

**FROM TATTOOS, VEILS AND NOTEBOOKS:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHERNESS AND IDENTITY  
CONSTRUCTION PROCESSES IN YOUNG STUDENTS WITH  
MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS IN SPAIN**

**DE TATUAGENS, VÉUS E CADERNOS: REPRESENTAÇÕES  
DO OUTRO E PROCESSOS DE CONSTRUÇÃO  
IDENTITÁRIA EM JOVENS ESTUDANTES DE ORIGEM  
MIGRANTE EM ESPANHA**

Antonia Olmos Alcaraz<sup>1</sup>

María Rubio Gómez<sup>2</sup>

Ouafaa Bouachra Outmani<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT**

This study relationally analyses the processes of the construction of difference and the processes of identity construction in which young adolescents and pre-adolescents with migrant backgrounds within formal educational contexts are involved. The text aims to show and describe how otherness and identity work in an intersectional way. Our analysis considers intersectionality as the most appropriate way of approximation to the reality observed. To do so, we work from biographical interviews and life stories of young people produced through our own respective fieldwork. This material had been analyzed looking for the relations between identity categories (gender, religion, nationality...) and how these categories are interpreted for the young adolescents involved in the research. We research in twelve andalusian high schools with students, teachers and families. Along three scholar years, we made 132 interviews and 13 discussion groups. This allows us to address the theoretical objects of the study (otherness/identity) in a contextual and process-based way.

**Keywords:** Identity. Otherness. Interseccionality. Migrations. Ethnography.

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate professor, Social Anthropology Department at Granada University (Spain), and member of Institute of Migrations at the Granada University and the "Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales". E-mail: antonia@ugr.es.

<sup>2</sup> PhD in Social Sciences (2013), and Masters in Migration Studies, Development and Social Intervention. Researcher from the Institute of Migrations and the "Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales" in the University of Granada. E-mail: mariarubio@ugr.es.

<sup>3</sup> PHD candidate at the Migration Institute, University of Granada (Spain), and Masters in Migration Studies, Development and Social Intervention. E-mail: ouafabouachra@gmail.com.

## RESUMO

Este estudo analisa relacionalmente o processo de construção da diferença e o processo de construção de identidades nos quais jovens adolescente e pré-adolescentes de origem imigrante dentro de contextos educacionais formais estão envolvidos. O texto objetiva mostrar e descrever como alteridade e identidade trabalham de modo interseccional. Nossa análise considera a interseccionalidade como o caminho mais apropriado de aproximação com a realidade observada. Para tanto, desenvolvemos a pesquisa a partir de entrevistas biográficas e história de vida com jovens em nosso trabalho de campo. Este material tem sido analisado buscando as relações entre as categorias de identidades (gênero, religião, nacionalidade) e como estas categorias são interpretadas pelo jovens adolescentes envolvidos na pesquisa. Pesquisamos estudantes, professores e familiares de 12 escolas de ensino médio na região da Andaluzia na Espanha. Ao longo de 3 anos escolares, fizemos 132 entrevistas e 13 grupos de discussão. Isto nos permitiu abordar nossos objetos teóricos de estudo (alteridade/identidade) de forma contextual e processual.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade. Alteridade. Interseccionalidade. Migrações. Etnografia.

## Introduction

Looking at the situation of young people with a migrant background in their roles as secondary students, we ask ourselves, how are they building their identities? How are they perceived and built in the schools? Are these constructions of otherness<sup>4</sup> relevant to them? What kinds of categories are operating in these constructions? We work on the assumption that it is not possible to set previous information that could give us with certainty which socio-cultural categories are the most powerful to understand how the representations of otherness in school contexts are generated; and we cannot either know which identity elements are more important for young people with a migrant background. Nevertheless, we are aware that both processes are closely related -they are two sides of the same coin-; and that socio-culturally constructed categories such as “race”/ethnicity, social class or gender (but also aspects related to religion, language or national background), as categories that emerged when “we talk about immigration”, work in an interrelated, interdependent and contextual way.

## 1. Theoretical frameworks

We have previously worked in different studies the investigation of the creation processes of otherness at schools regarding migrant populations and/or from immigrant families (OLMOS-ALCARAZ, 2009, 2010; OLMOS-ALCARAZ and RUBIO-GÓMEZ, 2013; RUBIO-GÓMEZ, 2013; RUBIO-GÓMEZ and OLMOS-ALCARAZ, 2013). It suffices to recall the main theoretical references that inspire us and guide us in our investigation.

---

<sup>4</sup> In this article, we understand the concept "otherness" as "a relation of difference as strangeness (not identification with the "other"), motivated by non-contact (ignorance) or contact, and in most cases, for the symbolic power where one group (or individual) dominates in cultural, social, political and/or economic terms to another. It is a relation of domination of one group over another due to the existence of ideological interests, which causes the process to lead to the construction of difference" (OLMOS, 2009: 54). To see other critical approaches to the concept of otherness see Olmos-Alcaraz (2009, 2010).

Accordingly, in the first place, we bring the work of G. Simmel (2002) on the figure of the foreigner. For the author the construction and representation of the foreigner as the “other” necessarily involves an ambivalent attitude where closeness and distance are present at the same time. That ambivalence is also highlighted by Z. Bauman when he indicates that “[...] the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; may even be both” at the same time (BAUMAN, 2005, p. 87). Furthermore, we cannot fail to mention the work of E. Goffman (2001) that has provided a special input into our analysis, although it does not refer exclusively to foreigners or immigration. The concept of stigma that the author sets, as an attribute to discredit used in the categorisation processes, and from which otherness is constructed as inequality, is central to understand how the construction of the difference is built (GARCÍA *et al.*, 1999) towards immigrant populations at the present time. Current researches, such as E. Santamaría (2002), A. Dal Lago (2005) or A. Rea (2006), have helped us to bring closer the more traditional approaches and/or exclusively referring to immigration policies to the analysis of the migration phenomenon as a social issue in globalised societies:

Thus, we see the *immigrant* –understanding that this demographic-based term transforms into a socio-cultural category from which we identify certain individuals and that, only occasionally, is related to the idea of “foreigner”–; is currently contemplated as the *summum* of otherness. (RUBIO-GÓMEZ and OLMOS-ALCARAZ, 2013, p. 3)

On the other hand, our work is also fed by the contributions of T. Van Dijk (2003, 2009) on the power of the discourse in the social construction of the difference and racism reproduction. We seek to describe these processes within the formal education institution, with the main objective of knowing and understanding how the categories that classify and organise the pupils with a migrant background and/or from migrant families in “good and bad students and good and bad pupils” work (OLMOS-ALCARAZ and RUBIO-GÓMEZ, 2013, 2014; RUBIO-GÓMEZ and OLMOS-ALCARAZ, 2013).

Regarding to the reviewed to support our positions on the processes of the identity construction we will mention the work of S. Hall (2003) and R. Brubaker and F. Cooper (2001). Accordingly, one of the questions that has had the most interest for people to this respect –and

is still worrying/interesting at the present– within and beyond the academia, has to do with the integration processes<sup>5</sup> between the migrant populations and the native populations in the recipient country. It is therefore that we can find countless work along this line and relevant initiatives in the form of public policies that lead and/or accompany these integration processes. The identity question points thus significant when we talk about integration, although our greatest concern from our positioning is that this has not always been understood as process-based and multiple. The tradition embodied by S. Hall, the Cultural Studies, has known how to capture this orientation. Consequently, we highlight, and gather for our analysis, his clearly antiessentialist and per-formative vision of the identity:

The concept accepts that the identities never unify and, that in late modernity times, are increasingly more fragmented and fractured; they are never unique, but built in multiple ways through the discourses, practices and different positions, often crossed and antagonistic. They are subject to a radical historicisation, and in a continuous process of change and transformation. (HALL, 2003, p. 17)

This position is also shared with the work of Brubaker and Cooper (2001). The authors claim for this the use of the term “identification” as a substitute to “identity”:

While the qualifying meanings involve to identify oneself (or other person) as someone who fits in a certain description or belongs to a certain category, the psychodynamic meaning involves to emotionally identify oneself with another person, category or collectivity. Once again, “identification” demands complex processes (and often ambivalent), while the term of “identity”, appointing a condition more than a process, entails a loose fit between the individual and the social. (BRUBAKER and COOPER, 2001, p. 22)

But, in our opinion, the most interesting and valuable thing that we rescue from the S. Hall contributions to the contemporary debates on identity, is the definition of it –in terms of identification, as Brubaker

---

<sup>5</sup> In this article we do not deal with this question, but we can check previous works for a critical analysis on this respect (CONTINI *et al.*, 2016; GARCÍA *et al.*, 2011; OLMOS-ALCARAZ, 2009).

and Cooper (2001)– as the result of subjectivities and what we could call alter-discourses at the same time:

I use «identity» to refer to the meeting point, a stitch between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices that try to «question» us, tell us or put us in our place as social subjects with particular discourses and, on the other hand, the processes that generate subjectivities, which build us as subjects sensitive «to tell». (HALL, 2003, p. 20)

His idea of the “stitch” between the two realities allow us to think identity –the processes of identification– as a reality that articulates between the individuals and their “others”, that continuously adjust every day, and that is open to changes and transformation. And it helps us to justify our interest to delve into an intersectional approach when it comes to address our theoretical subject of study.

To talk about intersectionality is not an easy task, due to the diversity of nuances and approaches of the studies done to date under this perspective. Check Olmos-Alcaraz and Rubio-Gómez (2014) for a first approach made in this sense from our research studies on the construction of the difference towards the pupils identified as “immigrants”. Although it is clear that we can determine its origins in the contributions of feminist authors placed in non occidentalocentric paradigms. We can find the work of K. W. Crenshaw (1991, 2012), P. H. Collins (2000), P.H. Collins and J. Solomos (2010), bell hooks (2004), Yuval-Davis (2007, 2016) or C. West and S. Fenstermarker (2010) among others. All of them –while from different positions– propose ways of approach and analysis of the social inequalities. Our proposal of analysis of the construction processes of otherness and identity in young people with a migrant background includes some of the contributions made by them. Thus, in the first place, we refer to the idea that from an intersectional approach we must consider that different ways of oppression exist (and so we add different ways of creation of otherness). There are based on the articulation of the categories that build inequalities, the different relations established among them, and the operating contexts in which we may find them. The variability of the relations is large, depending on the place of the subject within the intersection of the categories that would work like interrelated rings (ANDERSEN and COLLINS, 1992; WEST and FENSTERMARKER, 2010)

On the other hand, and in the second place, it is vital to consider that a large heterogeneity exists in the way to experiment the diverse ways of oppression, and great diversity of possible articulations and the statements of otherness from which the construction processes of the identity can be generated. To be oppressed implies “lack of choices” (BELL HOOK, 2004). However, it happens sometimes that some behaviours and ways of being resulted from personal and/or group choices are interpreted from outside, from the exo-group, as a consequence of a situation of oppression, which maximises the attribution of otherness in negative terms<sup>6</sup>. What is interesting is how far the attributions of otherness influence and/or determine the processes of identity construction and in which sense –given that, as indicated before– they occur in many diverse ways.

What is interesting is to question us how far the attributions of otherness influence and/or determine the processes of identity construction and in which sense –given that, as indicated before– that occurs in many diverse ways.

We may find some answers if we think in an intersectional work of the categories implemented to make otherness: social class, gender, “race”/ethnicity, place of origin, nationality, language, etc. And here we rescue the idea of the “stitch” of S. Hall (2003), to understand in a better way how the discourses and practices generated around these categories necessarily and contextually meet with our subjectivities and personal experiences of social class, gender, “race”/ethnicity, place of origin, nationality, language, etc., as “interrelated experience categories” (ANDERSEN and COLLINS, 1992).

In the third place, it is necessary to consider the logics operating in racism, sexism, classism, etc. That is, the ideologies that support the processes of social inequality resulting from markers of “race”/ethnicity, sex/gender, social class, etc. All of them have something in common, to provide processes of essentialisation and naturalisation of the differences that will help to legitimise social inequality. Therefore, we believe they must work jointly:

---

<sup>6</sup> It is an example what happens with the interpretations we often built around the use of the Islamic veil: women that decide to use this symbol for identity reasons or even rebelliousness but they are considered as submissive, oppressed and dominated.

[...] although they exhibit different descriptive characteristics and results, gender, race and class – eventually everything that people experiment as organising categories of the social difference– are however comparable as production mechanisms of social inequality. (WEST and FENSTERMARKER, 2010, p. 172)

Finally, we would like to point out how we can also fall into a simplistic analysis that considers that all these ways of oppression and creation of otherness, also identity construction, work in an accumulative way. The categories of the diversity are not independent of one another, nor selective, as “no one can experiment gender without experimenting race and class at the same time” (WEST and FENSTERMARKER, 2010, p. 178), and every subjectivity face them in a particular and contextual way. This is why we should talk about the “race”, the gender, the social class, etc., as “ongoing resultants” (WEST and FENSTERMARKER, 2010, p. 178) which produce dynamic and interactional differences, diversities, othernesses and identities.

The objective of this study is to show the operating way of the identity and otherness construction processes experienced by the students when they are the key actors of a migration project, and how is that shown within the school context. We will use an intersectional approach described as forensic tools to “disembowel othernesses and identities”, to “dissect social and school trajectories”. Firstly, we describe the methodological process continuously, this will allow the reader to understand the interpretations resulting from our work done with an specific type of data; secondly, we show what are the representations of otherness and identity constructions of two of the students from an ethnographic approach; and, thirdly, we explain our analysis and interpretations on how these realities work in an intersectional way, considering our own theoretical-methodological approach, on how this one implicates in the study of the social and school trajectories of these students and on the necessities raised in terms of the design of educational policies for the management of the diversity.



## 2. Methodological notes

In 2007 we began, from the “Laboratorio de Estudios interculturales”, a project called: “Multiculturalism and Integration of Foreign Immigrant Population in Andalusian Schools”. From this project it was set out, among others, an investigation that involved Granada, Almeria and Malaga (Andalusia, Spain) as the places to centre in what we called at that point “the new students”. To do this, we focused on secondary school stage and we tried to analyse practices and discourses that were generated among this population (discourses from the educational inspection, from the management teams of the centres, from the teacher's rooms, from the classes, etc.). These first approaches encouraged us to go beyond, to know how the students lived that “being others”, being identified as “immigrants” and/or “foreigners”, and how this affected their courses within the formal education environment but also outside. One of the questions, at that point, that seemed to be central in the way that these students build their own identities, was the place of origin. This fully stereotyped, prejudiced and mythologised identification of being “Moroccan”, “Rumanian”, “Senegalese” or “Ecuadorian”, brought with it clear discourses on how they should be in school environments. Thus, to keep working on the same line, the research in Malaga started to focus in students from Morocco and from Ecuador in Almeria. We conducted in-depth interviews, discussion groups and participatory observations, with five girls and four boys, up to 2011, that led into the construction of life stories –understanding these as a good methodological tool that allowed us to access to vital processes told from the subjectivity (BERTAUX, 1999)–. This close contact with the girls and boys, their families and their social and school environments helped us to better understand the diverse nuances in their flexible, changing and multiple identities contrasting with the ways other people had to identify them. See the Table 1 with a summary of the conducted interviews and discussion groups:

**Table 1. Conducted interviews and discussion groups**

	Number of interviews	Number of discussion groups
<b>Educational administration staff</b>	26	2
<b>Teachers</b>	60	5
<b>Students with a migrant background</b>	35	5
<b>Relatives of the students with a migrant background</b>	11	1
<b>Total</b>	132	13

And in Table 2 we compile the summary of the participatory observation periods:

**Table 2. Participatory observation**

Observation places	Periods
<b>District Education Boards</b>	2007-2008 School year 2008-2009 School year
<b>Schools (teacher's rooms, multipurpose classrooms and classrooms to teach Spanish for foreigners and playgrounds)</b>	2007-2008 School year 2008-2009 School year 2009-2010 School year
<b>Outside school spaces (leisure and family)</b>	2008-2009 School year 2009-2010 School year 2010-2011 School year

### 3. Otherness and identity (ies) in young students with a migrant background: Intersectional analysis from biographies and life stories

#### 3.1. Ricardo's story

Ricardo is a 15 years old boy born in Esmeraldas (Ecuador). He arrived at Spain with his father when he was 7 years old. It was his grandmother who migrated to Spain after Ricardo's mother death, and two years after she processed her grandson and son-in-law's arrival to Spain. He has been living in Almeria since his arrival. He says he was put into the primary school of their neighbourhood when he arrived and he felt most welcome:

I met a lot of children when I went to school; they were also my neighbours so we soon were friends. We all played together, mainly football and racing and all that, I felt very good in here, (...) and I used to go to play by the beach almost everyday, they called me at home, we used to go to school together... I had a lot of friends from school. (Ricardo, 15/04/2009)

The school was the meeting point for Ricardo with another girls and boys from the same area, which, at his age, made easier to generate relationships beyond the school environment. Moreover, the similarities between the logic of one formal education system (the Ecuadorian) and the other one (the Spanish), facilitated his adjustment to the new context, the one he used to describe as “less strict, more relaxed and simple”:

When I came here for the first time I passed school very easily. I came in second grade and I already knew from there what they were learning here, then until six grade I knew everything, I never failed anything, I always had good marks. (Ricardo, 15/04/2009)

But he says everything changed when he started secondary school:

When we went to the secondary school we started to form groups, each on their own way, me on mine, some people were leaving the neighbourhood, I was feeling quite lonely, I didn't have my old friends... Now, although a lot

of us know each other since we were kids we don't have a close relationship, hello and good bye, and that's it. And that's at school, because I rarely meet them around here so I don't even see them. (Ricardo, 22/04/2009)

This change concerning the relationships that Ricardo had with his schoolmates comes together with the concern of his father for his son “loosing his culture”:

When he was 12 years old I used to take him with me everywhere for him not to forget his roots, his costumes, our things, because although we lived here we are still from there and not having his mum and his grandmother being at work I didn't want him to lose his culture. (Ricardo's father, 28/05/2009)

We understand that at this pre-adolescent moment, is when you build part of the framework that is going to hold your identity, and so far, Ricardo's story about his arrival and experience in primary school has not been identity related at all, but from this point, identifications attributed to other people begin to gain strength in his discourse:

If I think about it... I met the Latinos because of my father, because he used to drink and go out to pull people's legs, but not like here in a bad way, over there means that you do it to enjoy yourself, to go out and dance, drink and all that. Then I started to go with him and all the Latin's knew me and I made friends from Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Dominican Republic and some Brazilians, not so many. Now it's me the one going out and my father stays at home. And I used to say that I didn't like dancing and things like that! (Ricardo, 13/05/2009)

So “the Latins”, named as “others” in this extract of the discourse, become identity referents for our protagonist. Referents that in many cases had been living in Almeria a great part of their lives, as we could verify during our fieldwork, and that, during their gatherings they used to constantly idealize their more narrated than lived origins:

I haven't told you that I am Spanish, well I am Ecuadorian, but I have Spanish nationality. My friends tell me if I have the papers I am Spanish and I fuck them and tell them: –Oh! Immigrants, out of my country– And we laugh and all that. (...) Although I have been over here for almost ten years if they ask me what's my country, the

one that represents me, I say Ecuador. I think it does represent me more, but I don't know, I feel from everywhere... or nowhere... maybe more Latin because everyone coming from America is Latino, my friends are Latin, yes, I am Latin... (Ricardo, 22/04/2009)

And that does not only affect in his sense of belonging, but also in his appearance (two piercings in the lower lip, another one in the eyebrow, tattoos on his arms and legs, “Latin fashion” haircut as he says and we can check it when we go with him and his friends and see the uniformity in their looks) and in his understanding of his stay at the secondary school:

I was fine at the beginning, although it was very boring, then I started to go wrong (...) Once I told my mum that if I had to repeat a school year ever in my life I was not going to be the same. It's like you miss a year of your life in there, and now looking at the grills it looks like a prison, I don't feel fine over there. Also my friends are not there, they are mostly working or wasting their time at school. (Ricardo, 15/04/2009)

Obviously neither Ricardo's identity, nor the social and school trajectory were only defined based on what his father, his “Latin friends” or himself projected; we understand that the school representations of Ricardo had to do with how he felt in it, how he saw himself in this space where different socio-cultural categories (gender, place of origin, physical appearance, etc.) were generating discourses of otherness where Ricardo was identified as “Latin-American” and therefore he was supposed to be “kind”, “attentive”, “lazy”, “with a low academic level”:

The Latin Americans are the ones with less problems here because they are very kind and attentive... Their academic level is a different thing... but they integrate very well. (Conversation: PE Teacher, Ricardo's school, 20/01/2008)

This boy is not as good as he was at the beginning, he has been lowering his level and now he's got a very very low level in everything and we are thinking in putting him in curricular diversification in third grade because he is increasingly more disoriented, neither he studies nor he wants, I think. (Ricardo's school counsellor, 22/05/2009)

Or more interested in “the girls, the gangs and those nonsense” than in the studies:

One of my duties is to meet with the tutors of the students that I selected for the life stories. I have been looking for Luis’s tutor today (...) he told me that he has nothing to say about him, he does not have any problems, he has integrated very well, he works well, he behaves in the class and that he is not like the other Ecuadorians that the only interests they have are the girls, the gangs and nonsense like that. (Conversation with Luis’s tutor and Observation: Luis is invisible: meeting with his tutor, 13/05/09)

One of the first situations we knew related to Ricardo in the school was exactly the concern of his tutor and school counsellor for his supposed belonging to a gang, something that he relates:

This is very funny. Today the school counsellor called me to speak with her because the tutor has told her I am a Latin King or something like that. She hasn’t told me like this but I reckoned because she was asking if I was in a gang, if I liked violence... “huevadas” (slang word for nonsense used with in the Latin vocabulary). It would be ok if they told me in Ecuador because people that go like me over there are called gang members, but here? (...) Some people at school look at my piercing, the tattoos and that... maybe I dress a little bit different from the Spanish but neither they dress all the same. I think this is because they did a questionnaire about reading, if we liked it and what we read and I was honest. Because I like reading about revolutionary people, like Malcolm X or Che, and American history... maybe because of that and the way of dressing, I don't know, but I think is funny, what do they think? (Ricardo, 27/05/2009)

This situation reflects a clear attribution of stereotypes and otherness to Ricardo in which his origin has a lot to do (we wonder what would have been the conclusion of the tutor and the school counsellor if Ricardo was of a Spanish origin). This produces mistrust in Ricardo and expectations that he was inclined in some cases to take advantage of intentionally, as it happened in this episode where he exalted male chauvinism attitudes towards the teacher who was showing her concerns on him belonging to a gang:

The citizenship teacher (also tutor of the class) invited me to one of her classes, which she hoped to be interesting, as she had proposed to the students to form into political parties and they had to present their candidature in front of everyone. (...) When it was turn for Ricardo and his colleague they presented a discourse where they said if they won they would give a broom to every woman, that the women would have an assigned owner, that non of them would be allowed to leave home alone. The whole class was laughing and the worst thing was that the teacher laughing told me: “See how are they?” That's how they work, weren't you studying the Latins? He is Ecuadorian, look how they are. (Observation: In the citizenship class, 19/05/09)

And this implies a feedback between the attributions of otherness and the identity construction processes that results in a transformation towards a “bad pupil and bad student”. In this case, gender is articulated and intersected with other markers and categories. “Latin American” is one of them but not the only one. What has been told shows us clear evidences of Ricardo's process of change that takes him from feeling fully integrated in the neighbourhood and in the school without his national background, gender or origin being an obstacle for it; to begin processes that put distance from a school and social trajectory aligned with the school logic requirements. It is the institution the one that projects towards him a stereotyped identity and precisely defined in categories that, despite it has not had previous relevance, end up becoming central in his identifying process. We see as the discourses and discursive practices that question Ricardo are combined and interrelated with their own subjectivity, producing diverse ways of being in the school environments and outside these ones.

### 3.2. Latifa's story

Latifa is a 16 years old adolescent, born in Tangier (Morocco). She came to Malaga two years ago with her mum and her older brother through a reunification process. Her father emigrated to Spain 10 years ago. When she arrived, she was normally enrolled in third grade of secondary school without any curricular adaptation and she is currently in fourth grade of “diversification” in the same school. The Curricular

Diversification Programmes are offered as a measure to meet the challenges of diversity, being an extreme measure with the aim of the students reaching the main objectives of the stage. When we ask her about her expectations and what was her opinion of Spain before she came here, she admits that she was very excited, not only to reunite with her family, but because everyone spoke very well about Spain:

I was very excited coming to Spain, because I heard it was very nice, I didn't know how it was going to be, I pictured it in many different ways. I thought I was going to find normal people just like us, but when I arrived I saw them very different to us, not all of them are the same. It's not because of the house, or anything like that; it's because of the people at school for example. I thought it was going to be normal being among them, but it's not like that, they all stare at you, like in the bus, if I sit down no one wants to sit next to me, they would rather die standing than sitting next to me, I don't know, I think they don't accept me, they don't admit foreigners, their faces clearly speak: we don't accept you, go back to your country. We accept them in Morocco much better. I am not sure if it's because of the hijab, to be honest I don't know... (Latifa, 21/05/2008)

Latifa tells us her first day at school tearfully, because it was experienced as a very painful process. She did not recognise herself in this new social and school context and no matter how much she tried, she could not picture herself fitting with the codes, logic or dynamics of her new school. Her faltering voice during the interview reveals her suffering:

At the beginning when I arrived I was crying all the time and when I was back home I used to tell my parents I wanted to come back to Morocco. First day at school I was very scared, I arrived very early to be able to find the school and my class, I found everything empty; no one was there yet. I had no idea how it was going to be. I felt lost, I just looked at them, you know, they are Spanish, of course in Morocco I had just seen and related with Muslims, it was the first time I saw a Spanish. I heard talking about Spanish, the way the women here dress and that, but of course, it's not the same being among them. And they don't belong to our group, they don't have the same habits, their habits are very different. I didn't know what was going on. (...) I felt very scared. I didn't want to study, If it wasn't because my parents forced me, I think I would have never come back after that day at school. I



felt very scared because of the people not the school. Since I arrived to Malaga as I saw the people looking at me because I was wearing veil, I didn't like it, I didn't feel well. Besides that I didn't know Spanish, I didn't have any friends, it was a very big change for me. I swear if my mother and my father had forced me everyday, today I wouldn't have stepped again on that school. The moment I went again through that school door the day after I started to think in my homeland and I told myself, what are you doing here Latifa? (Latifa, 21/05/2008)

While Latifa tell us about the lack of “reception” from the school, the rejection she noticed from the other students towards her and the loneliness feelings, the anger and frustration she felt for feeling constantly pointed and observed as “the different”, the “Muslim”, the “Moorish” and the “terrorist”, from the school they talk about her integration and adjustment as completely normalised:

This girl wears her veil, but of course, she is such a good girl, such a good student, so quiet, so polite, that she arrived half way through the year course and we did not have a problem, no one has picked on her. We have not heard any comments. She has met other Moroccan girls, and so she joins them. (Latifa's school counsellor, 01/04/2008)

There are different sociocultural categories taking place at the same time in the representation the school does of Latifa. In this case, gender intersects with other markers like nationality, place of origin or religion, producing a stigmatised image of otherness, as the subject oppressed in essence:

The country of origin of these girls [talking about Latifa] is not resolving this equality problem but reinforcing it. More and more women are wearing veils and they are fully covered and they are completely destroyed by her husbands, fathers or brothers. (Latifa's school headmaster, 12/11/2007)

Latifa has stated how because of being a “muhayaba” girl (woman that uses the veil) she is responsible for a continuous process of questioning and mistrust from some of the students and the teachers during the two years she was at that school; something we identify as “symbolic oppression” situations. She explains she feels continuously

questioned about the reasons why she wears the veil and sometimes, she even feels attacked to stop using it:

Some teachers tell me “Latifa one day we will hopefully see you without that, with your hair, it's for sure very nice and that you dress more modern, more European not so African”. And I think, but I am African, I am Moroccan. (...). At the beginning, everyone asked me why I was wearing the veil. Teasing the Islam, asking me how women in Morocco swim at the beach, if my parents forced me, that I had to take it off, they laugh a lot at me, they looked at me a lot, etc. I didn't like it; it was very annoying, asking me all the time. That's why I haven't got any friends in my class; I think they are all afraid of me because of the headscarf. That's why I don't feel good at this school, because people don't accept me as I am and they all want me to change to be like them. But I don't want to be like them, because I am Muslim, but they don't understand. (Latifa, 4/10/2009)

The school headmaster –as an authority figure of the centre– responded to our interest to know how do they deal with these situations of cultural diversity with the following statement: “I have tried with a few girls to take their veils off, because if you can not wear at the school your swimming custom or a cap, I don't think it is right to wear the veil” (Latifa's school headmaster).

The representations existing at school, and in the society in general, about why the use of the veil and the explanations/interpretations that most of the girls say, seem to be distant. While the reasoning of most of the teachers points to the girls wearing the veil at school are oppressed by their families, their religion and eventually by the men of their community:

I am concern about the issue of the veil with the Moorish because sets an important difference, it is a sign of discrimination towards women, that I think it makes difficult the integration of the immigrant girls. There are some cases of girls here that are pointed because of the veil issue, I struggle against that, I want them to take it off whenever they want, and that they put it on whenever they want, but that they take it off whenever they want and so they can show me. (...) I understand because of their roots and their culture they carry some issues that clash with our culture, like the gender equality, especially in the Arabic culture, not so much in other cultures. I don't want

that discriminatory treatment for my students. I constantly fight for this issue here, to the extent to ban the Arabic language at school, because I don't understand it and I realised that the Arabic boys used it to tease the Arabic girls, and then discriminated poor them, with problems, and they had to come to tell me their problems, and I thought hold on, everyone is going to speak Spanish here, because you know how to speak it perfectly, there is no problem, and if you say something to any of the female students, whatever your nationality, you will have a problem with me, because of the female discrimination. (Latifa's school headmaster, 12/11/2007)

The strategy of the Moroccan girls wearing the veil as a way of resilience to the cultural assimilation<sup>7</sup> seems not to fit with the school logic that perceived those girls as submissive. However, in Latifa's case we can observe how what it is perceived externally as an oppression ("the veils of the Moorish [...] is a sign of discrimination towards women", affirms the headmaster previously interviewed) is from her own experience a personal choice, that is carried out for different reasons to the ones the teachers suggest. For her, the use of the veil is above all a way to resist the acculturation and/or assimilation:

For example, in my case with the veil, they think, this Muslim, wearing the veil, so she is religious, terrorist and she wants to put us a bomb for sure. That is their thinking. Since I arrived and they are still asking me why do I wear it, why don't I take it off. I tell them I wear it because of my religion, I can't take it off. My religion says that and I like it and I want to wear it. They think that my parents are forcing me. And I say no, the only ones wanting me to do something is you, you want me to take it off. My parents don't say anything, neither I have to wear it or take it off. They don't get involved. I tell them if I want to do something I do it and that's it, I won't allow anyone one to force me, neither you, nor anyone. (Latifa, 21/05/2008)

Opposite to what her teachers or classmates think of her, Latifa's words show a very active role, independent, claiming and of social protest. This is a way to look for resilience strategies and questioning

<sup>7</sup> We understand "assimilation" as a cultural adaptation of minorities to hegemonic canons, where all recognition of diversity is relegated to the private sphere (DIETZ, 2012).

of the reviled categories externally attributed to “woman Arabic/Moroccan/Muslim/submissive”. And meanwhile some of the girls, like Latifa’s case, resist directly to this social and institutional modelling, the school continues self-appropriating the “liberating” role from the oppression of these girls:

We have had a few students that have taken it off after being with us, what is the reason why they have taken it off? The veil is a sign of discrimination towards women, but the problem is, how do we get rid of it? Can you get rid of something external that is considered a sign of identity and that it is deep-rooted in some cases of that culture? You have to ask to the ones that have taken it off why so we know how to convince the others to take it off. Because if we ban the veil we can get the opposite reaction, as happened in France. (Latifa’s school deputy headmaster, 16/04/2008)

This way, it is constructing the otherness (in this case of the Muslim students in the Spanish schools) to a disadvantage position, and thus demoting to subordinate positions certain subjectivities in relation to others identities. During our fieldwork, we have observed how Latifa slowly internalises some of the stereotypes handled to define her, in such a way that sometimes she ends up seeing herself in the way the others treat her and interact with her. This is her explanation why she does not relate with the “new students”, as she was one day:

Well, as I am now in Spain, I would treat them like them. But if I was in Morocco would be very different. I have realised here when a new student comes they don't interact. But it's also truth that a few months ago a new female student came and I was like them. I was scared to get closer to this girl, you know, with the veil and that, I am more scared to approach someone than their thought of me being a terrorist approaching them, and that they think what kind of class I am into. But of course in Morocco I would have accept it, I would have welcome her, because I know she would not have those thoughts about me, because they see me the same as them, but not here. Because, over there we wouldn't have the language problem, and also it's not like here that everyone hates me, they think I am a terrorist. (Latifa, 04/10/2009)

Showing to have assimilated –not without regret– the representations of otherness that demonise the use of the Islamic veil. Latifa ends up reproducing the stereotypes that are attributed to her as a girl with

“difficulties to integrate with her peer group” when she expresses that she feels scared of approaching others because of the thought of “what would they think of her, a girl wearing a veil”. In here, we can see that stitch between subjectivities and alter-discourses that we were previously talking about. Latifa is a Muslim Moroccan student female in Spain. That is questioned as “the other different to us” at school; and that ends up emerging in her identification processes at different moments of her experience, sometimes to show herself claiming and against otherness processes in negative terms in which she sees herself into; other times to show herself trapped by them.

#### **4. Final thoughts: by way of conclusion**

The objective of this research was the description of the operating processes of otherness and identity present in young students with a migrant background and the analysis from an intersectional perspective. The proposal conducted here, must be seen in three aspects: as a theoretical-methodological stance; as a critique to the educational policies and practices across the integration processes in which these students are involved and the role that the educational system plays in it; and as a reflection to help in the design of diversity management educational policies from an intersectional view. Let us see what we refer to.

An intersectional theoretical-methodological approach, allows us to see that we should observe the processes, in the contexts and the agencies and the subjectivities to understand, in this case, the social and school trajectories of these young students. But also tells us the weight of the otherness in their own constructions; and most importantly: the non-linear relation, nor summative, nor multiplier of all the aspects. That does not mean that there are no certainties with which we shall work in this interpretative task and the analysis of the social realities, but that implies to remain vigilant not to leave the non-so evident explanations and maybe more difficult to delimit, define and generalize. The idea of the “ongoing resulting” (WEST and FENSTERMAKER, 2010) illustrates very well what we did. The otherness and identity categories are built everyday, contextualised, and being results and processes at the same time. It has been of

significant help to consider their development –once again, as results and processes at the same time–, to understand inequality situations and power hierarchies working in every instance, with regard to every individual, in a particular space, recognizing that “the difference is and interactional, dynamic result” (WEST and FENSTERMAKER, 2010, p. 170), and always unfinished and that is how it has to be addressed.

On the other hand, the criticism of our work on how, at the present in Spain, the integration processes of the students with migrant backgrounds are implementing, is based on questioning the position, and place, to be and from which “you are”, that the school impose on them. Present and distant at the same time (SIMMEL, 2002); ambivalent figures in the classroom and the school (BAUMAN, 2005); stigmatized on many occasions by the institution itself, by teachers and students (GOFFMAN, 2001). The social and school trajectories of these children and adolescents are slowly changing because of the expectations built on them by the school. The images created by the school on them are closely related to their identity constructions –changing, variable, procedural, yes. But certainly decisive of experiences and situations, because the identity processes are part of these expectations. Latifa told us that she wanted to drop out school. It was a harassing thought and, without a doubt, she would have left her studies if not for her parents. The question is, how far and it what sense these expectations on the social and school trajectories –in particular her trajectory– are determined because of her feeling as “being hated by her classmates, because of the use of the veil and being thought as a terrorist” at the school? Ricardo suffered a transformation process from an “integrated” student to a student that –sometimes– subverted the established order in the school dynamics *trivialising* on the superiority of the men towards women in his interaction with the other classmates. We wonder why a model student comes to achieve and embrace these behaviours? Could be the reason the lack of trust of his teachers anticipating he is a member in a gang due to his origin? The school understands these issues as the result of dynamics initiated externally. But we have observed that it often happens otherwise. Nevertheless, it is a determination to look for the origin of the failure within the students themselves, their families, their peers, their “cultures” of origin.

Finally, we believe the management of the diversity at schools can not be done from such a reductionist position and perspective as it is now. Let us teach the language to the students that need it and we will facilitate their integration. Yes. But it is not enough. Ricardo speaks the school vehicular language. Also his family. This issue may be particularly necessary, essential, unavoidable for Latifa. But her main constraint to develop a successful, and not a failure, social and school trajectory is that she feels hated for being different, because of who she is, for feeling out of place. That is why she does not want to be at school. And that is also why –even before knowing the language– she can not start, develop and culminate enriching social and school trajectories. An intersectional educational policy should consider the existence of categories producing inequality processes spinning around different axis. In the school case, not knowing the language generates inequality, not having friends generates inequality, not having economic resources generates inequality... And these issues –and their interrelations– should be considered when designing a new student reception plan. We insist on not only the language. In order to do this, it is necessary a critical diagnosis of our realities, of our schools. It is not possible to work in this sense if school failure and social inequality are being diagnosed as a linear consequence of the ways of being of the students, their families, their cultures of origin. There are numerous elements that influence and determine the social and school trajectories of the students and numerous ways in which the inequality processes that may result from these trajectories are experimented. To measure every situation contextually becomes essential to design plans that can be implemented in an integrated manner.

## References

- ANDERSEN, M. and P. H. COLLINS. **Race, class and gender**. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1992.
- BAUMAN, Z. **Modernidad y ambivalencia**. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005.

BELL HOOKS. Mujeres negras. Dar forma a la teoría feminista. In: *Traficantes de Sueños* (ed.), *Otras inapropiables. Feminismos desde las fronteras*, Madrid, Traficantes de Sueños, pp. 33–50.

BERTAUX, D. El enfoque biográfico: su validez metodológica, sus potencialidades. **Proposiciones**, 29, pp. 1–22, 1999. [www.preval.org/files/14BERTAU.pdf](http://www.preval.org/files/14BERTAU.pdf), visited 20/06/2014.

BRUBAKER, R.; COOPER, F. Más allá de identidad. **Apuntes de Investigación del CECYP**, 7, pp. 30–6, 2001.

Collins, P. H. **Black feminist thought. Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment**. New York and London: Routledge, 2000.

Collins, P. H. and J. Solomos (eds.). **The Sage handbook of race and ethnic studies**. Los Angeles, London, Singapore, New Delhi, Washington DC: Sage, 2010.

Contini, P.; Olmos-Alcaraz, A. Managing the Cultural Differences in Spain: When Talking about Interculturality Means Talking about Immigrant's Culture. **Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences**, 7, pp. 63–73, 2016.

Crenshaw, K. W. Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. **Stanford Law Review**, 43, 6, pp. 1241–1299, 1991.

KIMBERLÉ, C. **On Intersectionality: The essential writings of Kimberlé Crenshaw**, Jackson, Perseus Distribution Services, 2012.

DAL LAGO, A. **Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale**. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005.

DIETZ, G. **Multiculturalismo, interculturalidad y diversidad en educación: una aproximación antropológica**. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012.

GARCÍA, F. J., A. Granados and R. Pulido. Reflexiones en distintos ámbitos de construcción de la diferencia. F.J. García and A. Granados Martínez (eds), **Lecturas para educación intercultural**, Madrid, Trotta, pp. 15–46, 1999.

GARCÍA CASTAÑO, F.J., OLMOS-ALCARAZ, A., CONTINI, P. and M. RUBIO-GÓMEZ. Críticas y superaciones conceptuales en



la gestión de la diversidad cultural. In E. Gualda (ed.), **Inmigración, ciudadanía y gestión de la diversidad**. Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, pp. 31–65, 2011.

GOFFMAN, E. **Estigma. La identidad deteriorada**. Buenos Aires: Amorrortou, 2001.

HALL, S. ¿Quién necesita identidad?. In S. Hall and P.D. Gay (eds.), **Cuestiones de identidad cultural**, Buenos Aires, Amorrortu, pp. 13–99, 2003.

OLMOS-ALCARAZ, A. La población inmigrante extranjera y la construcción de la diferencia. Discursos de alteridad en el sistema educativo andaluz (**Doctoral thesis**). Social Anthropology Department, University of Granada, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. Construcción discursiva del alumno inmigrante extranjero en Andalucía: el otro en nuestras escuelas. **Revista de Educación**, 353, pp. 469–493, 2010.

OLMOS-ALCARAZ, A.; RUBIO-GÓMEZ, M. Corporalidad del «buen estudiante»: representaciones de género, «raza», etnia y clase social en la escuela española. **Revista Iberoamericana de Educación**, 62, pp. 163–179, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. Imaginarios sociales sobre “la/el buen y la/el mal estudiante”: sobre la necesidad de un análisis interseccional para entender las lógicas de construcción de la diferencia hacia el alumnado “inmigrante”. P. Cucalón (ed.), **Etnografía de la escuela y la interseccionalidad**, Madrid, Traficantes de Sueños, pp. 9–15, 2014.

REA, A. La europeización de la política migratoria y la transformación de la otredad. **Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas**, 116, pp.157–184, 2006.

RUBIO-GÓMEZ, M. Construyendo diferencias desde retóricas de la igualdad. El caso del alumnado denominado latinoamericano en la etapa de educación secundaria obligatoria (**Doctoral thesis**). Social Anthropology Department, University of Granada, 2013.

RUBIO-GÓMEZ, M.; OLMOS-ALCARAZ, A. Construcción social del “mal estudiante” en la escuela pública española: intersecciones de género, “raza”/etnia y clase social. **Diálogos sobre Educación. Temas actuales en investigación educativa**, 7, pp. 1–19, 2013.

SANTAMARÍA, E. **La incógnita del extraño. Una aproximación a la significación sociológica de la «inmigración no comunitaria»**, Barcelona: Anthropos, 2002.

SIMMEL, G. El extranjero como forma sociológica. In: E. Terrén (ed.), **Razas en conflicto. Perspectivas sociológicas**, Barcelona, Anthropos, pp. 59–65, 2002.

VAN DIJK, T. A. **Racismo y discurso de las elites**. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Discurso y poder**. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2009.

WEST, C.; FENSTERMAKER, S. Haciendo la diferencia. In O. Hoffmann and O. Quintero (eds.), **Estudiar el racismo. Textos y herramientas**, México, Afrodesc, eurescl, pp. 170–212, 2010. [www.ird.fr/afrodesc/](http://www.ird.fr/afrodesc/), visited 12/11/2014.

YUVAL-DAVIS, N. Intersectionality and contemporary politics of belonging. **Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy**, 10, pp. 561–574, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. Power, intersectionality and the politics of belonging. In W. Harcourt (ed.), **The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development**, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 367–381, 2016.

*Recebido em 14/06/2017*  
*Aprovado em 31/07/2017*