

The “Conguito”, the “Moro” and the “Gitano”: Multiraciality and the Pervasive Stigmatisation of Racialised Youth in Spain

El “Conguito”, el “Moro” y el “Gitano”: la multirracialidad y la persistente estigmatización de la juventud racializada en España

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Maghrebi Muslims, Black Africans, and Spanish Roma people are possibly the most stigmatised, racialised and discriminated against groups in contemporary Spain, a country with a strong legacy of colonialism and a problematic relationship with diversity. Because mixedness is a crucial test for evaluating the persistence of societal ethnoracial divisions, in this article we analyse the narratives of children and youth of Maghrebi Muslim, Black Afro-descendant and Roma mixed ancestry, looking at how their specific mixed heritage shapes their experiences of discrimination and agency. The qualitative information presented here draws on various recent research projects in Spain on intermarriage, multiraciality and multiethnicity. We show that despite the fact that the mixed-ancestry participants were born and socialised in Spain and have one parent who is an ethnic Spaniard, they nonetheless are perceived as foreigners and are subjected to everyday “othering.” That is, their mixedness does not make the stigma of foreignness disappear. The inclusion in our analysis of participants of Roma (*Gitano*) ances-



Abstract

try, which is the largest national ethnic minority group in Spain, allows us to uncover different aspects of minority/majority dynamics in Spain and to show how patterns of social exclusion encompass racism, Islamophobia and antigypsyism

Los musulmanes magrebíes, los negro-africanos y los gitanos españoles son posiblemente los grupos más estigmatizados, racializados y discriminados de la España contemporánea, un país con un fuerte legado colonialista y una relación problemática con la diversidad. Dado que la mixticidad resulta una prueba crucial para evaluar la persistencia de las divisiones etnorraciales de la sociedad, en este artículo analizamos los relatos de niños/as y jóvenes de ascendencia magrebí musulmana, negra afrodescendiente y romaní, examinando cómo su herencia mixta específica configura sus experiencias de discriminación y agencia. La información cualitativa que aquí se presenta se basa en varios proyectos de investigación recientes realizados en España sobre matrimonios mixtos, multirracialidad y multiethnicidad. Demostramos que, a pesar de que los participantes de ascendencia mixta nacieron y se socializaron en España y tienen un progenitor de étnicamente español, son percibidos como extranjeros y están sujetos a la “otredad” cotidiana. Es decir, que ni siquiera su mixticidad hace desaparecer el estigma. La inclusión en nuestro análisis de participantes de ascendencia romaní (gitana), que es el grupo étnico minoritario nacional más numeroso de España, nos permite desvelar distintos aspectos de la dinámica minoría/mayoría en España y mostrar cómo los patrones de exclusión social engloban el racismo, la islamofobia y el antigitanismo.

Mixed youth; multiraciality; identity; belonging; discrimination; racism; racialisation; agency
Juventud mixta; multirracialidad; identidad; pertenencia; discriminación; racismo; racialización; agencia



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1. Introduction: multi-layered racialisation and discrimination in the Spanish context

Although Spain thinks of itself as a “post-racial” society that has overcome its colonialist past and in which all citizens are treated equally, the reality is that social inequalities between different ethnoracial¹ groups continue to exist. While not strictly a pigmentocratic divided society

¹ We use “ethnoracial” as well as “multiracial”, “multiethnic”, and “mixed” as equivalent terms, acknowledging the ambiguity of the distinction between “race” and “ethnicity” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Jenkins, 1997; Ortiz, 2017). Although race is generally thought to be an externally imposed category based on constructed physical markers (principally phenotype) and associated with colonialism, and ethnicity is often defined as a chosen and self-constructed distinctiveness related to cultural ancestry or nation formation, the reality is that ethnicity can adopt a primordialist dimension in the same way as race. Populations that were not subject to colonial history or who were not considered “people of colour” have also been racialised. As the case of Spain shows, Muslims, Jews, and Roma populations have historically been racialised as “absolute others,” having made their ethnocultural differences seem essential in order to justify their marginalisation, exclusion, or even mass murder.

like the United States, Colombia or Brazil, several studies show that constructs of race, such as skin colour and other apparent traits, are nevertheless crucial markers for social interaction and differential treatment in Spain, as a myriad of studies and surveys report (see, for instance, Cea d'Ancona, 2023; CEDRE, 2020; Federation of SOS Racism Associations in Spain, 2022; Flores, 2015; Rodríguez-García, 2022).

Furthermore, in the Spanish context, race operates in intricate ways along with other markers of difference. Ethnicity and religion can become an even more stigmatising and divisive force than the classical biological notion of race or colour-focused (i.e., Black / White divide), which is more predominant in countries such as the United States (Foner, 2015). This reality of multi-layered racialisation and discrimination affects mainly Maghrebi Muslims (namely Moroccans, known historically as “the Moors” and often pejoratively referred to as “*Moros*” in modern times), Black Africans from sub-Saharan Africa (historically from Equatorial Guinea, and nowadays also from other countries, such as Senegal and Nigeria); and the Spanish Roma (known in Spain as *Gitanos*). These are possibly the most othered and discriminated minorities in Spain, a country with a strong legacy of colonialism and a problematic relationship with diversity.

Exclusionary and racist ideologies shaped Spain's colonisation of the Americas and also of parts of Asia and Africa, affecting indigenous and African-descent peoples within the colonies and in the metropolis, with enduring effects. Spain had colonies in Equatorial Guinea and parts of Morocco until the late 1960s. More, in Spain and its colonies, Black slaves were sold until as late as 1846, sales that were advertised in newspapers' “Sale of Animals” section (see Viana 2019). In fact, Spain was the last European country to abolish slavery, in 1886. Given this history, racism is as structural as normalised in everyday life in Spain, with people not even being aware of it. Good examples of the internalisation and normalisation of the racial imaginary in Spain are products of widespread consumption like *Cola-Cao* (a widely consumed chocolate drink in Spain, whose early advertisements, remembered nostalgically by many Spaniards, featured a song portraying slaves happily working on cocoa plantations) and *Conguitos* (literally “little Congolese people,” a very popular Spanish brand of chocolate-covered peanuts, featuring colonialist images of “primitive” African people in their huts with caricatured features), both advertised widely in the media for decades².

Not surprisingly, it is still common for kids at school to call their Black peers “Conguito” as a pejorative term (Ballestín, 2012; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021c). It is not surprising either, as a recent study (OBERAXE, 2024) shows, the presence of subtle and explicit racism towards Afro-descendants in Spain in school sports activities; or the endemic lack of representation of African and Afro-descendant people in political and lawmaking institutions in Spain, despite representing about 2.2 percent of the country's total population (United Nations General Assembly, 2018; Cea d'Ancona, 2023).

Notably, the modern idea of race (and Whiteness) in Spain emerged with the desire to maintain religious or moral divides, and came into being in Spain in the 15th century with the *Estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (Laws of Purity of Blood), a Catholic doctrine of moral distinction between Christians and non-Christians (Muslims and Jews), aimed to ensure that only

2 See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLA7BtVwpcQ;> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHetWd6pIDY;>
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHfgrTTjQ_w.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHfgrTTjQ_w)

people of Christian descent (“Old Christians,” interpreted as being “pure White”) were able to advance socially and maintain positions of power over Jews, the “Moors” (Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula), and converts to Christianity (the *conversos*) in mainland Spain, and over Native Americans, Black people (of African descent), and mixed-race people (*mulattos*) in the context of the Spanish colonies (Rodríguez-García, 2022).

In this context, a family’s honour and social position were based on maintaining the integrity of “blood purity” in its lineage; hence, the mixing of castes (i.e., of bloodlines) through intermarriage was seen as challenging the hierarchical social order (Feros, 2017; Hering Torres, 2003; Wade, 2022). The standards of racial purity in Spain were abolished entirely only in 1870 (Rodríguez-García, 2022). Nonetheless, during Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975), the proclaimed notion of *Hispanidad* sustained the mission of regenerating “the Spanish race” through a project of national Catholicism and a revival of “authentic” Spanish tradition, conceived as White and Christian, and deeply antagonistic to “foreign” elements, specifically the Maghrebi Muslim world, namely Morocco.

Indeed, Spanish identity has historically been significantly created in opposition to “The Moors”, who have historically been stigmatised and racialised as perpetual foreigners (Mateo Dieste, 2018; Zapata-Barrero, 2006). The embedded “Moorphobia” in Spanish society has historical roots dating back to the *Reconquista*, the centuries-long (711-1492) conflict in the Iberian Peninsula between Christians and Muslims that predated the era of the Spanish colonial Empire. Given this history, any trace of a Maghrebi ethnocultural ancestry in Spain elicits social distancing and discriminatory reactions from mainstream society (Rodríguez-García, 2022).

Finally, and on par with the racialisation of Maghrebi Muslims in Spain, is the racialisation of the Spanish Roma (the *Gitanos*), the oldest and largest national ethnic minority group in Spain and the most stigmatised and structurally discriminated-against minority group in the country (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a). Traditionally a nomad population originated from the Punjab region, the first group of Roma people arrived in Spain in the 15th century, followed by subsequent migration flows, mainly from East Europe. Even after six hundred years of being present in Spain, the Roma are still perceived as outsiders and are the ethnocultural group upon which the notion of *the other* is most strongly projected (Cea d’Ancona & Valles, 2011). Spanish society’s antigypsyism is deeply inter-iorised and normalised by Roma individuals (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021b).

Due to more than 600 years of cohabitation and a broad racial mixing with *Payos* (non-Roma Spaniards) (Mendizábal et al., 2011) Spanish Roma people are mainly racially identified for non-phenotypical ethnic markers, such as surnames, accent, outfit or socialising styles in public. As a result, racial profiling is a common experience for youth from both Roma-only and mixed Roma/non-Roma families. Antigypsyism (Cortés & End, 2019) is a mixture of racism and aporophobia (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a). This includes assumptions such as antisocial and uncivilised behaviour, fearfulness, suspiciousness, and potentially dysfunctional parenting (Herrero-Arias et al., 2023), potentially re-educability (Picker & Roccheggiani, 2013), and positive ones related to natural talent for arts, among others.

This specific history of multi-layered stigmatisation and discrimination in Spain, with specific populations being particularly targeted (Black Africans, Maghrebi Muslims, and Roma), reveals the intersection between different axes of diversity and discrimination, encompassing

racism, Islamophobia (or Moorphobia), and antigypsyism, and makes of Spain an exceptional case for the study of racialisation and discrimination processes that continues to exist.

One of the best ways in which we can evaluate and observe the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes, ethnoracial divisions and discriminations, is through analysing the interaction between groups, and particularly examining processes of mixedness; that is, mixed couples and multiracial/multiethnic descendants, a growing global reality (Alba et al., 2018), that is also in the rise—yet fairly unresearched—in Spain as a result of its unparalleled contemporary experience of very rapid, large-scale international migration (Arango, 2013) and greatly increased ethnocultural diversity (National Statistics Institute, 2024; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021a, 2021b).

Traditionally, intermarriage has been considered the ultimate indicator of immigrants' and ethnic minorities' integration into mainstream society, capable of diminishing barriers to social interaction across groups. Mixed couples and individuals of mixed ancestry have been conceptualised as representing the zenith of a society without differences, fostering processes of interethnic understanding, and bringing about social transformation through the development of new hybrid identities and cultural forms that blur colour lines (Alba, 2009; Ali, 2003).

Some studies, however, have challenged these ideas rooted in classic assimilation theory, showing that negative attitudes, racialisation processes and discriminations continue to exist despite mixedness. Multiracial and multiethnic individuals still carry the stigma of foreignness and suffer everyday racism, affecting their identity choices and sense of belonging (e.g. Kalmijn, 2015; Lee & Bean, 2012; Song, 2017). This also appears to be the case in Spain, although we still know little (Rodríguez-García et al., 2016, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

To delve into this reality, in this article we analyse the narratives of children and youth of three distinctive groups: Maghrebi Muslim, Black Afro-descendant, and Spanish Roma mixed ancestry in Spain, talking about their life experiences, their mixed heritage and its meaning for them, their identity and sense of belonging, and their experiences of discrimination and agency. We show that, despite their mixed ancestry, and having been born and socialised in Spain, these individuals still carry the stigma of foreignness and suffer everyday racism, all of which affects their identity and sense of belonging. The inclusion in the analysis of the Spanish Roma, a national ethnic minority, allows us to uncover the intersections between different axes of diversity and the minority/majority processes distinctively found in Spain, and that we have reflected in the title of the article with the condensed derogatory terms popularly used in Spain to target these groups, namely the *Conguitos*, the *Moros* and the *Gitanos*.

2. Methodology

This article draws on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Catalonia, Spain, between 2014 and 2024 as part of various related research projects on mixed families' and youth's life experiences, identity and sense of belonging, and discrimination (see Funding details). Regarding mixed youth with immigrant ancestry, our sample consists of 119 Spanish-born youth, aged between 14 and 30, both males and females, and with parents representing 50 different foreign countries. Of these individuals, 97 were the offspring of mixed couples, with

one native ethnic Spanish parent and one foreign-born parent.³ In the case of mixed Roma individuals, the sample consists of 33 informants (15 men and 18 women), aged between 18 and 65.

The wide age range considered resulted in an internal diversity in terms of the life stage of the respondents (from living at home with their parents and still attending compulsory secondary education, to being independent and even starting their own family). Most respondents lived in Barcelona or cities/towns in the Barcelona metropolitan area, which is also the region where most of the descendants of mixed couples live.

Respondents were selected through personal connections, advertisements, and contacts with migrant associations in different parts of Catalonia. We tried to avoid the use of a snowball sampling method to avoid problems of sample bias. The interviews took place mainly in the respondents' homes, but also in social, leisure or study places. In some cases (less than 10%), one of the parents was present, especially for minors. The fieldwork was done by researchers with extensive experience in interviewing and with an attitude of empathy and human warmth. It was decided to proceed in line with what Batista et al. (2022) consider an example of microethics (situated, relational, negotiated, and embodied) in decision-making in the research process.

The interview guide was organised into different sections, each containing different topics: migration history of the immigrant parent(s) -not in the case of the Roma population-; daily life and family dynamics, customs, religious beliefs, and practices; social and political participation; socialising and leisure activities, friendships; identity and sense of belonging; experiences of discrimination, and life satisfaction and future. Interview scripts were tested on a few cases, with subsequent modifications when needed.

The interviews were conducted in Catalan or Spanish and lasted between 45 minutes and two hours on average. After the interview, the interviewer collected notes on the main topics discussed. An information sheet and a consent form were given to the participants before the interview, and confidentiality was guaranteed throughout the research process. Only the project researchers have had access to the information. All real names have been changed in this article.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then coded and analysed using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. A codebook was initially created to work with all the material, containing codes and definitions for the interview scripts. Coding was carried out by one of the researchers, but the codebook was created with the participation of all the researchers. Once the initial interviews had been coded, using the established codebook, revisions were made to incorporate new items or modifications. A system of analytical memos was constructed, which we used to analyse and write up the results, conclusions, and proposals for the whole project.

³ The sample also included 22 respondents with two parents born in different foreign countries (e.g. Colombia/Brazil). They served as a control group to better test the dynamics of belonging, integration and racialisation compared to their peers with one Spanish-born parent. We analyse these comparative aspects with more detail in previous works (see Rodríguez-García et al., 2021c).

3. Results

Despite the general association—found in general in the literature—between mixed couples/families and children of mixed couples and the erosion of differences, our findings show that the stigma of *otherness* persists is still going strong in the three multiracial groups studied: children of mixed Black Afro-descendants, Maghrebi and/or Muslim origin, and children of mixed Roma/non-Roma couples, with some specificities that we will explore. Still, the interviewees' experiences are diverse, complex, and multifaceted, depending primarily on aspects such as phenotype, Muslimness, having distinctly foreign or presumably Roma surnames or first names, or using minority languages or accents.

However, to better understand the experiences of discrimination of the interviewees, it is necessary to consider the diversity of identities expressed by these individuals. Some of our respondents from immigrant origins identified themselves as native Catalans or Spaniards, others as mixed, others as “foreigners” (closer to a parent of immigrant origin) and others as cosmopolitans or “citizens of the world” (see Rodríguez-García et al., 2021b). However, most were seen as “immigrants” in everyday public life.

The Spanish Roma living in Catalonia, as opposed to the historical othering by mainstream society, have developed complex situated identity frames, based on ascendants' territory of origin, language use, extended family belonging, religion (Cantón, 2020), or simply being Spanish Roma concerning other European immigrant Roma families. Children growing up in ethnically mixed families often feel othered by both Roma and non-Roma, or over-identified with either of them (Cortés, 2021). These identity frameworks, combined with the degree and modalities in which they were considered “immigrants” or “perpetual strangers”, undoubtedly conditioned experiences of the stigma of otherness.

3.1. The Conguitos: Black Afro-descendants vs. White privilege

The most common experiences of otherness among this group were undoubtedly related to their perceived visibility as “foreigners” or “outsiders” based on their phenotype and physical appearance, following hypodescent patterns similar to those described for the Anglo-Saxon context, which can be subsumed under the “*One-drop*” rules (see Peery & Bodenhause, 2008; or Williams, 2011). Therefore, they were more likely to report having been victims of racist name-calling associated with the phenotype (colour), such as *colacao*, *conguito*, *negrito*, “being of chocolate”, and so on:

You want to play Jaume I [*King James I*, “*the Conqueror*”, one of the prominent Catalan historical figures] in a theatre performance, and first they tell you that you're not a boy, and then that you're Black. Things like that, insults... my generation sang the Colacao song, the Negrito, racist rhymes in the street... (Gema, 39, Spanish father, Guinean mother)

Furthermore, the participants of this group reported experiencing more direct instances of racially motivated physical aggression compared to the rest, as opposed to merely verbal abuse or microaggressions. To understand this, we must keep in mind that anti-Black racism resides within ideologies of Whiteness, White supremacy, and fear of the Black body (Kendi, 2019, as cited in López & Jean-Marie, 2021). The legacy of anti-Black racism and the continued denial of black people's basic humanity reflects the “afterlife of slavery”, which continually situates

black people as objects of fetishisation and violence (López & Jean-Marie, 2021). The most important finding of our research is that this legacy also affects children and young people of multiracial Afro-descent.

Perhaps the most spectacular case is that of Joanna, who told us how a couple of Neo-Nazi boy and girl had harassed and assaulted her on a regional train:

They started giving me bad looks, and suddenly they said: “Monkeys to the jungle.” And I was like... “OK, I’m going... I avoid them...” But when I left, she pulled my hair. I defended myself and grabbed her by the hair and pulled her down to the floor and said, “Don’t touch me, don’t touch me!” (Erica, 18, Brazilian father, Colombian mother)

Shifting from direct harassment to attributions of otherness, multiracial Black Afro-descendants were more frequently seen as adopted by the autochthonous or “White” parent to a greater extent than members of other racialised mixed groups (except Asians, who are not included in this article). This was a harsh reality check for them in terms of identity:

When I speak, they say “Oh, you speak Catalan” [*laughs*]. And I say “yes...” But then they ask you “Where are you from?” (...); at first glance, they would never conclude that you are mixed. If you speak Catalan, they’ll conclude that you’re adopted. (Samanta, 22, Senegalese father, Spanish mother).

In their narratives, there is also a complaint of being depicted as primitive and having “Third World” stereotypes attributed to people of African origin (poverty, ignorance, etc.) (Adejumo-Ayibiowu, 2023), despite having parents with higher education. This logically led to reactions of anger and helplessness and a determination to fight against its effects. Sora’s words are very emphatic:

My skin colour is associated with my supposed economic situation, even though they don’t know nothing about me (...) At school, they directly relate the fact of being Black with the fact that I should have a low level of culture in general, and that “you are too smart to be from outside (Spain)”, or “you are too smart to be Black.” (Aida, 14, Senegalese father, Spanish mother)

Many of our informants highlighted the identification of a moment of inflexion (mostly in childhood, but not always) in which they became aware of inhabiting a corporeality read in a foreignising, racist and segregating sense. Albert (20) expressed with these impassioned words the moment he realised he was Black at primary school:

I looked at the skin tone of my classmates, and I said, “But wait a minute, they are White, and I am Black.” I would go home and cry to my mum and say “Mum, I want to be White.” (...). And she always told me “Why do you want to be White when all the *guiris* [*White tourists*] go to the beach to look like you and they turn pink?” (Albert, 20, Cameroonian father, Spanish mother)

The hyper-sexualisation of their racialised bodies was very present in the experiences of multiracial women of mixed African descent. Their narratives showed that greater significance is given by society to elements of external image such as dress, hairstyle and body care, wearing

the hair naturally curly or straightened, using bleaching creams, or dressing in a more modern or traditional way:

There were times when I didn't like myself... I used to see that at parties they all wore their hair down and wore beautiful dresses... It was very challenging for me to find make-up shades because of my hair and skin tone, and I didn't feel comfortable. (Aida, 14, Senegalese father, Spanish mother)

These findings can be related to several studies that point to the historical exoticisation of racialised women, who have been stereotyped with attributes of hyper-sexuality, and greater obedience, all gender and racial stereotypes rooted in colonial relations (Collins, 2004 or Kempadoo, 2004). As Joanna very powerfully pointed out:

And when you say "Latina", "Oh, hot blood," and when you say "Colombia, Brazil," "Oh, the explosive mix in bed, boom, boom." I mean, I should know how to dance, I already know how to fuck, I already know how to cook... And when I say my mixture, they freak out a lot. (Erica, 18, Brazilian father, Colombian mother)

Finally, it is worth noting that some Black afro-descendant mixed youth felt trapped in the dynamics of monoracism when their skin colour was lighter. They often reported microaggressions stemming from monoracist attitudes (Johnston & Nadal, 2010). As Joanna put it:

So, I suffer racism from the White side, and I suffer the reaction from the Black side because, obviously, I have more privileges than a person who is blacker than me. (...) Black people don't see me as Black and White people don't see me as White, so you're like, "Well, what's going on here?" (Erica, 18, Brazilian father, Colombian mother)

3.2. The Moros: Racialising Maghrebi heritage

As explained in the Introduction, being a Maghrebi Muslim in Spain strongly signifies otherness (Mateo Dieste, 2018; Zapata-Barrero, 2006). Our interviewees of Maghrebi mixed background have suffered more openly from stigmatisation stemming from external perceived markers (for instance, dwelling the hijab, or the djellaba) and from following religious practices such as Ramadan or simply praying (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021b). They were also victims of the suspicions and imaginaries of danger and threat associated with Islamic terrorism. This quote by Mariam (24) in the context of a private religious school is particularly illustrative:

And there at the Nuns' [*religious school*] (...) One day suddenly one of them [her peers] raised her hand and said "The cleaning lady is a Moor, and she says they're going to conquer Al-Andalus again," and at that moment almost nobody knew that my father was from Tunisia, but the conversation that took place there seemed so ignorant... I felt like "Where am I? (...) What kind of bubble do they live in?" (Adila, 24, Tunisian father, Spanish mother)

As Meer and Modood (2019) observed, it is more difficult to sympathise with a minority that is perceived to be disloyal or associated with terrorism, a view that leads to a perception of Muslims as a threat rather than as a disadvantaged minority, subject to increasingly pernicious

cious discourses of racialisation. Attacks based on the stigma of Muslimness even extended to multiethnic families of ethnoreligious Muslim Maghrebi and non-Muslim native Spanish background, as we heard from a young man with a Syrian father and Spanish mother whose family restaurant was attacked by neo-Nazis and who received phone calls calling them “shitty Moors”:

The restaurant has been attacked four times between graffiti and phone calls in the last three years. My father doesn’t understand: “We are Christians, so what?” (...). I spend hours telling him: “For them, you are a Moor, a terrorist, not Christian, not White (...), get it into your head.” (Rafael, 26, Syrian father, Spanish mother)

Notably, in cases where there were no external indicators of religious practice and the person could not be phenotypically identified as being Muslim (i.e., foreigner), experiences of discrimination were not reported. This pattern is similar to findings in previous studies in the line (Gilliéron, 2022). For example, Luz (22, Moroccan father, Spanish mother) told us that when she asked her father why her brother was on the verge of dropping out of studies, he resignedly replied that it was because he was physically more noticeable as a Moroccan than she, and that therefore “the opportunities (for social mobility) were very, very few”.

Having a whiter or more “invisible” skin phenotype as an immigrant was perceived as an advantage by many of our informants. So, they tended to deny more often that they had suffered discrimination or racism. As Marta (16, Moroccan father and Spanish mother) told us:

No, not at any time. I think it’s more because of my look, that I don’t look Muslim (...), and there are teachers here who still don’t know that. Maybe that’s why I haven’t been discriminated against.

In the case of mixed Muslim girls, the question of wearing the veil appears as an important aspect of their self-identity as well as an important visible and stigmatised marker of foreignness (Rodríguez-García, 2022). Consequently, they may experience more racialisation and discrimination than mixed Maghrebi boys (Hopkins, 2016; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021c). Notably, while some of our informants did wear the veil, even if it was only on occasion:

I’ve worn it on occasion because I feel more protected. If they’re already looking at you because you’re a woman and they see that you’re from outside, they’ll look even more. So, at some point at night, I have worn it. (Leila, 18, Moroccan father, Spanish mother)

Others expressed that they had chosen not to wear it, despite declaring to be “good” practising Muslims and praying, observing Ramadan, etc. They also claimed that there was no need to wear the hijab to be a “good person.” In the words of Saida (17):

I wouldn’t feel myself wearing the headscarf. You need much faith to wear it, and the truth is that I don’t have it. I believe in God. Yes, I do Ramadan and all those things, but do I actually need to wear the headscarf? No. I can be a beautiful person without the headscarf. That has nothing to do with it. (Saida, 17, Spanish father, Moroccan mother)

A final important point to note about the mixed Maghrebi group is that, in more segregated social and school environments, they were more likely to express some experiences of control

and rejection by peers from endogamous immigrant families, a reflection of the dynamics experienced by second generation Muslim immigrants (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012): being accused of not being a “real Muslim” because of their mixed background:

In primary school, most of my classmates were already Arabs or children of immigrants. (...) They had two parents from the same place, and (...) I was more on the outside, half and half (...) Sometimes they told me things like “You don’t know how to speak”, “you’re not really Moroccan...” But well, I didn’t mind... (Naim, 14, Spanish father, Moroccan mother)

3.3. The Gitanos: Othering from within

For Spanish⁴ Roma, ethnic invisibility is both a strategy and an experience (Abajo & Carrasco, 2004). In this sense, when our interviewees were perceived as phenotypically invisible, they experienced a polarisation of experiences in public spaces, depending on whether they were alone or accompanied by family members who were visibly perceived as Roma. As Candela expressed it:

The same thing always happens to us in the shops: the security guard comes after us when we go in. He’s after us all day, but we’re used to it. (...). This is how it happens in the life of the Roma, eh? It’s because that’s the way society looks at us. They look at us, Roma, as lazy, as delinquents. (Candela, 28, Roma father, Paya mother)

Thus, testimonies such as that of Miguel (36), who suffered discrimination by bouncers at dancing clubs when he went with his Roma cousins but not when he went alone, are common. Or that of Rocío:

With my cousins, yes... They’re not brown, they’re brunettes, but you can see it..., the hair, you know? (...). They look at you. I go out with my cousins dressed up and... I go into Pull and Bear or some other store, and the security guard just looks at us... But if I go alone, no. (Rocío, 18, Roma father, Paya mother)

It is at work and at school that the shockwave of the stigmatisation of the Roma population on the descendants of mixed families is most evident. Racist experiences in the workplace abounded from the moment colleagues or bosses/supervisors discovered Roma ancestry: for symbolic and relational purposes, these individuals become fully Roma. The fear and caution of being discovered as being Roma permeates the discourses of our interviews, as the following extract shows:

I used to work in Primark, and I hid that I was mixed for three or four months, yeah. When they found out I was Roma, there were comments like “Oh, is that you Roma work too? Ah, well, you didn’t look like ...” (...). They wanted to give me a permanent contract, but when they found out, they kicked me out, yeah. (Esmeralda, 25, Roma father, Paya mother)

⁴ All Roma parents in the sample are Spanish, and therefore, in the interview extracts, we will omit the reference to their nationality. The same applies to the *Payos/as* progenitors.

Many of our informants witnessed aporophobic comments about Roma (Zellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a) at school: “They are dirty or smell”, and reported experiences of mistrust from teachers, particularly concerning behavioural issues and alleged tendencies to steal belongings. In this context, Antonio stated:

I remember in Fifth Grade, I’ll never forget it... Some money disappeared from a backpack, and the first person they accused was me. (Antonio, 38, Roma father, Paya mother).

The most painful and traumatic experiences of racism took place in the school environment, where, despite changes in attitudes towards cultural diversity due to the inclusion of pupils of immigrant origin, negative stereotypes and low expectations associated with Roma pupils have remained constant over time and can affect mixed descendants. Following Ogbu’s ecological-cultural model, disengagement in Roma students can be interpreted as an adaptive response to the impossibility of accessing more advanced studies and better-paid jobs. As a practice of secondary cultural difference, the anti-school attitude actively supporting the maintenance and reproduction of ethnic identity (Bereményi, 2007) can also affect mixed individuals.

For example, Rubén (28, Payo father, Roma mother) told us that a teacher had encouraged him to continue studying “because you are not like the others (Roma)”. What seemed like a compliment to him when he was 14 turned out to be an indicator of the low expectations of Roma pupils at school. Consequently, “ethnic invisibility” still appears to be the most effective protection a surest defence against the impact on their school careers:

And I remember the teachers would leave Roma pupils aside and say “You’re not good for studying”, and they didn’t bother anymore. And I always tried to hide it [being a Roma]... I always had excellent marks... And when they found out, they stopped giving me privileges, like participating in the Sant Jordi literary competitions... (Rocío, 18, Roma father, Paya mother).

From a gender perspective, Roma women have traditionally been assigned to bring honour to the family (Corsi et al., 2008). So, they experience greater family control and restrictions in everyday life. Family control and traditional mistrust of the school environment have had the same effect on the persistence and academic performance of some older mixed Roma women as on their endogamous Roma peers, sometimes with the passivity of the school itself. As Veronica told us:

Yes, because even the teacher with whom I got the best marks told my mother: “If you want, keep her at home,” that is (...) Fatal. And my mother had to work, my father did too, and my brother had just been born... I was thirteen years old, and I stayed at home. (Veronica, 31, Roma father, Paya mother)

3.4. Strategies of resistance and agency

The patterns of resistance strategies that emerged from the narratives of our informants ranged from passivity and non-recognition of any experience of discrimination or racist aggression to conscious and militant anti-racist activism, particularly among young people of African and Roma descent. As noted by Snyder (2016), some coping strategies are considered

more adaptive, such as seeking social support and developing a positive racial identity, while others are defined as less adaptive or maladaptive, such as internalising negative stereotypes, withdrawing or acting out physically. However, strategies of resistance and agency, as some researchers (Albuja et al., 2019; Alim, 2016; Tsai et al., 2024) have highlighted, are highly dependent on how normative ideologies about race, ethnicity and cultural identities compel racialised individuals to assess systemic risks before engaging in identity negotiation, particularly the situated context and their personal safety.

While multiracial youth use different strategies to negotiate identity, many do so under constant fear of identity denial, imposter syndrome, and other long-term consequences (Tsai et al., 2024). Furthermore, youth are not uniformly impacted by racialised events, and therefore, the coping strategies they use vary based on individual and contextual factors (Kubiliene et al., 2015). Scholars have argued that strategies that teach individuals about race and racism, prepare them for biased encounters, and help them develop a positive sense of self (Snyder, 2016), can also be catalysts for agency and empowerment (Deaux, 2018, as cited in Rodríguez-García & Rodríguez-Reche, 2022).

From this framework of analysis, and looking more closely at our research findings, one of the determining key elements for the selection of strategies was whether or not multiracial young people lived with a parent of immigrant or Roma origin, and the degree of contact and daily relationship with that branch of the family and the minority community, as in many cases the interviewees had separated ancestors. There were instances where the absence of references to cope with situations of racism and xenophobia was highlighted. This was also evident when the parents of immigrant origin had distanced themselves from their cultural roots and/or downplayed their own experiences of racism. Rita's testimony is very illustrative in this regard:

It was very difficult for me because my mother also denied her culture, so I didn't feel the support of "Hey, don't worry, you have to be very proud of yourself," right? (...) I didn't know how to deal with it. (Rita, 29, Spanish father, Moroccan mother)

An additional factor that affected the strategies of resistance and agency was the extent of multiculturalism and mixedness within the educational and community environments of the interviewees. The strategies deployed were more passive and relaxed when this was a significant aspect of their experience. Conversely, when mainstream monoculturalism (Sue, 2004) exerted more significant pressure, more polarised strategies were activated, either in terms of "passing" as a local (Dawkins, 2012) or in terms of visibility and pride in mixed roots and anti-racist demands.

Taking these modulating factors into account, we can describe four main strategies identified to respond to stigmatisation, racialisation and discrimination:

1. The non-recognition of any experience of racism or discrimination, which was more prevalent among boys and girls with a North African parent, who were perceived as non-visible and secular. For example, Najda pointed out:

My friends have always known me as a normal person. They haven't known me with any label. I also consider myself from here, and we always speak Catalan. Maybe it would have been different if I wore a veil, if I identified myself as a Muslim but being more Western it is easier. (Najda, 17, Moroccan father, Spanish mother)

2. Attitudes of normalisation of racist (verbal) aggressions, acceptance, and lack of response. There was a tendency to diminish the significance or relevance of experiences of racist discrimination, employing strategies such as “pass,” “ignore,” “solve it by oneself,” “do not let it affect me,” and so forth. As Kemal expressed it:

I was angry, but I also passed a little bit. Now, I would face it differently, of course, but I wouldn't tell anyone either; I would deal with it directly. But I wouldn't give it any importance, and then they wouldn't go on because they would find it doesn't work. (Kemal, 25, Turkish father, Spanish mother)

A specific modality we found recurrent in this kind of responses was using humour to show indifference. Some of our informants made it explicit in their narratives:

Well, I also use irony and humour when they ask me if there were lions or if they lived in huts [in their father's country] (Aida, 14, Senegalese father, Spanish mother)

3. *Passing* and the rejection of aspects of their cultural and personal heritage that society stigmatises, and the subsequent attempt to render these aspects invisible. The key point to note here is that these types of strategies go beyond those driven by colourism (Glenn, 2008), because, as previously argued, other markers based on religious and cultural differences can also be the basis of racialisation and stigmatisation, and make people appear unintelligent, unattractive and untrustworthy.

Naim performs one extreme example of the passing strategies. With a non-practising Moroccan mother and a wholly Westernised lifestyle, Naim, who passed as an autochthonous boy, combined a remarkable ignorance of the cultural particularities of his mother's country with a desire to identify himself entirely as a Catalan:

A. I can't imagine living anywhere else [outside Catalonia or Spain]

Q. And in Morocco?

A. No, no, I can't imagine it... For me, the culture of Morocco is the opposite of what I think, to tell you the truth.

(Naim, 14, Spanish father, Moroccan mother).

In the case of our mixed Roma respondents, strategies of hiding Roma ancestry were identified, particularly at work, in order to protect themselves from the stigma associated with mistrust and low expectations of their skills and competencies. As some of them pointed out:

At work, you always feel self-conscious. You do not know how people will react, which can make you angry. With time, you start to be yourself, but at first, you have to keep quiet, watch, and try... because there is still racism and mistreatment. (Zaira, 42, Roma father, Paya mother)

In this regard, we noted the use of strategies that could be described as passing or “acting White,” as Ogbu (2004) identified and analysed them in the school context, including

the systematic use of Catalan (rather than Spanish) or the normative use of Spanish without an Andalusian-like accent (in the case of mixed Roma) as a passing strategy in public spaces. Carme's testimony is very representative:

I speak Catalan when I go to look for a job... Yes, there are always stereotypes, there is always racism, and when you go to look for a job, you avoid it (*gypsiness*), just like when you go to rent a flat. My name is Carme (+*Catalan surname*). This is clearly not a Roma surname. (Carme, 39, Roma father, Paya mother)

Individuals did not display pride when passing actions involved the expectation of physical features being modified. As previously discussed, such practices were identified in women's narratives through hair straightening, bleaching creams, and adopting ethnically neutral clothing. As Samanta noted:

When I'm with people from here, the way I dress changes a lot. When I am in my neighbourhood, I braid my hair and all that. Outside, I'm more refined, but it comes automatically. I don't know if it's subconscious peer pressure... The way I act and express myself changes me a lot. (Samanta, 22, Senegalese father, Spanish mother)

This last quote relates to what Root (1996) and others (see Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002) call *situational identity shifting*, which acknowledges the fluidity of multiracial identities and how they can be expressed differently in different settings.

4. Reversing stigmatisation and racism: "from insult to pride." This refers to the awareness, often associated with age and personal growth, of redefining one's identity and embracing the socially rejected more positively. To illustrate this finding, it is necessary to highlight certain aspects of the young people's narratives:

- Expressions of pride in their mixed roots, especially among Afro-descendants and mixed Roma. Albert's and Candela's accounts illustrate well this aspect:

When I was a child, I used to say "Yes, I want to be White." Then I left it on standby, but I wasn't like "I recognise that I'm Black and being Black is cool." So, it was like a process of adaptation, which made me accept that I was born Black and had to be very proud. (Albert, 20, father from Cameroon, French mother)

Here we are (*as Roma*). And you don't have to change because you're around Payos (*non-Roma*). I am the way I am. Why do I have to act like a Payo so that you accept me? You have to accept me as I am. (Candela, 28, Roma father, Paya mother)

- In the case of many Afro-descendant women, there had been a change in perception and attitude towards the "normalisation" of their racialised appearance (make-up, clothes, hairstyle...) in order to enhance their multiracial heritage:

Given everything I've been through, I'm embracing my authentic self. I love my natural Afro and my skin colour. I used to wear three kilos of make-up to try to look whiter. (Erica, 18, Brazilian father, Colombian mother)

We must bear in mind that, as some scholars have pointed out (see Alexander, 1996; Back, 1996, or Bhabha, 1996; as cited in Mahtani, 2002), the experience of mixed-race identity can offer opportunities to perform racialised identities. Multiracial youth can engage in *racialised performance* (ibid.) or *strategic essentialism* (Spivak, 1988), demonstrating a desire to create new meanings from imposed hierarchical and dualistic racial orders. They make effective use of multiple, dynamic and ambiguous racialised spaces.

- Practising the Muslim religion and wearing the veil in the case of girls are indicators of this belonging and pride in the immigrant parent's community of origin. Saida, for example, was very proud and natural, showing her Muslim beliefs:

I'm very proud of who I am, my heritage, and everything else; I don't have to hide it. (Saida, 17, Spanish father, Moroccan mother)

5. Anti-racist activism and militancy, sometimes joining an ethnic NGO to strengthen bonds with the ethnic community. These types of strategies are reminiscent of those analysed by Sayad in *L'immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité* (2006) about the children of immigrants in France, who demand different social conditions and respect from those experienced by their parents because, although they are French, they remain immigrants in the public sphere and do not achieve equality as real citizens, being subject to all kinds of discrimination and racism. This leads them to create associations and support groups for their cause.

Anti-racist activism was particularly evident among the Afro-descendants. Tim was very clear in this respect; he told us what made him decide to join an anti-racist association in Barcelona:

It was more through identification with groups that were suffering from racism, people who were coming on boats, the way they talk about Africans, about the invasion of immigrants, etc. The fact of identifying with these people, and with my father, was what made me say: "I also feel African" (...), I am clear about what I want to contribute to the Black community in Spain and Catalonia. (Tim, 29, Guinean father, Spanish mother)

Among the Roma population, the case of Jairo (23) stands out, as his primary aspiration for the future was "to continue the legacy left by my father in the Cultural Centre of X [a segregated neighbourhood] and with my work in the Y Foundation [a Roma NGO] against discrimination".

Moreover, some women noted their willingness to create spaces of sociability and solidarity in which to share experiences related to blackness and to expose/denounce everyday and institutional racism from a feminist perspective. Those interviewees who tended to identify as mixed showed a strong awareness of the potential for navigating different contexts. In fact, Afrofeminism, where a re-appropriation of racialised and "visible" women's identity (i.e. being Black/Afro-descendant) is made, is one important form of empowerment and anti-racist and decolonial strategies that are taking place in Spain in recent times (Habimana, 2023).

4. Conclusions

This paper has analysed the life experiences of children and youth of Maghrebi Muslim, Black Afro-descendant, and Roma mixed ancestry, to understand how they make sense of their mixed heritage and its meaning in their life-course. These groups, which represent the most stigmatised minorities in Spain, have been subjected to racialisation and experiences of discrimination throughout their lives. Despite being born and socialised in Spain, they continue to be perceived as foreign and subjected to discriminatory treatment in various public social spaces, particularly in educational and professional settings, but also in public places. This significantly impacts their identities and sense of belonging, as previous studies with multi-ethnic and multiracial individuals also show (Kalmijn, 2015; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021c; Song, 2017).

The comparison of the three groups considered has shown that young people from multiracial families with an immigrant parent of African descent (whether from the African continent or other latitudes, such as Latin America) are the ones who suffer the most from experiences of racialisation based on the phenotype and the stereotypes associated with it. Thus, for young people of mixed African descent, the perceived skin tone subsumes the degree of otherness, and the racist experiences suffered, with less room for manoeuvre than for the other groups, who find it easier to pass as White when the phenotype is outwardly invisible as foreign or minority. In the case of children and youth of mixed Maghrebi, Arab or Muslim origin, the dynamics of their everyday social life are strongly conditioned by the externalisation of Muslimness and the phenotypical “visibility” associated with people of Maghrebi and Arab origins (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021c). The affiliation to Islam is racialised and affects the descendants of mixed families, even if they have never felt close to Islam.

For their part, young mixed Roma continue to be subjected to the same racist stereotypes associated with the Roma community (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a), despite the passage of time, especially when they are phenotypically visible (a point of similarity with mixed Black youth) and when they (especially women) adopt an external appearance (dress, hairstyle, etc.) associated with “Gypsiness” (a self-presentation racialised by dynamics parallel to Muslimness). If they are visible as Roma at school and in the world of work, they are subject to the same low expectations and dynamics of exclusion as their endogamous Roma peers (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021b).

From a gender perspective, we observed that women of mixed origin from the three groups experienced the assignment of hyper-sexualising attributes associated with foreign endogamous immigrants (Collins, 2004; Kempadoo, 2004). Some women reported more experiences of control and surveillance by the family and community environment. Even if these parental gender control patterns have relaxed in the mixed family, they are sometimes reactivated from adolescence or on trips to the countries of origin (for weddings and holidays...), leading to arguments and conflicts. This is because women are traditionally seen as the ones who keep the tradition alive (McGrath & McGarry, 2014; Ramji, 2007, as cited in Rodríguez-García & Rodríguez-Reche, 2022).

Finally, we explored key strategies adopted by our interviewees to cope with experienced racism and otherness, which depended greatly on perceived visibility as immigrants or Roma people, as well as upon the balance of risks and opportunities in relation to family, peers and the wider society (Tsai et al., 2024): non-recognition of any experience of discrimination or racism, more common among North Africans, Arabs and/or Muslims, and some Roma; at-

titudes of non-response (ignoring, not letting it affect them personally); strategies of *ethnic passing* or *invisibilisation* of the revealing aspects of their ethno-cultural heritage; strategies of “turning insult into pride;” and finally anti-racist social activism, a strategy more present in the group with fewest options for passing, the Afro-descendants, and also in the Roma, due to the long history of marginalisation and racism suffered.

It must be acknowledged that the interviewees’ experiences of otherness and stigmatisation showed a certain porosity and malleability, precisely due to their mixed condition (Ali, 2003). The ambiguity associated with the enormous diversity of external phenotypic appearances, cultural practices, and outfits (dress and hairstyle, etc.) revealed racialisation dynamics’ plasticity and socially constructed nature. Many of our interviewees were constantly mistaken for origins other than “their own”. For example, boys and girls of African descent were mistaken for Moroccans or Latin Americans in certain instances. These confusions, or what could figuratively be called “masked dances”, undoubtedly influenced the self-defence and inclusion strategies of the interviewees, who were compelled to navigate these identity tensions.

In conclusion, our findings show that although the experiences of multiracial children and youth from the three groups considered are complex, shifting, and to a certain extent, comparatively different according to the prevalent axes of racialisation (phenotypical, ethnic-cultural, and/or religious), they have in common the challenge to optimistic public discourses and previous research on mixedness, and reveal the persistence of ethno-racial prejudices and racialisation dynamics that deter the social inclusion of this growing segment of the Spanish population.

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