human populations based on physical characteristics, cultural aspects, family and national origins, among others.[3] (Masferrer, 2023, p. 10)

By understanding racism as an observable and experiential phenomenon, it underscores the continuity and adaptability of these dynamics in different contexts, such as that of Latin Americans in host countries, where structures of power and discrimination are reconfigured but persist. While the US has recognized the Latin American region as its backyard, one can think of Spain as its front yard, given its historical colonial relations, palpable in languages, religion, diplomatic proximity, among others. In this sense, several Latin American authors have advocated for an intersectional approach to racism and racialization, because different identities (gender, racial, ethnic, class, nationality, migratory status to name the most relevant arising from our fieldwork) and inequalities are interwoven, converged and interact together (Gall, 2015; Viveros, 2016; Pérez Ruiz, 2018; Masferrer, 2023). This means that the effects of this form of differentiation and social exclusion are not easily predictable or detectable, because they operate contextually and temporally, and take on diverse forms; and, as we have mentioned, they reconfigure themselves in the migratory experiences of the subjects. Some types of interwoven racism include mestizaje (ethnoracial mixing) (Pérez Vera, 2023), anti-indigeneity (Rodríguez, 2023), anti-blackness (Vargas, 2023) and anti-chinese racisms (Gómez, 2023), among others [in Masferrer (coord.), 2023]. Additionally, many of these racialization processes are gendered (Padilla, 2014; Souto Garcia & Ambort, 2022) and certain racialized subjects are sexualized. In the same vein, Essed (1991) when studying Black university women, takes an intersectional approach to describe what she calls "everyday racism" experienced at the micro and macro levels.

Wade and Moreno Figueroa (2021) identified a disconnect between the explicit discussion about racism and its institutional dimensions, leading them to question whether an antiracist language is always necessary given existing alternative ways of articulating anti-racist struggles in Latin America. They believe that treating racialized dimensions more implicitly as an integral part of inequalities can be effective, even if not centering the struggle on racism. In their research, these authors found resistance to the use of the concept of racism among activists and grassroots organizers, along with an uneven understanding of such terms. In consequence, they embrace the idea of using alternative grammars of antiracism and racially-aware class consciousness. This is in accordance with the idea of "internalized racism," as a way of experiencing racialization processes as something difficult to perceive by the subject themselves, given that it is a process that happens externally and internally, but especially in the relationships

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3   Own translation.

between individuals and social structures (Moreno Figueroa & López, 2023). Likewise, Wade and Moreno Figueroa (2021) argue that:

> [...] revealing and naming racism has been an arduous and necessary struggle (Wade, 2010), due to the region's long history of denying and minimizing racism, rooted in part in dominant narratives of national identity that foreground mestizaje as the key process leading to nationhood (De la Cadena, 2007; Gall, 2004; Leal and Langebaek, 2010; Moreno Figueroa, 2012; Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar, 2016; Wade, 2017). (Wade & Moreno Figueroa, 2021, pp. 24-25)

Connecting Latin American, Spain and the rest of the World is important, mainly to better understand not only how colonialism worked but also how recent processes around issues of racism, racialization and minority recognition in Latin America have developed, and when considering migration, how migration influences the experience of racism at home and abroad. In the 1980s, the socio-historical context of Latin America was dominated by the incorporation of official multicultural language, which coincided with democratization, the global rise of identity politics, and the approval of new constitutions that recognized rights for minority groups, mostly defined around culture and cultural differences, decentering from racism. Even if these changes were relevant, the limitations of multiculturalism became obvious in practices of tokenism and cooptation and fostering resentment among populations.

Moreover, Wade and Moreno Figueroa's elaboration of alternative grammars make sense as these grammars derive from the history of mestizaje in Latin America:

> (...) as a process and an ideology of nationhood, which have created many racial formations in which prototypical identities or social locations of "Black", "Indigenous" and "white" are supplemented by a large—often majority—"mestizo" middle ground, which, although racially ambiguous, is also powerfully structured by racialized hierarchies that value whiteness. (Wade & Moreno Figueroa, 2021, p. 27)

This interweaving of racial categories, evidenced in the "alternative grammars," suggests that mestizo identities not only challenge binary classifications but also emphasize how historical legacies of mestizaje inform contemporary migrant experiences elsewhere. Thus, upon arriving in new societies, these legacies encounter transformations by existing local racial and ethnic dynamics. This process of interaction and transformation is crucial for understanding the complexities of global ethnoracial formation. For these reasons, our concept of global ethnoracial formation incorporates migration processes, race and ethnicity as experienced through mestizaje at origin and destination, often alongside gender, are instrumental to understand how students from Latin American or of Latin American origin experience ethnoracialization processes in Spanish Universities.

3. Methodology approach

Even though this study was first carried out in the United States to map the racial and ethnic experiences of inclusion/exclusion of Latin Americans, Latinos and Afro-Latin Americans in institutions of higher education (Vaillant Cruz, 2022; Padilla, 2023), the present study adapted the research design to the Spanish context. While the target population is very similar, Latin

Americans, Latinos and Afro-Latin Americans[4] in Spanish universities, here we incorporated community-engaged research. On the one hand, we carried out in-depth interviews with students and (a limited number) of faculty who had recent experiences as students. We also incorporated participant observation, conducted by attending classes, workshops, and events, including in non-university spaces, to build relationships with potential participants. On the other hand, participatory action research was implemented by getting involved with a recently formed group of antiracism student activists. In this article, we focus on our observations and student interviews. Overall, we interviewed 19 participants who were college students of Latin American origin studying or who had studied at a university in Spain. Our sample included 11 females and 8 males, no one identified as gender non-conforming. We asked participants to share any identity that was important to them; they mentioned gender, nationality, origin, religion, race/ethnicity, regional identities, among others. In terms of age, the sample ranged from 19 to 58, and included undergraduate and graduate students, in different fields (see Table 1).

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, employing different techniques: flyers, word-of-mouth, and referrals. We developed a semi-structured interview guide that asked questions about the participant's family background, their academic journey, socialization, friendships, ethnic/racial self-identification, migration, and discrimination experiences in higher education in Spain. To further expand on each theme, probing questions and cues were used to secure further elaboration on given topics. Verbal consent was requested from participants at the beginning of each interview after they were briefed on the objectives of the study. To protect the privacy of participants, personal data, institutional affiliation and location of the universities have been anonymized. In terms of participant observation, which was carried out in Andalusia, the field researcher always presented herself as a researcher and explained the project's details. The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted during the 2022-23 academic year, but there were follow-ups into the next academic year (2023-24). Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the interviewed individuals.

Table 1. Participants' profiles

Pseudonym/Gender	Age/Time in Spain	Parent's Country of Origin/Place of Birth	Graduate/ Undergraduate
Aspasia/Female	58/5 months	Ecuador/Ecuador	Graduate
Camilia/Female	23/Born in Spain	Cuba and Peru/Spain	Undergraduate
Camilo/Male	30/6 months	Colombia/Colombia	Graduate
Dora/Female	50/8 months	Peru/Peru	Graduate
Edwin/Male	20/5 years	Venezuela/Venezuela	Undergraduate
Esperanza/Female	45/10 years	Peru/Peru	Graduate
Isabela/Female	29/2 years	Colombia/Colombia	Graduate

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4   In the empirical material produced in our research, the categories Latin American and Latino are used interchangeably as a synonymous and derived from participants' self-identification, including the nationalities; and when Afro-Latin American is used, it adds to the idea of Latinidad also associated with Blackness (phenotypic markers), as described by participants.

Pseudonym/Gender	Age/Time in Spain	Parent's Country of Origin/Place of Birth	Graduate/ Undergraduate
Jonathan/Male	21/6 years	Dominican Republic/ Dominican Republic	Undergraduate
Joni/Male	19/Born in Spain	Colombia and Spain/ Spain	Undergraduate
Julia/Female	39/7 months	Mexico/Mexico	Graduate
Laura/Female	19/2 years	Colombia/Colombia	Undergraduate
Lola/Female	32/10 years	Venezuela and France/ Venezuela	Graduate
Navarro/Male	21/Born in Spain	Ecuador/Spain	Undergraduate
Paz/Female	49/23 years	Brazil/Brazil	Graduate
Roberto/Male	33/2 years	Brazil/Brazil	Graduate
Samuel/Male	35/6 months	Cuba/Cuba	Graduate
Simena/Female	22/4 years	Peru and Italy/Peru	Undergraduate
Susana/Female	41/14 years	Cuba/Cuba	Graduate
Veronica/Female	51/29 years	Argentina/Argentina	Graduate
Camilia/Female	23/Born in Spain	Cuba and Peru/Spain	Undergraduate

The analysis of the data generated through observations and interviews was conducted in phases. First, using a reflexive approach, we created general qualitative codes derived from our research questions. In a second phase, we identified recurring themes that informed our codes, following an inductive process, even if some themes reflect topics from the literature. MAXQDA 2022 Standard was used for data analysis.

Due to the ethnographic approach of this study, the reflexivity used for interpretation and the implementation of participatory action research, the team's positionality is crucial. Glenda Vaillant Cruz, who was in charge of the fieldwork, is a PhD student born in Cuba and raised in the US, who identifies as an Afro-Latina of mixed race/ethnicity. Antonia Olmos Alcaraz is an anthropologist from Southern Spain, born and raised in Andalusia. Beatriz Padilla, born in Argentina, is a sociologist educated in her country of origin and in the US, who lived in Europe for 16 years, and currently resides in the US, where she identifies as Latina. All authors have conducted research on migration, diversity, racism, and discrimination in educational settings. We utilize our positionalities as complementary lenses to analyze and interpret the ethnographic data. Moreover, from our positionalities we also embrace a socially engaged anthropology/sociology, as we believe that social research fosters critical thinking, counterbalances speeches of power and contributes to the struggle of those working toward social justice.

Finally, in an attempt to recognize some limitations to the study, we understand that from some perspectives, the anonymization of the data (carried out at the request of the participants) might be perceived as a lack of information in the research.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. "Standing Out": Identifying Racialization, Identity Markers and Racism

4.1.1. Phenotype and beyond: Processes of Racialization and Instances of Racism

Participants in this study identified various identity markers that contributed to their racialization. These markers often included phenotype, country of origin, race, accents, and gender. Additionally, bureaucratic processes and ethnoracial slurs were sometimes used to further the othering of participants or to underscore their difference and lack of belonging. For participants who had not been racialized in their country of origin, migration became a process of reforming their identities. For instance, Julia, a graduate student from Mexico studying in Spain, explained: "In Mexico, I am a *güera* (a white woman), a privileged *güera*. Here [in Spain], I'm Latina. I have just recently come to understand that [I'm Latina here]" (Julia, 2024).

While Julia had been perceived as a *güera* (white woman) in Mexico, she came to realize that she had been recategorized as "Latina" upon migrating to Spain, a category denoting a lower social position. She explains that she had "just recently come to understand that," indicating that her racialization was a gradual process. This shift in her racialization suggests that it is often context-dependent and that migration can influence self-identification, particularly when individuals are racialized differently in their host country due to newly recognized identity markers.

For participants like Julia, who were not racialized based on their phenotypic features, accents often became the most significant identity markers. Camila, an undergraduate student born in Spain to a Cuban father and Peruvian mother, recounted her experience of changing her accent. This process began at an early age. After her sister migrated to Spain from Cuba when Camila was 6 and her sister was 11, she started noticing that their classmates would single them out because of the way they spoke. "Up until that point, when my sister came [to Spain], I didn't understand why my classmates would laugh [when I spoke]" (Camila, 2024). It was then that Camila and her sister consciously began to change their accents to conform to the Spaniard accent as a way to cope with the discriminatory bullying they were experiencing at school. Reflecting on this, Camila expressed regret over losing her Latin American accent as an identity marker: "And now I regret it because I can't go back to [how I used to speak] because I was only 6 years old [when I decided to change my accent]" (Camila, 2024).

In both instances, Julia and Camila were confronted with racialization. Through external ascription, they were compelled to reflect on and reexamine their ethnoracial identities. While Camila initially coped with her racialization by changing her accent, an identity marker, during her childhood, as a college student, she frequently resisted ethnoracial discrimination and asserted her Latin American identity.

Camila noted that at her university, there were instances when classmates made discriminatory remarks about Latin Americans, unaware of her Latin American heritage. She explained, "I'm always the one fighting in [my group of friends]… When people don't know me, they often make racist comments until I speak up and say, 'Hey, you don't know this, but I am a

descendant of [Latin Americans]'" (Camila, 2024). Camila also mentioned frequently hearing pejorative terms used to describe Latin Americans, even within her own circle of friends, including "Machu Picchu," "Panchito," and "Sudaka." She added, "The word 'Machu Picchu' makes me very uncomfortable and I really don't like it at all… And 'Panchito'… It's said in front of me because even people who know better forget [that I am Latin American]… [because] I don't look like it" (Camila, 2024).

These ethnoracial slurs were mentioned by several participants who had also been referred to by these names. For instance, Esperanza, a Peruvian woman who earned her doctoral degree in Spain and is now a professor there, recounted an experience where she was called "Machu Picchu" by a group of women. She shared:

> It happened in Madrid while I was walking down the street, and there were two ladies at a bus stop. I passed by, and one of them called me 'Machu Picchu.' I laughed to myself, but not in front of them, to avoid being disrespectful. To me, it just seemed like ignorance. (Esperanza, 2024)

Those who identified their experiences of racialization often recounted instances of blatant discrimination, frequently expressed through racial slurs or discriminatory attitudes based on their phenotype or identity markers. Simena, an undergraduate student from Peru, shared numerous examples of facing such challenges at her university, both from professors and peers, once they were aware of her country of origin. She recalled moments when professors made assumptions about her migration:

> In the beginning, I remember that the treatment [from my classmates and professors] was a bit condescending, like *la pobrecita* (the poor little thing). They assumed I was an immigrant who had come with my family because I had no opportunities back home. The idea of what an immigrant is that the media portrays—that was me in their eyes. (Simena, 2022)

Simena further elaborates on how her classmates and professors were often taken aback when they realized that the assumptions they had made about her did not align with reality. As "la pobrecita" she was perceived as coming from an "underprivileged" socioeconomic status, and migrating due to economic hardships. In reality, Simena came from a fairly privileged background as her mother was a professor and she had attended a prestigious private university in Peru. She recalls a significant moment during her first semester when the class grades were posted, and she had earned the highest grades. She explains:

> [I remember] the looks of surprise on people's faces, like 'the Peruvian [got the best grades]? Really?'… [my classmates and professors] were hostile. They were just surprised because they had this idea [about me] that didn't match what I was showing them. (Simena, 2022)

In her interview, Simena recounts numerous instances where professors perpetuated stereotypes about Peru and its education system. One particular incident "marked her a lot" when a highly respected professor made disparaging comments about education in Latin America. Simena found the remarks "incredibly condescending" (Simena, 2022). Frustrated by the professor's words, she raised her hand and responded:

> It's not like that. I'm telling you because not only am I from there, but I've lived there my whole life, I've studied it. For example, for my final university project, I did a complete analysis of the educational system there. So I've studied it, and you're wrong, and you're giving incorrect information to a lot of people who will eventually be professionals in education. And I think it's very harmful for them to form this kind of idea about such a large region that is so important to Spain, like Latin America. (Simena, 2022)

Simena's contestation of the professor's comments did not sit well with them. "And that was the only time the professor became arrogant" (Simena, 2022). She felt that the professor felt as though she had disrespected them. The professor stated that even if Simena had conducted a study, so had they and that they "had a much higher level of education [than she did]" (Simena, 2022). They suggested that they should compare their research to see whose opinions were valid. Simena, stated "Well, I guess 20 years of living in Peru apparently doesn't count for much here" (Simena, 2022).

For the rest of the semester, Simena felt that this situation affected the professor's attitude toward her. She states, "I mean, my grades [were not impacted] … because that would have been too obvious" (Simena, 2022). Although she received the highest grade possible in the course, which was particularly impressive given the difficulty of the class, she was not awarded a distinction, which was at the professor's discretion. "I've been more cautious [with speaking out in class] since then" (Simena, 2022).

4.1.2. Bureaucracies as Official Modes of Racialization

As international students, several participants were forced to navigate bureaucratic processes to regularize their migratory status. While these processes often occurred outside of the university setting, they were fundamental to the international student experience and were a common thread throughout many of the interviews. These processes frequently left students feeling as though they were being "othered" or that they were "out of place."

Camilo, a graduate student from Colombia, explained that he decided to study in Spain after a friend informed him that, as Colombians, they could apply for a student visa after already being in Spain. Since educational costs are much higher in Colombia, he believed that studying in Spain was a good idea, especially with the ease of obtaining a visa. But in the end, Camilo found that these bureaucratic processes made him feel like an outsider, stating:

> From the moment you arrive everything about the migration process, bureaucratic procedures, visa applications, recognition of your degrees and grades—all these things make you aware that you don't belong here. So, you feel like an outsider. You need documents apostilled…and all that makes you feel foreign. (Camilo, 2023)

Similarly, Veronica, an Argentinean woman who obtained both her master's and doctoral degrees in Spain and is now a professor at a Spanish university, recalled the lengthy and complex process of regularizing her migration status as a student. When she first arrived in Spain, she decided not to regularize her status, but after nearly being deported, she began working long hours under the table to pay for her student visa, as her visa did not allow her to work legally. She recalls that once a year, she had to renew her student visa, which often caused her immense stress and anxiety:

> The [officials] would take notes, look at my bank statements, photocopy everything, and then there was an interview. And that was every year. It was a struggle. Honestly, every time I had to renew my [visa], it was terrible. I had tremendous anxiety. I didn't know if they would give it to me, if I would lose everything, or if I would have to return to Argentina. (Veronica, 2022)

The *Oficina de Extranjería* (Office of Foreign Affairs) often served as a space of blatant discrimination, even for international students who had a more privileged migration status than other Latin Americans. Immediately upon arriving in Spain, Julia stated that she did not feel racialized. She came to customs with her papers ready, yet the agent only briefly glanced at them. "[The agent] received it, meaning they just glanced [at my papers]. They didn't even open it... [They just] told me to go ahead. Nothing else. I think it is my appearance. Which bothers me because it shouldn't be that way" (Julia, 2024). Julia explains that because she was perceived by the agent as white, she was able to bypass any difficulties upon her arrival in Spain.

However, Julia recalls being mistreated later at the Office of Foreign Affairs:

> I got [to the office] for my appointment. The guard told me, "Stand there in line." So I went into the line. Then I was told, "Someone is calling you." I turned around, and another guard started to reprimand me. The other guard was really rude. He began [yelling], "I have been calling you for 10 minutes! I need to do my job, and you are wasting my time!" I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I didn't hear you." And he responded, "No, don't do that! DO what I am telling you to DO!" As if I was dumb. I got nervous, did what I needed to do, and then I left. (Julia, 2024)

This shift in Julia's treatment from the airport agent to the guards at the Office of Foreign Affairs underscores a critical distinction. At the airport, where travelers are often perceived as tourists or visitors, Julia's appearance allowed her to bypass discrimination and avoid scrutiny. However, in migrant-only spaces like the Office of Foreign Affairs, she could not escape being labeled as a "migrant." Although her phenotype had previously shielded her from discrimination, her migrant status now made her a target for mistreatment. This demonstrates that racialization is an ongoing process, influenced by changes in status—in this case, being classified as a migrant.

Bureaucracies within the university space also exacerbated participants' feelings of discrimination and not belonging. For instance, Julia shared an experience at the Office of the School of Graduate Studies at her university. She went to submit a document proving that all her degrees were original. Upon arrival, a staff member asked for an identification number she was unfamiliar with. When Julia expressed confusion about what was being asked, the staff member began to treat her rudely. "He said, 'Listen, when you registered [for classes], they should have given you a number... [the number] you use to access the computer system!'" (Julia, 2024). Julia asked if he meant her passport number. "[He said,] 'Well, of course! A passport number, or the number of...' And he starts listing off synonyms for this number" (Julia, 2024). Julia was upset by the staff member's condescending attitude and responded, "Here in your country, you use this term, and in my country, we use a different one. We may speak the same language, but we don't call it the same. So there is no reason for you to [treat me] like that" (Julia, 2024). The staff member ultimately signed the document, but with an attitude

that left Julia feeling infuriated. This instance highlights how bureaucracies even within the university space can further feelings of unbelonging amongst this student subpopulation.

4.1.3. Gender-Based Discrimination: The Exoticization and Sexualization of Latina Women

Some female participants reported feeling sexualized or exoticized, a phenomenon often tied to the ethnoracial stereotyping of Latina women. Latinas were frequently imagined as promiscuous or being characterized by curvaceous and sensual bodies. Camila described this exoticization of the Latina body, stating, "[T]here is this image… of a very perfect body, like something exotic… that draws attention" (Camila, 2024). Another participant shared, "I'm Latina, [people think] I would be tall, brunette, with lots of curves… I am not that tall, and I am pretty average… I don't want to mention my ethnicity [to others] because it would bring up stereotypes" (Esperanza, 2024). In this quote, Esperanza highlights the sexualization of Latina bodies as a result of pervasive stereotypes. These stereotypes were so entrenched that Esperanza often chose to conceal her ethnoracial identity to avoid being subjected to sexualization.

Simena took a similar approach, attempting to conceal her Latin American identity in certain spaces to bypass sexualization. She shared, "At parties, I swear, there [are] moments when I was afraid to speak, because as soon as they [hear] my accent [I am sexualized]. Everything [is] a constant sexualization of Latina women" (Simena, 2022).

Julia reinforced this sentiment, stating, "I think there is this exoticization, 'Wow, you are Latina!' Like they think you are super sexy. It's like, 'Oh! How exotic'… There is something in the way [Spaniards] look at me [that is sexualized]" (Julia, 2024). She elaborated further, stating:

> People always stare at me…the first thing people ask me is "Where are you from?" or "You are not from here right?" Without hearing me speak. And one time I asked someone how they knew [I was Latina] and they told me "It is because of the way you walk. You are different." (Julia, 2024)

In the quotes above, Julia reveals an important insight: the sexualization of Latina bodies is so deeply rooted in the colonial imaginary that it becomes an intrinsic part of the racialization of Latina women in Spain. Julia notes that simply by the way she walked, someone identified her as Latina, highlighting how these stereotypes are projected onto her physical appearance—demonstrating that Latina women are racialized through perceptions of their supposed "sexual" nature.

Furthermore, Isabela, a graduate student from Colombia who had decided to stay in Spain after graduation, discusses the stereotypical perceptions she frequently encountered in Spain regarding Latin American women in her interview. She notes, "The stereotype of the Latina woman [is that we are] very passionate" (Isabela, 2023). She continues, "[T]hey think we come to this country to marry a Spaniard who will save us. And well, no. I think that a lot of people come mainly to study" (Isabela, 2023).

Isabela's testimony highlights the exoticization and stereotyping of Latin American women in Spain, reflecting colonial and patriarchal narratives used in their racialization. The stereotype of the "passionate Latina" reinforces the idea that Latin American women are overtly sexual. These narratives reduce Latina women to opportunistic sexual beings, suggesting that their

main goal in migration is upward social mobility through relationships with Spaniard men. However, Isabela challenges this stereotype by pointing out that many Latina women migrate for educational opportunities, thereby contesting these simplistic and sexualized views held by society.

4.2. Malentiendidos: Reluctance to Identify Racism and Racialization

Participants in this study sometimes were reluctant to identify instances of discrimination or racialization, they at times described instances of discrimination as *malentendidos* or misunderstandings, attributing these events to "culture shock" or cultural differences. This tendency to downplay discrimination may reflect a conscious or subconscious effort to minimize their experiences in order to maintain a positive view of their host country. This downplaying of discriminatory incidents was particularly common among participants who were recent migrants or planning to remain in Spain after completing their degrees. At times, these participants would share moments of discrimination without labeling them as such.

Sometimes participants would justify the discriminatory attitudes of Spaniards, as not being "ill-willed." For example, when asked about the stereotypes Spaniards held about Colombians, Isabela, stated:

> [A] stereotype that I've noticed is... [Spaniards] still believe that we live in a jungle... I have a roommate who sometimes says things to me without meaning to offend, of course, with no ill intent, but she says things like, "How is it like to live in a third-world country?" [...] This Spanish girl (referring to her roommate) believes... that we are super behind [in Colombia], that our education is really bad, that everything there is bad. (Isabela, 2023)

In this quote, Isabela describes her roommate's negative perception of Colombia as a "third-world country," where people are behind in education and living in poor conditions. Although Isabela clearly identifies this as negative stereotyping on her roommate's part, she justifies her roommate's comments and attitudes, excusing them by stating that there was no "ill intent" and that her roommate did not mean to "offend." It is possible that, because Isabela had decided to stay in Spain after graduation, she was more inclined to overlook these discriminatory attitudes in order to maintain a positive perception of her host country.

Similarly, Laura, a Colombian undergraduate student, recalled a moment when her professor told her she needed to enunciate more clearly because of her accent. Afterward, another Latin American classmate approached her, remarking that the professor was "so racist" for making that comment. However, Laura remained unsure whether this was an instance of discrimination, justifying the professor's actions by suggesting that she did not think the professor "intended to make her feel bad."

When asked how she identified in terms of race and ethnicity, Laura remarked that this question was "easier for Americans" and that she had not thought about race as much in Colombia as people from the United States do. Ultimately, she stated that she identifies as white. Since Laura had not experienced racialization in her country of origin, she may have had more difficulty recognizing her racialization in Spain. For participants who were not ethnoracial minorities in their home countries, their racialization in Spain was often based not on their phenotype but on other markers, such as their accents. Because this form of racialization was

new to them, these participants often found it harder to identify instances of discrimination or understand their racialization compared to those who had been racialized or discriminated against in their country of origin.

For some participants, particularly those who saw themselves as temporary migrants, instances of discrimination were not always identified because they viewed their migration as privileged. This was the case for Aspasia, an Ecuadorian graduate student who lived in Spain only for her graduate program and had returned after its completion. When asked if she had experienced discrimination in Spain, she distinguished herself from other Ecuadorians, explaining:

> In Spain, one of the largest minorities is Ecuadorians, but not exactly the Ecuadorians who are doing what I went there to do... These are people who migrated and have had a very complex life, a very difficult migration... I was kind of someone just passing through, meaning I wasn't [the typical] migrant. (Aspasia, 2023)

Aspasia argued that, as someone who was "only passing through," living in Spain temporarily for a graduate program, she occupied a different position from her peers. This position, in her view, allowed her to bypass racial discrimination. While it may be true that her more privileged status, as someone who migrated to Spain under more favorable circumstances, may have shielded her from some forms of ethnoracial discrimination and stereotyping, it is also possible that her limited time in Spain prevented her from fully identifying racial discrimination or understanding her own racialization.

Those who adopted assimilationist coping strategies often did not acknowledge instances of discrimination. Samuel, a graduate student from Cuba who was determined to stay in Spain after graduation, began altering his way of speaking, gradually adapting his Spanish to more closely resemble that of local Spaniards, which he referred to as learning how to "speak correctly." He explained that he did not feel he had been discriminated against by Spaniards. However, he also noted that, despite working with them, he had not formed friendships with Spaniards, and most of his friends were Cuban. This suggests that he may have been experiencing othering without fully recognizing it. His reluctance to acknowledge his own racialization and exclusion could be a result of his efforts to assimilate, as maintaining a positive view of the host country might facilitate this process. His assimilationist approach to migration could be seen as a result of internalized colonialism, which historically positioned Spain as "la madre patria" (the motherland). Thus, potentially making it harder for him to recognize discriminatory attitudes or acknowledge the process of racialization he underwent upon migrating.

Moreover, some students found it challenging to discuss discriminatory incidents during the audio-recorded interviews. For example, one participant disclosed after the interview had ended that they had refrained from sharing their experiences of discrimination at their university due to fear of retaliation. This instance highlights a significant limitation in education research: because education researchers are often part of the academy themselves, participants may be cautious when sharing their experiences, particularly instances of discrimination out of concern for repercussions.

4.3. Standing Up: The Formation of Communities and Anti-Racism Advocacy as Strategies of Resistance and Coping

In response to racialization, othering, discrimination, and resistance from wider society, participants in this study frequently emphasized the importance of community building as a strategy for coping and resistance. These communities, often rooted in shared ethnoracial identities, enabled participants not only to resist discrimination and cope with challenges but also to exchange intellectual and social capital. Even participants who were reluctant to identify instances of discrimination acknowledged the significance of building community based on ethnoracial similarities as a key source of social support.

4.3.1. The Establishment of Ethnoracial Communities

When asked, "Who are your friends?," participants often engaged in discussions about the friendships, communities, and social support networks they had established or were developing in Spain, both within and beyond their university spaces. Many participants noted that their friends predominantly shared similar ethnoracial identities. Several also mentioned difficulties in forming friendships with Spaniards and integrating into communities outside their ethnic enclaves, attributing these challenges primarily to cultural differences or feelings of not belonging.

For instance, when I asked Dora, a Peruvian graduate student, who her friends were in Spain, she began to list all her friends and their respective countries of origin. Realizing that Dora had only mentioned friends from Latin America, I asked her if she had any friends from Spain, to which she replied:

> No, because I don't have a lot of relations with them. Maybe it's because... I find [Spaniards] a bit untrusting, I guess. I just feel more comfortable with other people from Latin America... I feel closer to them than I do to Spaniards. I have some classmates who are Spaniards, but with them, it's more like "Hi," "Bye." [I don't have friendship with them] the way I have with Latin Americans because they gravitate towards me less. Maybe it's just my perception, but I feel like [Spaniards] are people who don't talk much, or maybe they just don't talk much with foreigners. (Dora, 2023)

For Dora, friendships with other Latin Americans fostered camaraderie and a sense of belonging; being around people with similar backgrounds made her feel welcomed. She also mentioned feeling that Spaniards did not communicate much with foreigners and described them as "untrusting," reflecting her perception that Spaniards received migrants with caution or distance. Consequently, it can be inferred that Dora's perception of Spaniards' attitudes toward migrants led her to gravitate towards other Latin Americans as a coping strategy or a strategy of perseverance.

The construction of relationships based on ethnic commonalities was a theme echoed through several interviews. The participants of this study often had atypical migration patterns. Some migrate circularly, living in Spain for short periods while traveling back and forth to their country of origin, while others are faced with the decision of whether or not to stay in Spain after graduation and how to do so. Therefore, relationships and friendships with other Latin American students facing similar difficult decisions and atypical migratory patterns were especially important for the students interviewed, as they help establish support

networks and enable the sharing of intellectual capital. In her interview Lola, a multi-ethnic graduate student who grew up in Venezuela, shared how, through her friendships with other Latin Americans, she was able to navigate the challenges of being a migrant. In the quote below she describes her relationship with a friend she met in Venezuela, whom she was not particularly close to in their country of origin but whom she developed a deeper relationship with upon their mutual migration to Europe:

> We were more or less friends [in Venezuela], but we both had moved from Venezuela to [Europe]. Curiously, immigration tends to make us all the same. When we saw each other at our university [in Europe], trying to fight to survive abroad, we became super [close friends]. I mean, she would say, "Do you want to eat arepas?" And I would be like, "I love eating arepas!" Since then, we have become inseparable. (Lola, 2023)

In this quote, Lola expressed how shared culture, represented here symbolically through arepas, a staple of the Venezuelan diet, strengthened her relationship with someone of the same country of origin. Lola's testimony indicates that relationships based on shared identities can assist these students in their homemaking process, particularly when they feel "out of place" or othered. While these students, through migration, leave behind their country of origin and their homes, they find "home" and belonging amongst each other.

Furthermore, in response to ethnoracism and xenophobic attitudes, these communities serve as crucial coping strategies. For instance, Susana, a Cuban graduate student who lived in Spain for 14 years, described feeling othered and discriminated against while living in Northern Spain. It was through the small Cuban community there that she found support. "The Latino community here [in the city I live in] is very large, and the Cuban community is growing... When I lived in Northern Spain, there were only a few of us [Cubans]; we all knew each other, and we all helped each other." She further explained, "There were fewer of us there... But as soon as we met other Cubans [there], we built a bond. That's the same in all communities."

Through that bond, Susana was able to establish a social support network, which helped her cope with the discrimination she faced. Her testimony highlights how ethnoracial identity-based communities provide migrants with social capital that plays a crucial role in their ability to cope with ethnoracial discrimination.

4.3.2. Religion as a Community

Susana was also an active member of an evangelical church and had formed friendships with other Latin American college students within this religious community. The church attracted individuals who did not adhere to Catholicism, Spain's most predominant religious group, many of whom were migrants. This evangelical church served as a space of belonging outside the university setting, acting as a catalyst for bonding social capital. Since the church drew like-minded individuals with similar ethnic identities and religious values, it became a place where these students could connect beyond the campus environment. Within this network, students shared resources and provided each other with emotional and moral support.

Some participants expressed that their religious views created a disconnect between them and their Spainard classmates, prompting them to gravitate toward members of their church who shared their values. During a conversation on campus, Samuel shared that after arriving in Spain, he searched for a church that aligned with his Christian beliefs, which proved challeng-

ing in a predominantly Catholic country. For a period, he traveled back and forth between Spain and Cuba, leaving his home for months at a time to complete study abroad portions of his graduate program. Eventually, he was given the opportunity to reside in Spain permanently to complete his doctoral degree. Having migrated to Spain alone, leaving his wife and daughter in Cuba, he had to rebuild a sense of home on his own. Feeling isolated, he sought community, which he found through the evangelical church. There, he connected with other college students of Latin American origin who helped him settle in Spain.

The interviews revealed that the formation of social networks based on shared identities provided students with both material and emotional resources, aiding them in navigating spaces of resistance, discrimination, and other forms of contested belonging.

4.3.3. Anti-Racism Activism as a Resistance Strategy

At the time of the fieldwork, a group of students who had attended an antiracism seminar on campus founded the first student organization dedicated to antiracism. Upon reviewing their university's anti-discrimination policies, they discovered that while protocols existed for gender-based discrimination and harassment, none addressed ethnoracial discrimination. Joni, a founding member and undergraduate student of Spaniard and Afro-Colombian origin, explained the organization's goal: "Our [goal] was to promote an anti-racist protocol at [our university] since we noticed that in Spain, there is no protocol for addressing racist aggressions at universities" (Joni, 2022).

This organization united students and created spaces to express their outrage over discriminatory incidents on campus, while also providing a platform for political mobilization. They frequently held events focused on the experiences of racialized people in Spain. The organization became a space of belonging and resistance against discrimination, yet it also faced opposition from their university. Flyers were torn down from bulletin boards, prompting members to reinforce them with layers of tape to prevent removal. The student organizers also struggled to reserve rooms for their weekly meetings, despite being entitled to room reservations according to their university guidelines. They believed that the difficulties they encountered were due to the nature of their organization.

Jonathan, a Dominican undergraduate student and another founding member, expressed his fear of retaliation from their university. "In the back of your mind, you think you're putting yourself on the spot when you do this, and it's dangerous" (Jonathan, 2023). He worried that his involvement might affect his future as a student but ultimately felt the work was worth the risk, stating, "I put those thoughts on the back burner because I think it's good work, and it's worth all the trouble" (Jonathan, 2023).

While the organization served as a space of resistance against ethnoracism, it also fostered support, unity, and self-reflection among its members. Ultimately, it empowered students to assert agency, participate in political mobilization, and challenge their othering within their university. Additionally, it allowed them to reclaim campus spaces, including classrooms that had sometimes been sites of hostility from other students and faculty, thereby advancing their resistance and advocacy efforts.

5. Conclusion

A major theme that arose from the students' testimonies is that racialization, as Hall (2017) suggested, is an ongoing process shaped by experiences of discrimination, external ascription, migration, gender-based stereotyping, racial/ethnic differentiation, nationality, language and accents, culture, and social class, among other intersections (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2002) and intertwined categories (Masferrer, 2023). We argue that racialization is also embedded in the larger process of global ethnoracial formation. Thus, while phenotype often accelerates the process of racialization, the narratives in this study suggest that other markers, such as accents and gender stereotyping, also play a significant role in participants' experiences of racialization, thus broadening the process of racializations past phenotype (Fanon, 1952; Hall, 2017). The narratives presented demonstrate that racialization is situational and context-dependent, with changes in external ascription influencing participants' self-perception. As shown, Julia, who was perceived as a "güera" (a white woman) in Mexico, is now seen as "Latina" in Spain, indicating that racialization in the context of migration to Spain is a continuous process that is situational connected to a larger global formation of race (Olmos Alcaraz, Vaillant Cruz & Padilla, 2023), but with specific characteristics.

While we incorporated intersectionality in our analysis of ethnoracialization processes, it should be made clear that we focused on the intersectional identities and categories that our participants self-identified as relevant in shaping their lived experiences in higher education institutions in Spain. For participants who recognized discrimination and their own racialization, they were able to identify blatantly discriminatory comments and attitudes. Being called ethnoracial slurs by Spaniards was a common form of racial discrimination experienced by the participants in this study, with newly emerging terms frequently discussed during the interviews. These instances of discrimination occurred both within university settings and outside of them. Some participants, like Simena, recounted experiences of discrimination from professors and classmates who held stereotypical views about people of Latin American origin, often anchored in the colonial imaginaries of the "Descubrimiento" (Mignolo, 2007).

Other instances of discrimination took place outside the university, such as during interactions with bureaucratic processes, reminding us that bureaucracies are neocolonial technologies to exert power and control (Padilla & Cuberos-Gallardo, 2016) in this case over students of Latin American origin. Navigating bureaucratic systems in Spain is challenging for many, both migrants and nationals, but these spaces are particularly difficult for migrants. They often face verbal harassment and intentional legal obstacles designed to complicate the migration process. At the level of political discourse, bureaucratic and governmental policies often underscored the students' foreignness, thereby contributing to their othering. These bureaucratic spaces become sites of racialization, where official forms of exclusion are imposed on migrants through legal procedures. In this regard, our research once again allowed us to observe how processes of racialization occur within and outside individuals, but especially in their relationship with institutions (Foucault, 1992; Goldberg, 1992; Wade & Moreno Figueroa, 2021; Moreno Figueroa & López, 2023). As these situations are common, comparative research with other geographical contexts could be explored in the future.

Although education research traditionally focuses on academic environments, it is crucial to extend ethnographic studies beyond campus, and this should be taken into consideration for future research. As highlighted in this study, institutions outside of universities, such as immigration offices, play a significant role in the racialization of students, in this case a negative

one. Bureaucratic processes tied to migratory status are critical in shaping the student experience and must therefore be considered in the research.

Likewise, gender-based discrimination and stereotyping played a significant role in the racialization of Latina women. Some of the women interviewed for this investigation reported feeling sexualized and exoticized by broader Spanish society. Latina women were often portrayed as opportunistic and overtly sexual, with the goal of trapping Spaniard men for social mobility. These stereotypes caused many of the women interviewed to feel racialized, reflecting deep connections with the colonial imaginary of Latina women and patriarchal attitudes (Mignolo, 2007). Deeper gender and feminist analysis should continue to be taken into account when studying ethnoracialization as these processes intersect with gender and sexual identities as well as stereotyping.

In line with the findings of other research (Wade & Moreno Figueroa, 2021; Moreno Figueroa & López, 2023), in our work we also found how some participants were reluctant to acknowledge discrimination or stereotyping. However, given our research context, we find that part of the explanation for this is possibly due to internalized colonial ideologies or conditioning, which also take on a special aspect with respect to migrant populations (Olmos Alcaraz, 2020; Olmos Alcaraz, Vaillant Cruz & Padilla, 2023). Also, as argued by Padilla & Cuberos-Gallardo (2016), the idea of cultural proximity as a reinvention of the colonial imaginary is persuasive, confusing and paradoxical. For example, some participants often labeled blatant discriminatory actions as *malentendidos* (misunderstandings), naively justifying the action as unintentional or inoffensive. Moreover, those planning to stay in Spain after graduation sometimes downplayed discrimination possibly to maintain a positive view of the host country, and as Wade and Figueroa (2021) suggested, adopting an "alternative grammar" approach by not naming racism or discrimination as is commonly practiced in certain Latin American contexts.

Participants who were not racialized in their country of origin sometimes struggled to recognize their racialization in Spain (Olmos Alcaraz, Vaillant Cruz & Padilla, 2023), or perceived it as a temporary situation. International students planning to return to their home countries often viewed their migration as privileged, which may have made it harder for them to identify discrimination, potentially due to their brief stay in Spain. Those who adopted assimilationist strategies may have internalized colonial ideologies, perceiving Spain as *la madre patria* (the motherland), which made recognizing discrimination particularly challenging given their perceived cultural proximity, especially if compared to populations from other world regions. Additionally, some chose not to identify ethnoracism during the audio-recorded interviews due to fear of retaliation given the positionality of the researchers.

This investigation reveals that social networks based on shared ethnoracial identities are often formed in response to discrimination, othering, or the need for resources like social and intellectual capital. For our participants, these networks, established through friendships, religious communities, and advocacy, provided essential support, solidarity, identity affirmation, and belonging. These social connections fostered bonding social capital, particularly for those with atypical migration patterns. Additionally, the antiracism organization empowered participants, while the evangelical church offered a sense of belonging beyond the campus, rooted in shared ethnic and religious identities.

Based on our findings, we argue that students of Latin American, Latino and Afro-Latin American origins in institutions of higher education in Spain, in our case, have experienced a

process of racialization that is part of situational and intersectional global ethnoracial formations. All of these labels/characteristics contribute to better explain their lived experience. In addition, when studying racism, discrimination and racialization, especially when it involves populations in mobility or migration situations, it is important to account for a "dialogue" between the societies of origin and destination, as context is crucial to understand transnational spaces and phenomena, allowing us to move away from ethnocentric and nationalistic assumptions.

We believe that in the context of the internationalization of higher education this topic is fundamental. Future research should incorporate the lenses of situational and intersectional global ethnoracial formation, identifying and comparing different racialization processes that incorporate colonial history, migration systems and transnational practices.

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