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Blurring of Colour Lines? Ethnoracially Mixed Youth in Spain Navigating Identity

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Abstract

The recent rise in Spain of mixed unions between people born in different countries has brought about a significant increase in the number of multiethnic and multiracial individuals in the country. However, no research currently exists in Spain on the life experiences and identity processes of these mixed-parentage youth. Drawing on 124 in-depth interviews, this article examines the narratives of ethnoracially mixed descendants from diverse backgrounds in Catalonia, Spain. Our results show that identity processes and experiences of being mixed are very heterogeneous and multifaceted, and that some individuals have more choices, versus constraints, when navigating mixedness. A crucial factor affecting these outcomes is visibility—i.e., visible markers of difference from the native society, such as phenotype,

language, or religious affiliation. We find that while ethnoracially mixed individuals who have more outer characteristics shared with the native majority population can develop more advantageous, symbolic, and malleable identities, individuals whose heritage involves an ancestry that is negatively minoritized within the country of residence experience greater identity mismatch, stigmatization, and discrimination. This finding is at odds with the “postracial” or “colour-blind” future that might ostensibly be heralded by an ever-growing Spanish population of mixed individuals.

Keywords: Identity, multiracial, multiethnic, racism, mixed race, Islamophobia

Introduction

In parallel with the dramatic growth of immigration in Spain over the last few decades, particularly between 2000 and 2009 (Arango 2013), and in keeping with global trends (Alba, Beck, and Sahin 2018; Chito Childs 2018; King-O’Riain and Small 2014; Rodríguez-García 2015), mixed unions between immigrants and native Spaniards—and also between immigrants from different origins—have grown exponentially (Rodríguez-García 2006; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015). Owing to this increase in mixed couples, the number of mixed descendants (the children of intermarriage) has similarly risen. The steady rise in mixed families in Spain is a phenomenon that particularly affects Catalonia, the region of the country that has traditionally received the most immigrants (Domingo 2014).

Based on data provided by the Spanish Statistics Office (2019) and the Catalan Statistics Office (2019), of all registered marital and common-law unions in both Spain and Catalonia in 1997, 4.1 percent in Spain and 5.5 percent in Catalonia were mixed according to nationality (that is, one partner held Spanish nationality, whereas the other held a foreign nationality); by 2017, this number had increased to 14 percent in Spain and to 22.4 percent in Catalonia. And of all the births registered in Spain, the percentage of children born to

Spanish/non-Spanish mixed couples rose from 3 percent of the total number of births in 1997 to 11 percent in 2017 (see Graphs 1 and 2).

[Graphs 1 and 2 near here]

We are, therefore, encountering a growing population group (i.e., the descendants of mixed couples), but, in comparison with traditional countries of immigration (markedly the US), we still know little about the lived social and cultural experiences of these emerging generations.

This article aims to fill this research gap by examining the narratives of multiracial and multiethnic descendants from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds in Catalonia, exploring issues around identity and sense of belonging, and experiences of stigmatization and discrimination. Our study on mixed-background youth in Catalonia is the first investigation of its kind in Spain. We have asked research questions like, how do individuals of mixed descent identify themselves ethnically, and how do other people identify them? And if there is a discrepancy, to whom does this happen, and how does it impact on the individual's sense of social belonging? Do mixed individuals experience greater social inclusion, less "othering" that is based on ethnoracial boundaries, and less social discrimination compared with descendants of two immigrant parents from the same origin, as classic assimilation theory would suggest? Further, are there differences in mixed individuals' identity processes depending on factors such as ethnicity (ancestry), race (phenotype), religion, language, gender, or socioeconomic context?

Contextualizing “Race” and “Spanishness” in Spain, Europe

To situate our study on Spanish multiracial and multiethnic individuals, some contextual background is needed. Although Europe may not be a strictly pigmentocratic society in the way that North America (especially the United States, with its legacy of slavery) and Latin America have been (Telles and Sue 2009), skin colour and other physical traits are nonetheless important markers for social interaction, belonging, and differential social treatment in the European context (Lentin 2008; Simon 2017, 2018; Song 2018; see also European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018). For this reason, race, a topic usually shunned in contemporary Europe and a taboo category in academic and political discourse since the end of World War II (with “ethnicity” being the preferred term), still deserves a great deal of attention in the continent overall; race is a constructed yet structural “social fact” (Bonilla-Silva 1999) that remains a significant boundary driving stigmatization and discrimination. In Spain, the avoidance of discussing both race and the country’s disturbing colonialist past (not to mention its ethnic purging of Jews and Muslims) has enabled Spain’s white ethnic Catholic majority to be less attuned to still-present realities of racialization, racism, and other forms of discrimination (e.g., Flores 2015).

The construction of whiteness in Spain can be traced back to the 15th century with the implementation of the *Estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (Blood Purity Laws), whose function was to ensure that only people of Christian ancestry (interpreted as “racially pure”) were able to advance socially and maintain positions of power over converts of Muslim or Jewish descent in Spain or over First Nations/indigenous and African peoples within the context of the colonies. Anti-miscegenation laws in the colonial Americas helped maintain a hierarchical caste system, with “Old Christians” (considered racially pure whites, and not suspected of secretly practising another religion) at the top. Race, religion, and class were entirely intertwined in Spain and its colonies, and in this context ethnoracial mixing was a synonym

for moral/social degradation (see Rodríguez-García 2013). Racial purity standards were only completely abolished in 1870. Later, during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), the ruling regime's preoccupation was to morally regenerate what was referred to as "the Spanish race" through a project of national Catholicism and a revival of "authentic" Spanish tradition; the notion of "Spanishness" promulgated was not defined by racial categories per se, but it was highly insular, defined by Catholicism, and deeply antagonistic to "foreign" elements (Campos 2016).

Furthermore, the Arab Muslim population in Spain, who are chiefly from Morocco (the largest foreign-born population group in the country), have historically been stigmatized as perpetual foreigners since the time of the Crusades (Zapata-Barrero 2006). Islamophobia and Maurophobia in Spanish society have historical roots dating back to the *Reconquista*, the centuries-long violent conflict in the Iberian Peninsula between Christians and Muslims ("the Moors," from the Maghreb) that predated the era of the Spanish Empire and related colonization. To these intercountry and intercultural tensions, the continual sociopolitical conflict during the Spanish protectorate in Morocco (1912-1958) can be added, as can the widespread suspicion of Muslim communities in the Western world since the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Ramberg 2004). Given this history, the fact of being Muslim or even just being from a Muslim-majority country becomes a negatively valued ethnoracial attribute in Spain and tends to elicit social distancing and discriminatory reactions from the mainstream society (see also Rodríguez-García et al. 2018; and Rodríguez-García, Solana, and Lubbers 2016). Significantly, being of Moroccan nationality or heritage is usually conflated with being a Muslim in the Spanish context; "Moroccan" becomes a signifier of Muslim "otherness," more so than for other less established Muslim immigrant groups such as Pakistanis or Senegalese. These forms of engrained prejudice were referred to frequently by the interviewees in our study, as will be shown.

Multiracialism, Identity Choices and Social Constraints

In our research, we are testing, and ultimately refuting, classic assimilation theory, which has conceptualized intermarriage and multiracial and multiethnic individuals as a “final phase” indicator of people of immigrant or minority background integrating into mainstream society (Gordon 1964). Ethnic and racial mixing would thereby be envisioned to weaken fixed ethnic identities, to blur or redraw ethnoracial lines (Alba 2009; Ali 2003), and presumably to erode racial and cultural prejudices.

A multitude of studies, however, show that the experiences of multiracial and multiethnic individuals are very diverse, depending on factors such as ancestry, race, gender, or class (Alba, Beck, and Sahin 2018; Aspinall and Song 2013; Brunsma 2006; Chito Childs 2018; Edwards, Caballero, and Puthussery 2010; Herman 2004; King-O’Riain 2015; Lichter and Qian 2018; Rodríguez-García 2015; Root 1996; Song 2017 and Song’s article in this volume; Telles and Sue 2009; Waters 1996, 2009). This body of research, within which we situate our own study, demonstrates that not only are identity choices constrained by social forces, but also that the ethnic identity options of the dominant culture are not equally available to everyone. We draw on the argument that ancestry and visibility—i.e., “aspects of physical appearance, whether real or imaginary and typically crystallized in ethnic stereotypes” (Jenkins 1997, 66)—seem to be a crucial factor in determining ethnic identity options. It is greatly through these visible and phenotypical markers that individuals are socially categorized and valued as either members of the host society (“us”) or as outsiders (“them”).

The term “phenotype” is not used uncritically in our analysis. Phenotype, like race, is a social construct, which has historically been used to oppress and separate people (see Dalmage 2004; Feliciano 2016; Telles and Sue 2009). Yet, the categorization and

interpretation of a person's physical aspects by their society can have real effects on their social interactions and on both subjective and imposed perceptions of belonging (Martin et al. 2017), as we will show in this article.

Constructions of race are, in fact, central to the multidimensional nature of identity, including identity aspects that might be in conflict with each other, instead of seamlessly blended. Roth (2016), in her exploration of the multiple dimensions of race, discusses the notion of "observed race," which is the race that is ascribed to you (often tacitly) by others. This assigned classification may be at odds with a person's own self-identity and with the self-classification(s) people choose or prioritize for themselves, which is a crucial aspect of our research. While Roth specifically explores racial identification, within the Spanish context we find it more meaningful to look at the broader concept of identification, which can include racial, ethnic, and other features, such as religion.

The literature on identity mismatch and (mis)recognition (Aspinall and Song 2013; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Franco et al. 2016.; Jenkins 2005; Roth 2016; Song 2003) is particularly pertinent to our research, where we are very interested in the interplay between identity choice, societal discrimination, and sense of belonging. Ethnoracially mixed individuals with visible features associated with "foreignness," though native born, may face integration challenges in the society of their birth if they ultimately experience racial labelling and discrimination as well the non-validation of their selected self-identification. This last aspect is referred to as "identity mismatch," a term that describes situations where the self-identification and the socially ascribed or "observed" identification do not coincide. Depending on visible markers of difference (such as phenotype, language or accent, or religious affiliation), some mixed individuals seem to have more choices than others when choosing their identity and for passing as a member of the majority society.

While we find that “visibility” plays a key role in social interactions, our research complicates theories of multiraciality, colourism (Walker 1983; see also Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Feliciano 2016), and racism because we argue that other markers of difference, namely religion, can be racialized and can become an even more divisive, marginalizing force than race (phenotype) in the Spanish context (see also Foner 2015). Discrimination based on dark(er) skin colour is endemic to Spanish society as it is in North American and other European contexts. However, within the non-white skin palette, the colourism notion that preferential status or treatment is given to people who are lighter skinned is often upended by the Spanish tendency towards Islamophobia and Maurophobia. Multiracial individuals in Spain, whether black/white, Latino/white, South Asian/white or Arab/white, may experience their racialization and their identity options differently if they are perceived to be of Muslim (and specifically, Moroccan) background; in this case, a lighter skin colour may not afford them the same privilege that it might in a different national and cultural context. In this sense, we argue that race and religion are intertwined when analyzing processes of stigmatization and discrimination in Spain.

Finally, theoretically, when considering the social meanings given to phenotype and other external/visible markers, we draw upon the idea of social stigma, described by Goffman (1963) as an attribute, behaviour, or reputation that is socially discrediting, causing an individual to be classified by others in an undesirable stereotype. Stigma undermines the status of the actor by constructing him or her as abnormal and inferior, as “other” rather than as belonging. Being stigmatized can involve labelling, stereotyping, and loss of status. But actors do not remain passive and can resist and challenge negative stereotypes with strategic self-presentations and with countering self-classifications, as we will also show.

Methodology

This article draws on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Catalonia between 2014 and 2018 as part of various related research projects on mixed families and mixed youth in Catalonia.¹ Our sample (see Appendix for details) consisted of 124 in-depth interviews conducted with Spanish-born youth,² both males and females, from very diverse ancestry. Of these individuals, 111 were descendants of mixed couples: with 92 respondents having a native ethnic Spaniard parent and a foreign-born parent, and 19 respondents having two parents born in a different foreign country (e.g., Philippines/Morocco, France/Cameroon). In this way, the sample went beyond the majority/minority or native/immigrant dichotomy by also including mixed individuals with two immigrant backgrounds. The sample also included 13 Spanish-born descendants of endogamous immigrant couples (i.e., of parents born in the same foreign country), which served as a “control group.”³ In selecting these 13 cases, we endeavoured to match the background characteristics (e.g., education) of both sets of respondents as closely as possible to make the two groups more comparable.

The preferred age group for the interviews was 14 to 29 years, which is the official age range used by the Catalan Youth Agency for the purpose of defining “youth,” and is also the most predominant age group for descendants of mixed couples in Catalonia according to the *Catalan Youth Survey 2017*. However, in our sample we had several respondents above or below these ages—four above, and three below. We acknowledge that within this fairly wide range of ages, respondents might have been at different life stages (from studying and living at home with parents to being independent adults, possibly with partners and children), which, in turn, may have had an impact on their identity experiences and perceptions.

In all cases, respondents were selected using personal connections, advertisements, and contacts with different migrant associations in different parts of Catalonia. Most of the respondents lived in Barcelona or in cities/towns in the Barcelona metropolitan area, which is also the region where most descendants of mixed couples live.

The interview guide was organized into eight sections, each one of them including questions related to a variety of themes: migratory trajectory of the immigrant parent(s), daily life, family dynamics, customs, religious beliefs and practices, schooling and work, social and political participation, socializing and leisure activities, friendships, dating, knowledge of official and family languages, transnationalism, identity and sense of belonging, experiences of discrimination (and personal strategies to counter it), life satisfaction, future plans, and so forth.

To better understand the multiple dimensions of identity and how self-conceptions and ascribed conceptions might compete and affect the interviewees' lived experiences, participants were also asked to choose one of the following categories for how they identified themselves (self-identification) and for how other members of their society of residence identified them (ascribed identity): (Catalan/Spanish), Foreigner, Mixed, Global/Cosmopolitan, and Undefined. This selection by the interviewees, when considered along with their narratives, was helpful to the researchers for identifying instances of identity mismatch. The respondent responses are recorded in the Appendix of this paper, and they are also displayed—to show identity mismatch—in Table 1. The respondent's selection of one of the aforementioned categories did not exclude the fact that sometimes several categories were deemed applicable/relevant by the respondent. The interviewee narratives help show this complexity.

The interviews each lasted one hour on average; were usually conducted either in the respondents' homes or in public cafés, libraries, or university settings; and were held in either

Catalan or Spanish, depending upon the preferences of our participants. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and subsequently were fully transcribed and analyzed. ATLAS.ti software was also used in a supplemental manner in the researchers' analysis.⁴

An information sheet and a consent form were given to participants prior to conducting the interview, and anonymity was guaranteed. In the present article, all names have been changed to preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees.

Additionally, in this paper, we have drawn on information (i.e., similar findings and one interview excerpt) from a previous research project⁵ that analyzed similar issues of intercultural negotiation among mixed and endogamous couples, including parenting decisions and intergenerational dynamics; that sample included 94 couples (see Rodríguez-García et al. 2015, 2016 for specific results).

Findings: Multiple and Divergent Mixed Identities

Our analysis of the narratives of ethnoracially mixed youth reveals that identity experiences are multiple and complex. Some interviewees identified themselves as native (Catalan and/or Spanish), others as mixed (identifying with both parents' ancestry), others as global or cosmopolitan (part of a world culture that goes beyond national borders and ethnic labels), others as foreigners (not belonging to Spain/Catalonia, and often feeling from the country of origin of their immigrant parent(s)), and yet others as a combination of various categories (see Appendix). Using the same category choice, the interviewees also explained to us how they felt they were perceived by others in Spain—i.e., what identity was “ascribed” to them. We observed a difference in the identity processes/outcomes of mixed individuals who were seen as distinct from the monoracial Spanish majority (i.e., as *not* being native) as opposed to those who could “pass” as native Spaniards. Factors such as ancestry, phenotype, religion, and

language, as well as gender and class, were found to affect respondents' identity choices when navigating mixedness.

Greater constraints: Identity mismatch and the importance of “visible markers”

Experiencing presuppositions of foreignness, stigmatization, and racism were prevalent themes expressed by our mixed interviewees in cases where the immigrant parent was of non-European background. While these respondents often felt a primary and intuitive connection with Catalonia/Spain⁶, the country in which they were born and raised, they were not able to exercise this native identity unproblematically, as they frequently were labelled as foreigners and outsiders by the general public and sometimes by their peers. Table 1 documents and reveals the discrepancies between how our interviewees self-identified and how they were perceived in Spanish society (see also the Appendix).

[Table 1 near here]

The following narrative examples more vividly show respondent experiences of imposed categorizations and identity mismatch or restriction, where physical appearance seems to be a key factor:

Nobody identifies me as Spanish, or as Colombian either. Instead, as Brazilian, Saharan, Moroccan, Indian, Latin American... I went through a lot when I was a girl, [with] strangers on the bus saying to me, “So, dear, where are you from?” “I’m from Spain, sir,” [she laughs]. Well, I have this face [referring to her dark skin colour], and they think that I’m a foreigner... There’s a lot of difference between my sister and me: My sister is very white, so she is not noticed...

Maria, 27-year-old female, Spanish father and Colombian⁷ mother

If I have to define myself, I would say I am a black guy born in Spain. I am Catalan, I am Spanish, but I would never say I am only Spanish or only Catalan because although I was born

here, I do not feel like a person who is a white Spaniard or white Catalan. I don't feel that way because they have not made me feel like that (...). Here, the Catalans or Spaniards do not see me as Catalan or Spanish, even if I see myself as a Catalan and Spaniard. They see me as black...

Tim, 29-years-old male, Spanish mother and Guinean father

I feel that I'm from Catalonia... Sometimes [at school] they call me "fucking Chink" because I have [Asian] traits... I was more affected when I was younger, but I'm used to it now ...

Ignasi, 15-year-old boy, Spanish father and Taiwanese mother

What bothers me is that some elderly people who speak Catalan, when they speak to me, they speak in Spanish, and, of course, it's like saying, "You do not know Catalan." So I answer them back in Catalan, as though to say, "There is no need to classify me [as a foreigner]." You know?

Alba, 19-year-old female, Spanish father and Dominican mother

Notably, among our interviewees, there were several instances of siblings where, as in the above case of Maria, one was darker than the other and the socially ascribed identities to the two siblings were divergent. People treated the one with lighter skin as "one of us"—as "belonging"—and the one with darker skin as a "foreigner." This was the case, too, of two Chinese-Spanish sisters, Noemi and Loli, who explained that an imagined identity was often projected onto the younger dark-complexioned sister, with people constantly assuming that she was from India or South America, whereas the older light-skinned sister largely went unnoticed as having any immigrant background (for similar findings, see the interview cases presented by King-O'Riain in this volume).

Interestingly, some interviewees explained that the discovery of their socially perceived "foreignness," especially their "blackness," took them by surprise, and that they have tried to resist being stereotyped and "othered" as much as possible:

[When I was a child,] I did not see the difference. I only saw it if my peers made me see it... They always asked my mom if [my siblings and I] were adopted (...) So [it was] by the time I

was around...[age 14 in school] that I could see that if we saw movies about slavery or so forth, it was like “poor Sabrina”... From then on, I could notice it more (...) For example, at the Rototom [a music festival celebrating African heritage], people [were] saying, “You dance well because you are black.” *No*, I dance well because I like to dance, not because I’m black! Or a thousand things like that, generally more subtle than that.

Sabrina, 23-year-old female, Spanish mother and Kenyan father

One of the most interesting narratives we came across was that of a 22-year-old female, born to a Spanish mother and a Rwandan father. She grew up in a small city in the interior of Catalonia and has a strong local Catalan identity. She does not speak Kinyarwanda and did not learn any of Rwanda’s other official languages from her father, specifically because he did not want her to be treated as an outsider. She explained, though, that because of her dark skin colour—and also because of her Rwandan surname—she is instantly classified by people as a foreigner. However, as soon as she starts speaking in her perfect, “authentic” Catalan, there is an immediate understanding that she is Catalan. In that moment, the way that people look at her changes completely, even more so when people learn that she was born in Catalonia and that she is a university student—a sign of socioeconomic status. She articulated,

If I do not speak, they [the people] see me as a total foreigner. But as soon as I speak, [they comment] “Oh, how interesting! What beautiful and perfect Catalan you have!” (...) It might be the darkness of my skin..., [but] when I open my mouth and I speak with this deep Catalan, I am forgiven my blackness. Even more so once they know that one of my parents is super white, and that I am in university.

Carne, 22-year-old female, Spanish mother and Rwandan father

Carne’s story, in terms of the focus on and prejudice around her skin colour, is not unusual, whether among the narratives of multiracial individuals or among those of “visible minority” youth with two immigrant parents (i.e., the descendants of endogamous couples, which we discussed as a control group in our Methodology section). Our analysis of the

narratives with ATLAS.ti software uncovered a variety of recurring terms related to visible markers and discrimination (see endnote 5). There were many mentions of skin colour, specific derogatory terms, being regarded with fear and distrust, and feeling on the outside. Examples of terms and language that came up frequently are as follows: skin, black, white, half-blood, mulatto, chocolate, *Conguito*⁸, *moro* (Moor), *sudaca* (derogatory term for Latin American), they smell bad, fucking black, fucking Chinese, fucking immigrants, look, gaze, stare, rumour, fear, suspicion, shame, denigration, loneliness, guilt, sadness (for a similar list of everyday taunts thrown at mixed-parentage youth, see Tizard and Phoenix 1993, 89-92).

The racialization experienced by our respondents was profoundly alienating in some cases. Tim, the earlier-quoted Guinean-Spanish interviewee, explained that he did not even feel that a mixed or hyphenated identity was available to him, stating, “I never define myself as a mulatto; I define myself as black.” Moreover, the sense of not being fully able to claim a Catalan or Spanish identity and of not belonging also arose from not seeing himself reflected in social positions of power or prestige. He explained, “The situation of black people in Spain is [of having] so little power (...) When I was a child, I would have liked having had a black teacher, a black doctor...” Such examples allude to the systemic racial hierarchy that still seems to be in place in Spain.

A final example—taken from our related study on mixed couples in Spain (see Methodology section and endnote 5)—that illustrates identity mismatch and imposed identity categories in circumstances of blatant and shocking (systemic) racism comes from a parent talking about her mixed-race children’s experiences at school:

[My daughters] belong here; they feel they are from here, but people see them as foreigners... For example, there was a third-grade teacher who told [my eldest daughter, who was then eight years old,] while preparing for the play *Little Red Riding Hood*, “Since you are black, you will be the wolf.” That time I went and complained to the principal.

Dominican woman married to a Spanish man

“Muslimness” as a crucial marker of otherness

In analyzing the narratives of our interviewees, we have also found that one of the strongest sources of discrimination is having “visible” Muslim heritage (whether socially interpreted from an individual’s non-white phenotype; manner of dress, such as donning the hijab; “Arab” or “Pakistani” accent when speaking Spanish or Catalan; use of Arabic or Punjabi; or Arab surname) (see also Rodríguez-García, Solana, and Lubbers 2016). As mentioned earlier, an abundance of negative stereotypes and prejudices exist in the Spanish consciousness that associate Muslims with being the perpetual outsider or enemy (Zapata-Barrero 2006). Consequently, mixed youth with Muslim—especially Moroccan—background in Spain, as well as descendants of two immigrant Muslim parents, are often conflicted about expressing this aspect of their identity or ancestry.

The following three excerpts from our interviews demonstrate the dissonance between the respondents’ own sense of identity and belonging, which may be largely, or even entirely, locally rooted, and the assigned Muslim/foreigner identity—with its associated stereotypes—that is projected onto them:

I feel Catalan, even Catalan separatist! Not Spanish, and not Moroccan either, because I spend very little time there and also because at home Moroccan culture is not present... Okay, my father is an immigrant, but I have not grown up thinking like that! [At school] people have always forced me into making me feel that I am from the outside, telling me that I am from Morocco and so on...

Leila, 18-year-old female, Spanish mother and Moroccan father

Two weeks ago, a man asked me, “Where are you from?” Since I’ve been wearing this [a necklace with the Hand of Fatima], a lot of people have asked me. And he said, “Well, you are Moroccan.” And I said, “Well, if you think so...” And he said, “Yes, you are dark, and you have traits [*rasgos*] and their way of speaking, and you certainly don’t speak Catalan.” So I looked at him..., he was an elderly man, and I said politely, “Sir, I was born in Barcelona, and surely my Catalan is better than yours.”

Iris, 22-year-old female, Spanish father and Moroccan mother

I feel more from here because my whole life is here; I was born here. I like Morocco because I have family there, but I prefer it here (...) I have put on the hijab, but I have seen that some friends have lost job opportunities because [the employers] did not want the hijab, so I am willing to take it off if necessary. Since putting on the hijab, I've noticed that people treat me clearly as an outsider (...) For example, I accompanied my cousin to school—she did not know how to speak [Spanish]—and they said to me, “We'll have to bring you a translator, because you cannot speak [Spanish].” Or when I go with my mother, they always tell us, “We are going to bring you a translator,” and I say, “No, I know how to speak [Spanish]!” They always assume that I have a handicap (...) Or when the [terrorist] attack happened [in Barcelona, in 2017], people treated us, my parents too, as terrorists: “Terrorists, go back to your own country!” and so forth.

Fada, 19-year-old female, Spanish born with Moroccan parents

Other narratives from (mixed) descendants of Muslim ancestry have emphasized that apart from perceived physical traits and “foreign” language or accent—whether real or imagined—respondents' names can also become unwanted signifiers of foreignness:

I suffer discrimination when they see my surname, because they say it is not from here. It happens with some professors: “And this surname, where is it from?” It bothers me because they are already tagging me as though I am not from here.

Luz, 22-year-old female, Spanish mother and Moroccan father

Furthermore, as this next extract from a 24-year-old female of Belgian and Rwandan background shows, the discrimination that Muslims are subjected to in Spanish society is distinct from—and often stronger than—generalized anti-black racism within a predominantly white European society. Being perceived, whether correctly or incorrectly, as Muslim, especially as a Moroccan/Maghrebian, based on outward characteristics is a particular socially assigned ethnoracial category that is loaded with negative assumptions and that ranks lower than any other form of ancestry in the Spanish sociocultural hierarchy.

I suffered discrimination when I was in school, but not because I was Belgian or Rwandan but because people thought I was Moroccan. [They called me] “fucking Moor” [*mora de mierda*] and things like that (...). They did not know where I was from, but because of my look, they thought, “She is Moroccan.” At first, I used to say, “I’m not Moroccan,” and then later, “So what if I’m Moroccan?!”

Arlette, 24-year-old female, Belgian father and Rwandan mother

Advantageous hybridity: Whiteness and strategic passing

We have also come across narratives of less conflicted, more advantageous experiences of mixedness. These mixed-background individuals, who most often claim a more symbolic and flexible mixed identity, generally have one immigrant parent who is white—commonly from another (Western) European country—and have access to an additional mother-tongue language that, in many cases, is socially valued or even considered prestigious by their native Spanish society. Many of these interviewees tended to view themselves as having a privileged cosmopolitan identity and expressed that because they had the ability to blend into the dominant society (whether at home or in the country of their immigrant parent), they had the freedom “to choose” and to shift between their available ethnic options when desired; their sense of belonging was rarely, if ever, questioned. These views are articulated in the following interview extracts, as is the frequent awareness of the respondents that their particular social advantage from having mixed ancestry is not equally available to descendants of more stigmatized groups.

To me, [being mixed] hasn’t been a problem. Rather, it’s been an advantage... because I know another language; you also get to travel a lot (...) I have no Italian accent, so I can go unnoticed (...) I have not suffered any discrimination—on the contrary! They look at you and they say, “Wow! You’re from another place!” Perhaps a person from Africa might be more discriminated against for being black, also the Arabs (...)

Leo, 14-year-old male, Spanish father and Italian mother

I would say that I am from both places; I am not half and half, but I am both. I can be 100% Catalan and 100% English; one thing does not exclude the other. I could make myself some bread with tomato [a typical Catalan food], but always accompanied by a cup of tea. I can be both things in their totality.

Gabriela, 19-year-old female, Spanish father and British mother

When I am in France, I can say that I am Spanish. And in Spain, I can say that I am French, or vice versa, depending on the situation (...) I have no limitations or restrictions. I have the same status [as any Spaniard], and [both identities] are valued equally in both countries (...) French is considered a prestigious language. A North African or South American boy may not have such recognition.

Michel, 16-year-old boy, Spanish father and French mother

I mean, sure, my mother is an immigrant, just like a Moroccan person, but she is English, so she's a "cool" immigrant...

Tomas, 22-year-old male, Spanish father and British mother

We saw similar experiences of "white privilege" and ease of ethnic belonging among interviewees with other mixed Western backgrounds (e.g., Swiss-Spanish), and also in some cases of mixed youth whose non-European origins were not physically perceptible, as in the following example of a Japanese-Spanish female who is able to self-identify on her own terms:

I think of myself as a Catalan girl, who at the same time has a Japanese background, but not a "real" one—perhaps with some influences, like in temperament, because of education or personality (...) At first glance, when I meet people, they think I am just Catalan because physically that's what I look like (...) At school, some peers have told me that they see something different, something "oriental"—but not physically, more about my behaviour—because I am a little distant, serious, quiet, ... not "typically Spanish."

Montse, 26-year-old female, Spanish mother and Japanese father

Our interviewees in this group of mixed respondents who, whether having a Western/Western or Western/non-Western ethnoracial mix, were perceived as being "white"

by Spanish society (see Appendix) also commonly expressed shifts in their identification and sense of belonging depending on their life stage and their particular context (i.e., when, where, with whom, and doing what?), as the next excerpt shows:

If I'm there in Kosovo and they ask me, "Where are you from?" of course, I say that my father is Albanian but that I was born in Spain. And if they ask me [the same thing] here in Spain, I say that I'm Albanian. It depends. First off, I would say that I am half and half. But lately, in recent years, I feel more Albanian, like my father, from Kosovo. But, well, I am half Catalan, half Albanian. I also have this [Catalan] nationalist feeling...

Lidia, 16-year-old female, Spanish mother and Kosovar father

These type of context-based identity fluctuations were also observed to some extent among our interviewees in other groups, but having a white phenotype seemed to consistently allow individuals a greater freedom to "choose" their identity in a given moment.

Pride and reappropriation of mixed roots

We also encountered some instances of visibly mixed descendants claiming their non-Western immigrant roots as a tool of ethnic pride. This type of positive non-Western bicultural narrative occurred most often among individuals who came from a higher socioeconomic and educational background and also among respondents belonging to minority groups that are more valued in Spanish society.

In terms of the latter consideration, one example that stood out was the case of Chinese-Spanish mixed youth. Despite the fact that Chinese communities in Spain, as in other European countries and Western nations, have certainly experienced negative stereotypes, marginalization, and discrimination (see excerpt from Ignasi in "Greater constraints" subsection), the notion of Chinese immigrants being a "model minority" (in line with the prevailing stereotypes in North America), with great importance attached to education, a strong work ethic, and a tendency towards upward mobility, has more recently become a

generalized stereotype in Spain, where the Chinese community has grown exponentially over the past couple of decades and has demonstrated its entrepreneurial and academic success (Beltrán 2013). Furthermore, Mandarin Chinese has become a very valued language globally, in contrast to other languages used by minority cultures in Spain, such as Arabic, Punjabi, or native African languages. These factors may explain why the Chinese-Spanish mixed youth in our study on the whole did not describe the same social marginalization that was experienced by numerous other mixed populations with non-Western ancestry and why these respondents were invested in maintaining their Chinese heritage and network. The following two excerpts articulate positive sentiments of mixed belonging:

I like to be told [that I am partly Chinese]. You feel that you are different, that there is no one like you. I'm the only one in the class who has Chinese blood and I can speak Chinese!

Noemi, 19-year-old girl who has a Spanish mother and a Chinese father

Disadvantages [of being mixed]? I don't see any; all I've found are advantages. For example, to be able to find work with Chinese people [employers], because now for Spaniards, maybe it's not so easy, but in a restaurant or a Chinese store, it's easy. And [finding work] with Spaniards, too; for example, here they need people who speak Chinese because there are so many Chinese tourists... So I think that everything is an advantage: to [be able to] meet people, to do business with people from China, and so forth.

Reiko, 24-year-old female, Spanish mother and Chinese father

We also found that these positive bicultural experiences tended to be more common among females, whether mixed Chinese or from other non-Western backgrounds. Subsequent research on both gender and class—as intersecting factors with race—would help to improve our understanding of these patterns.

Conclusions

In line with previous studies (e.g., Choudhry 2010; Tizard and Phoenix 1993; Song 2017), our investigation of mixed youth in Spain shows that identity outcomes and experiences of being mixed are very heterogeneous, and are dependent on various factors or conditions, such as ancestry, phenotype, religion, language, gender, class, and location. In other words, it depends on “what type of mix” you are, and also where you are (see also the Introduction by Osanami Törngren, Irastorza, and Rodríguez-García in this volume and the contributions by Song, Chito Childs et al., King-O’Riain, and Osanami Törngren and Sato).

We have found that for some individuals, being mixed is a mostly, if not entirely, positive experience. They have what we could call greater “mixed sociocultural capital” to draw upon (see Rodríguez-García et al. 2018): Their non-Spanish heritage allows them to travel between countries, leverage diverse personal networks, use multiple languages, and enjoy an “exotic,” “cosmopolitan,” or “cool” multiethnic status, whether largely symbolic or not. In these cases, we found that mixed-background individuals could be more strategic or selective about their “mixedness,” choosing different ethnocultural options depending on the context and passing through them more freely. Their self-identification and the socially assigned identifiers mostly tended to overlap, but even when not, the ascriptions of non-native “otherness” were usually positive. These circumstances generally occurred among mixed-parentage descendants who had more discernible characteristics shared with the majority native-heritage population (e.g., light/white skin colour) and most commonly among those whose parent’s foreign nationality held a higher status in Spanish society (predominantly Western European countries); these respondents also often belonged to a wealthier social class. Dawkins (2012) and Waters (1996) have found similar results regarding the greater availability and exercising of ethnic options among white European versus black mixed-

heritage individuals in the US, and Gilliéron (2017) has uncovered similar patterns in the case of binational youth in Switzerland (see also King-O’Riain and Small 2014, and Osanami Törnngren and Sato’s article in this volume).

Conversely, descendants of mixed couples in Spain whose ethnoracial heritage involved a negatively minoritized group (particularly Muslim and/or Moroccan descent) experienced greater stigmatization, racism, and discrimination, including adverse identity mismatch, where self-identification as “Catalan,” “Spanish,” or “mixed” did not coincide with the assigned racialized categories of “foreigner,” “immigrant,” “black,” or “Muslim.” Arguably, Islam, a “racialized” religion (Meer 2014), can be an even more divisive and marginalizing marker than race in the Spanish context (see also Foner 2015).

In some cases, ethnoracially mixed individuals whose heritage involved non-Western backgrounds claimed their mixed roots as a tool of “ethnic pride.” However, it could be argued that ostensibly embraced hyphenated ethnicities (for example, Chinese-Spanish, or, in other national contexts, Moroccan-French or Turkish-German) reflect the difficulty of going altogether beyond the confines of externally imposed ethnoracial categories, as has also been noted by previous studies (e.g., Song 2003, 2017). In other words, a “positive narrative” does not necessarily mean a “positive reality” in the sense of inclusiveness.

Significantly, the fact that similar experiences of identity mismatch, stigmatization, challenged sense of belonging, and discrimination were encountered by both mixed-race individuals and monoracial individuals with shared visible traits means that it is not origin per se that makes a person pass or be accepted as a native Spaniard, but, rather, whether or not an individual is perceived as “different” from the majority population. All this challenges the idealized notion of a ‘postracial’ or ‘colour-blind’ future that might seemingly be heralded by an ever-growing population of mixed-race individuals, as previous studies also show (e.g., Brunsma 2006; Chito Childs 2018; Daniel and Newman 2015; Khanna 2010; King-O’Riain

and Small 2014; Lee and Bean 2012; Martin et al. 2017; Rodríguez-García 2015; Rodríguez-García et al. 2018; Song 2014, 2017; Telles and Sue 2009; Waters 1996, 2009; see also the Introduction of this volume).

Many of the interviewees expressed variations in their self-identification(s) depending on the context (when, where, with whom, and doing what), revealing how identities are entrenched in a continual redefining process in which individuals are active agents with the capacity for contestation (Deaux 2018; Hagerman 2016; Sanchez, Shih, and Wilton 2014; see also Song's and Chito Childs et al.'s articles in this volume).

However, an agency-based and multidimensional view of ethnoracial identity (i.e., acknowledging the complex, dialectical, multifaceted, context-bound, and shifting nature of identity and categorization) does not preclude stigmatization, racism, and other forms of discrimination from happening and from affecting individuals and their social relations. In the end, some individuals are more persistently structurally constrained than others in their identity choices or "identity autonomy" (Sanchez, Shih, and Wilton 2014; see also Franco, Katz, and O'Brien 2016; and King-O'Riain 2015). Ultimately, mixed—and monoracial/monoethnic—individuals who belong to socially minoritized ethnic or racial groups have less options for navigating and "choosing" their identities.

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² In a couple of cases, the interviewees were born outside Spain but were raised and schooled in Catalonia, Spain.

³ The smaller size of the monoracial group (13 respondents) did not allow an exact comparison with the mixed group, yet this group provided extra information that could be examined against the results of the mixed respondents.

⁴ ATLAS.ti (<http://atlasti.com>) is a computer program used to assist with the analysis of information from qualitative (non-numerical) data sources. The software provides tools for researchers to create codes for themes, which can then be weighed and evaluated for their importance. In this study, we have established analytical categories (codes), for example, for “visibility” and “discrimination,” which include all the related words (in vivo descriptive labels) we think might be relevant emerging from the narratives (e.g., words related to discrimination might include “look,” “gaze,” “stare,” “taunt,” “rumour,” “attack,” “dark,” “light,” etc.). We are then able to find recurrences of terms, as well as associations between codes, across the interviewee narratives. Still, these recurrences and associations then have to be located within the narrative and carefully read by the researchers for meaning and context to make sure that they are of analytical significance; i.e., recurrences and associations in themselves are not self-explanatory or meaningful.

⁵ “Immigration and Intermarriage: Ethnicity and Social Integration” (2012-15), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (CSO2011-23242).

⁶ Spain is divided into 17 historical autonomous regions, some of which have their own officially recognized language, distinct cultural traditions, and strong sense of “national” identity. Among them, Catalonia has for centuries maintained a political claim for recognition of its cultural singularity. This issue has grown in intensity since the lead-up to and the aftermath of the hotly disputed October 1, 2017, referendum for Catalan independence. Our research data sometimes indicated the importance of differentiating between respondents’ identification with Catalonia versus with Spain, or even with smaller regions (i.e., the province, city, or town the respondent lived in). Interviewees whose immigrant parent(s) had Spanish as a mother tongue (chiefly immigrants from Latin America) generally identified as Spanish, rather than as Catalan, and they also tended to be less proficient in the Catalan language, whereas respondents whose immigrant parent(s) had a foreign first language generally had no prior attachments to Spain or Catalonia and therefore tended to be more Catalan-oriented both in terms of learning the language and in their sense of belonging (see also Rodríguez-García et al. 2015, 2018).

⁷ In all cases, the name of the country refers to the place of birth, not to citizenship.

⁸ “*Conguitos*” (literally “little people from Congo”) is a very popular brand of chocolate-covered peanuts, which uses clear racist iconography in its packaging. The wrapper and advertising pictures have changed slightly over the years, from colonialist images of “savage” African people in their huts to more recent references to hip-hop culture, but the product has always maintained a strong stereotype of black people. Most Spaniards are completely unaware of this normalized form of racism in their society.