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KNOWLEDGE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
THE CONCEPT OF ALTERITY AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Abstract: Human beings inhabit a symbolic reality that articulates meaning. This is culture understood as a web of meanings that actually builds our identity by providing guidance in the complexity of our environment. It is the complex interplay between identity and alterity, between interiority and exteriority, between familiarity and strangeness. Worldviews set up borders that delimit one's own world and others' ground by establishing stereotypes and prejudices. This article presents the results of a research project on prejudices towards the other in students majoring in Education and Psychology with the aim of offering some reflections on what is at stake in social exclusion policies.

Keywords: Identity, alterity, prejudice, dialogue

> What does it mean to exist according to listening , for it and through it, what part of experience and truth is put into play? (...) Listening is always being on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity (Jean-Luc Nancy).

INTRODUCTION

The mental representation of alterity is arranged through different conceptual and appreciative elements. Knowing these elements is crucial if we want to have an influence on the educational, political, or social processes whose mission is to ensure the social cohesion and integration of people from other cultures. This is a very complex phenomenon for which the social sciences have not yet agreed on a widely accepted globalizing theory, particularly if we consider that some of these elements stem from stereotypes and prejudices deeply rooted in the cultural concepts of the different social groups.

To start with, it is rather difficult to speak about prejudice without referring to stereotypes and discrimination. However, each of these concepts belongs to a different research tradition with the consequent methodological differences. Stereotypes are studied mainly within research about people's perceptions and social cognition, with an emphasis on the determining structural and functional factors in their formation and activation. Prejudice, however, is studied in the field of research on attitudes, where evolutionary and affective aspects of intergroup perception are much more relevant. Finally, discrimination studies come from research on the nature of intergroup relationships and their consequences on contact, conflict, and cooperation among groups.

This has led authors to adopt different levels of analysis: more individual or interpersonal, on the one hand, and more social or intergroup, on the other. Thus, prejudice is usually defined as a negative individual attitude, but it can also be conceptualized as a social rule particular to a certain society. Likewise, prejudice can be expressed through interpersonal relationships or in an institutional manner through social policies aimed at out-groups. Furthermore, studies about affective, cognitive, and behavioral manifestations of prejudiced behavior show two pieces of evidence: first, there is a tenuous relationship between the evaluative content of the stereotypes that an individual has about a social group (cognitive

evaluation) and his or her affective estimates (emotional reactions) about this group; and secondly, the content of stereotypes does not seem to change remarkably even though there are modifications in affect and affiliation among groups.

A stereotype (understood as the knowledge that an individual has of the attributes associated with a certain group) is activated automatically or spontaneously; to the contrary, the activation of prejudiced personal beliefs (conformity with a negative cultural stereotype) requires a controlled process that involves some explicit intent. In this sense, since the first expected stereotyped answer will be unconscious, the individual needs to invest time and conscious effort to develop non-prejudiced personal beliefs.

Hence several working hypotheses emerge. First, there is a lack of continuity between personal and group representations; that is, there are different feelings, thoughts, and behaviors when people are perceived as particular individuals with peculiar characteristics compared to when they are perceived as members of a group. Secondly, there must be a clear research distinction between those who hold prejudice and those who suffer from it, as this is a unilateral phenomenon where some groups (mainstream, dominant) activate the prejudice while other groups (minorities, subordinated, disadvantaged) are their victims. This distinction has led the social psychology of prejudice to be identified with the social psychology of dominance. The issue is to determine whether the structural factors (differences in power or status) among the groups are causal determining factors of prejudice, or whether they just provide the appropriate context for the psychological forces underlying prejudice to reveal themselves.

The scientific literature on this topic shows that, at first, all the weight of research fell upon the study of the origins of prejudice. In this sense, prejudice was proposed to be the result of using unconscious defense mechanisms that allow the individual to deflect and release any internal conflict towards an out-group. From this perspective, prejudice is a product of hostility and frustration aimed at or projected towards minority groups and therefore a symptom of the existence of an initially hidden conflict. It is not surprising, then, that this perspective led to a reflection on the weight of an authoritarian and dogmatic personality in shaping prejudice.

Next, the cultural component was added: prejudice should be understood as a social or institutional rule that most individuals abide by. The research issue is how these rules influence and determine individuals' attitudes and behaviors and how they are transmitted. Conformity with social

rules through socialization processes will then be emphasized. Prejudice emerges as an expression of incompatible or conflicting group interests: the failure of state integration policies stimulates people to resort to building a social identity by categorizing the in-group positively and the out-groups negatively.

In this way, in the late 1980's, several theories emerged that were interested not in the origin of prejudice but in understanding its complex and contradictory nature. Given that in contemporary Western societies the open expression of discriminatory opinions, feelings, or behaviors is mostly rejected, the question is: If people as appear to be non-prejudiced, why do they go on discriminating, even though at present they do not do so openly and evidently, but subtly and indirectly? It can be observed, then, that explicit prejudice has been replaced with new more roundabout forms: the new expression of the negative feeling towards members of other groups does not show in hatred and open hostility but in discomfort, insecurity, annoyance, or fear that lead to avoidance rather than aggressive behaviors. The decrease in prejudice, then, seems to be more apparent than real, and this goes hand in hand with a change in what is considered socially desirable: being a racist or discriminatory goes against the prevailing rules, so the social cost for those people who openly express their prejudice is very high. As a result, prejudiced individuals have learned to abide by these external rules, but they do not seem to have internalized them in their value system. In this sense, the so-called *new racism*, *symbolic racism* or *aversive racism* assume that members of the out-group have acquired the freedom to compete on equal terms and have become highly demanding, and given the stiff competition in the access to the resources of a welfare state, they do not deserve the benefits they get because they are outsiders, since they do not respect the traditional values of the society that welcomed them; instead they take advantage and demand a lot and give nothing in return...

Therefore, the theory of social identity states that underlying intergroup attitudes and behaviors is a desire to create and preserve a satisfactory positive identity. It can be deduced from this that threats to social identity should be dealt with by increasing attempts at positively differentiating the in-group from the out-groups, that is, by establishing a boundary between the self and the others, between identity and alterity. When group identity feels threatened by alterity (language, customs, clothing, food, etc.), there is a greater chance of focusing exclusively on differences that are often exaggerated.

Thus, to delve deeper into the origin of when these prejudices were shaped, we have to early understand their genesis before we can successfully attempt any strategy aimed at overcoming them. The determining factor in the creation of prejudice lies precisely in the *image of alterity* that every social group forms of out-groups, so the representation of alterity holds the key to many difficulties that emerge in every intercultural dialogue process.

BOUNDARIES OF (AC)KNOWLEDGE(MENT): IDENTITY, ALTERITY, AND DIALOGUE

The phenomenon of globalization implies two contradictory cultural processes: on the one hand, the globalization of the economy (markets, capitals, workers) that seems bound to create a *worldwide community* and on the other hand, cultural fragmentation, understood as a defense of one's particular identity when faced with the threat of homogenization. If the increasing economization aims at establishing a global lifestyle, a global consumer community, and a global market, this implies a remarkable dialectic between identity and alterity, and therefore forces a reflection on intercultural dialogue.

Identity is somehow a limitation. One defines a person by establishing the limits that circumscribe a shared worldview, that is, a way of understanding family life, the working world, politics and economy, ethics and spirituality. In short, identity means putting up fences, establishing a boundary that separates us from others. The issue is to what extent these boundaries are the reflection of a desire for isolation, that is, whether it is inherent to their very concept that they are intended to be impermeable because they are justified as a metaphysical need.

It seems absolutely impossible to define oneself without this idea of limit at the core of the symbolism of the boundary. However, boundaries are not natural phenomena but social constructions that organize the relationships of the self-us with others, that is, a perception of groups that imposes geographical, linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious differentiation. Do we have to think that boundaries separate, or can we also imagine that they unite? Is the boundaryon principle a metaphor that means a desire to be closed to alterity, or can it also be conceived from the perspective of openness? These questions arise from the assumption that much to their regret, boundaries cannot contain a real identity that always goes beyond

conceptual demarcations because, after all, the boundary homogenizes realities that are not completely identical and differentiates elements that are not totally diverse. The decisive factor here is to determine who decides what differential traits are exaggerated in the guise of stereotypes and prejudices that block the interaction process between groups and hinder real cross-border dialogue.

Post-modernity has taught us the significance of the desire to transcend, that is, to not feel inevitably trapped in a jumble of blunt boundaries that paralyze us. The post-modern concept of identity imagined as craft is nothing more than the will to save the individual from a fragmentation that is not destructive. In this sense, the boundary with its symbolism does not disappear from the mental map, nor does the painful tension of identities vanish, but now it is subjected to thorough rereading that interprets it as pieces that every individual has the possibility of organizing with some degree of freedom.

This would explain why in Anthropology the proposal of replacing the metaphor of identity (which has too many philosophical connotations for a post-metaphysical culture such as ours) with that of identification has come to the fore. In this way, the desire not to reduce culture to a set of elements externally imposed on us but to understand it as the setting of a community, that is, as an affective interaction between people, is highlighted. It is true that this concept does not cancel out the threat of mystifications through an essentialization that clearly separates what we believe we are from what we do not want to be, but it has the advantage of stating that the creation of this *outside* is defined by an artificially created, radical alterity. In this sense, the concept of identification implies the idea of permanent surveillance in order to preserve an identity that is believed to be threatened, to prevent elements from the exterior world from infiltrating our interior and polluting it to the point of destruction.

Identification keeps working with the concept of alterity, and there is still some cultural distance, but it is not necessarily understood as an opposition anymore. Alterity is not denied, as in the case of cosmopolitan pluralism, which seeks some universal minima to be the basis of understanding, but the emphasis is placed on that casuistic that seems to forcefully denounce the logics of difference: there is no identity without hybridization, exchange, or racial mix. It is identification as a denunciation of the process which consists of extrapolating the attributes of an individual to an entire group as part of the strategy to erect an impassable boundary. Herein lies the importance of studying stereotypes and prejudices that define an individual

as a paradigmatic example of a group, because then we will need neither arguments nor contact with reality to confirm or deny them, as the only goal will be to create and disseminate them with the aim of keeping one's own identity immovable.

This assumption may lead to some optimism, as the same process that makes it possible to erect a boundary that allows us to manipulate the supposed identity of others at will may also help us reverse this dynamic if we are willing to be exposed to the peculiarities of others. It is an ethical vision that refuses to be ruled by uncritically perceived assessments or by an indifference towards alterity, because it accepts the risk of being exposed to the peculiarities of every individual. Only in this way does identification acquire a true face, because it discovers that it is not the identity of the individual but of the self-in-relation with my environment, ready to live on the boundary, that puts one in contact with an alterity that alters. It is the intuition of the significance of this *in-between* that characterizes the interpersonal and intercultural dimension, that is, the space between the self and others that may be filled in with significant content only if one is willing to modify one's vision.

To understand the implications of this concept for the study of prejudices and stereotypes, it is useful to use the metaphor of mobility as one of the most determining variables of the paradigms of globalization and post-modernity. Indeed, understanding mobility as existential means thinking about the fact of learning to live in space and time. Mobility forces us to understand the human condition as the permanent readiness to adapt to new situations, to transform strange things into familiar ones, to build a home in any place. Here, movement is a symbol of the management of possibilities, an arrangement of space through change that both shapes and transforms us. In this sense, going from identity to identification means no longer referring to the situation understood as the domain that embraces us and instead talking about the human being as a being-in-situation. This is the human being seen as an individual that strives to find guidelines and build points of reference in order to move from chaos to cosmos. This is the basic function of culture, and it is not by chance that we talk of worldviews to refer to this effort of location, that is, of learning to observe reality beyond the mere surface. In this framework, stereotypes and prejudices act as cartography, as a way of structuring experiences through borders, horizons, crossroads, and itineraries.

The incredible capacity for human mobility should help us to understand that there is no cultural determinism that forces us to see reality in a certain

way. Mobility, as a force of propulsion, implies a dynamism that promotes (in the etymological sense of the word) interest. Identity mobility opens a myriad of existential roads that allow for new perspectives, alternatives to the established order. It entails understanding identification as porosity, as a relationship intertwined with the environment. It is identification understood as a dialogue with alterity, as an attentive look that is not intended to know alterity but to acknowledge it. It is dialogue as an instrument to approach others, as an impatience that prevents defensive isolation, as a flow that sweeps us away to a new situation. Thus, through dialogue and acknowledgement, stereotypes and prejudices are replaced: the boundary is not an impermeable demarcation anymore and becomes, through the porosity introduced by contact with alterity, a place of passage, a symbol of the human capacity for transformation.

Prejudices can only be eliminated if identification with a conglomeration of significantly shared experiences that establish a familiar horizon does not imply discrimination or exclusion. An inclusive society cannot exist without acknowledging alterity, without a willingness to be open, without accepting others as members of our identification with their own world. Just as we build a house, culture also has to be constantly built. Without permanent renovations, the stability of the house-culture is in danger; without acknowledging alterity, one is condemned to loneliness, as dialogue is not possible without acknowledging plurality. Prejudice, in this sense, is a symptom of the inability for dialogue, of the denial to listen to the other, of the fear of change, because, after all, every real conversation with alterity has to lead to a conversion of identity.

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Different variables play a decisive role in the integration processes of immigrants. We should bear in mind that social integration is a two-way phenomenon: there must be some effort by each of the social actors, both the immigrants and the host population. In this study, we will place the emphasis not on the active concepts of the immigrant population but on those of the host population. Obviously, there are many concepts that are useful in the integration process; it is necessary, then, to promote and increase all the positive factors that enhance an integrating concept of alterity to the extent as possible. Unfortunately, there are also distorting factors that only hinder social interaction, among them, all the ones that

encourage the concept of the other on the basis of clichés and prejudices.

This study aims to ascertain what mental representations of alterity prospective professionals (teachers, social educators, psychologists) have in two different cultural contexts in the Mediterranean basin, namely Barcelona and Rabat. These professionals regularly frequent common intercultural places as they contribute to the education of prospective citizens. Their work seems to be absolutely essential as part of any intercultural dialogue, so contributing to their awareness of prejudices and stereotypes means efficiently investing in a society that seeks an effective, realistic dialogue along with solidarity and respectful coexistence. The theoretical contribution of this study will allow us to introduce improvements in the pre-service and in-service training of these professionals by ensuring a greater presence of elements that may help to shape a representation of alterity devoid of prejudices, as well as a necessary reflection on one's own identity and alterity in order to promote community coexistence.

In this sense, the main objective of this research is to ascertain the mental representations of alterity in prospective educators. To do so, three sub-objectives were established:

1. To define the perceptions that prospective professionals express about the out-groups and in-groups present in their society.
2. To analyze the categorization of the different social groups perceived in the different cultural environments.
3. To describe prejudices and stereotypes about the observed groups that emerge.

METHOD

This project has posed some challenges. One of them is epistemological, closely linked to the problem of language and the concept of reality that is created through different cultures in interaction. Indeed, the students we interviewed and analyzed did not speak the same language (in Barcelona they speak Catalan or Spanish, and in Rabat Darija or vernacular Arabic together with French). As every language is a reflection of a worldview, for the this study we had to find convergent spaces and draw bridges of comprehension between these two societies, which are so geographically near and yet so epistemologically far.

For this reason, another difficulty involved establishing an appropriate and valid method for a project like the one we proposed, one which

attempts to get to the very root of anthropological and cultural concepts of alterity. This determined our choice of a qualitative method, as this was the best way to show the axiology particular to the shaping of the concept of alterity in a given cultural environment. Among these methods, projective ones have appeared to be the most suitable for this study, as they assume that the subject projects him/herself unconsciously in the material he/she is presented with, thus establishing a tension between the conscious and unconscious, between the situations where cultural alterity and the self-representation of one's own identity intervene.

A final difficulty was how to give shape to the research conclusions into a common reflective work, as the analysis and interpretations of the results sprang from diverse epistemological assumptions. An effort has been made to be aware of the weight of the dominant ethnogenesis in every group in order to be able to look into the most genuinely anthropological aspects that might be shared by the two groups.

To achieve the proposed objectives, a survey with four different sections was used.

In the first section, the respondents classified different social groups which have been significant in the context of Catalan society. These items were established by a control group that was administered an open pre-survey with the aim of determining which social groups were conceived under the term others. This is how the concepts of in-group and out-group were defined. The groups on which the respondents had to take a stand were the following: Latin Americans, Sub-Saharans, North Africans, Chinese, Pakistanis, Gypsies, Muslims, newcomers, illegal immigrants, Europeans, Castilians, and homosexuals.

In the second section, the respondents assigned up to four descriptors (positive and/or negative) to every out-group from a predetermined list: hard-working, skilled, exploited, loyal, respectable, religious, clean, generous, responsible, flexible, progressive, sociable, democratic, supportive, honest, civilized, integrated, friend, lazy, unskilled, dominant, traitor, despicable, unfaithful, negligent, materialistic, irresponsible, intolerant, conservative, undemocratic, unsupportive, liar, uncivilized, not integrated, and adversary.

In the third section, sixteen images were presented that identified the other. These images were chosen by the research groups in Barcelona and Rabat according to the existing preconceptions with regard to the respective foreigners. The respondents observed the photos for 30 seconds and then answered the following questions:

- What can you see? Who are they? Where do they live? What are they doing? What do you think they are like? What kind of relationship do they have? Does this happen in Catalonia?
- How do you feel? What does the situation in the photo make you feel? What is your position on this situation?
- What does society think about this? What are the usual social perceptions (positive or negative) about this situation?

Finally, six social scenarios (moments of coexistence where cultural differences emerge as paradigmatic in the definition of the other) were posed in order to clarify the different concepts of alterity existing in the cultural imagery of our society. These scenarios were access or difficulty accessing: civil service, private companies, Spanish citizenship, voting in local elections, housing, and establishing affective couple relationships with the in-group.

The sample in this study consisted of 165 students, 117 of them majoring in Education and 48 of them studying Psychology. Concerning their gender, 18% were men and 82% were women, this proportion being common in Education and Social Sciences courses. Regarding their ages, 75.2% of respondents were between 20-22, corresponding to students in their second or third year of university, while 24.8% were between 23 and 30. A similar proportion is found concerning their place of residence, as 75% of respondents live in the Barcelona metropolitan area while the others live in other towns in Catalonia.

RESULTS

With regard to the groups that are perceived as out-groups, it is noteworthy that respondents show a concept of alterity based essentially on geopolitical references. In this sense, the different groups that have been living in this country for years are still perceived as out-groups, with an identity clearly differentiated from that of local population. More than 99% of the answers show a psychosocial distance with regard to people from Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and Pakistan.

The group of illegal immigrants (which potentially encompasses all the immigrant communities with a given legal status) is synonymous with the aforementioned groups. On the contrary, the conceptual label of newcomers is perceived in an appreciably different way: even though

the term refers to the same individuals, the social perception is different with regard to their developing roots in the host community. For this reason, only 11.8% of respondents state that newcomers are part of the local community. The origin of this mental representation must surely be found in the politically correct discourses set forth by the public administration and the different social institutions.

The Chinese and Muslim communities are perceived as local by a low number of respondents, with 3.4% and 3.5% of the answers, respectively. One influence on this description might be the higher numbers of these groups in certain environments, which markedly contributes to their social visibility and a prejudiced vision of them.

With regard to the group with Latin American roots, we can see that the perception of their settlement and integration is no better than in the previous groups. Thus, despite the fact that they share a common language, namely Spanish, only 2.6% of the respondents consider them part of the in-group, which shows the scant permeability of the host society and its social interaction networks.

Gypsies, on the other hand, seem to have a more settled cultural and presence in the territory, as 73.3% of the respondents believe that they are part of the in-group, even though their social exclusion causes attitudes of rejection in 1 out of 4 respondents.

As for the European population, it is surprising that one-third of the subjects (33.9%) perceive them as distinct from the local population. On the contrary, Spanish-speaking people with Castilian roots are perceived as an integral part of the Catalan identity despite the fact that they speak a different language than that of the local community. In these two cases, the consciousness of national-state belonging seems to prevail over the usual language of communication. This result seems to dovetail with those of other studies that similarly state that for many subjects, multifactorial identity or multi-identities do not only depend on just a single variable. Here we can see the difficulty of clearly categorizing one's belonging to a certain social group.

Similarly, the group of homosexuals is perceived as an integral part of the local community (91.7%), even though they are a minority within the identity conglomeration of this community.

Psychology students identify the same out-groups with percentages similar to those of the Education students. Nevertheless, they more often (81.2% of the respondents) express the perception that Gypsies are a minority within the spectrum represented by the Catalan identity.

Likewise, their perception of the European population differs 13 points from the opinion expressed by the Education students. Finally, their mental representation of the group of people who use Spanish as their usual language does not seem to differ from their perception of the Catalan identity.

To analyze the categorization of the different social groups as perceived by the students, we provided them with positive and negative descriptors, as mentioned before. As a criterion to ensure the greater relevance of the results, we only selected the answers which were chosen by at least 20% of the respondents.

An initial finding from these results is that there is a distinct assessment concerning perceived identity, with positive words assigned to the groups considered to be endogenous (Europeans, Castilians, and homosexuals), except for the Gypsies, who, despite being considered endogenous, are assigned a negative connotation. On the contrary, the exogenous groups are generally assessed negatively, with the exception of the subgroup called newcomers; this conceptualization may have been influenced by the different campaigns carried out by the public administrations.

Moreover, we can see that the Psychology students are more balanced when assessing the different social groups both positively and negatively, whereas the Education majors tend to project more positive than negative adjectives on the groups described. This may be due to the fact that these respondents engage in more social interaction with the different exogenous groups because they are involved in in-service training in schools with wide cultural diversity.

The negative adjectives that all the respondents attributed to the exogenous groups the most often are dirty/negligent and not integrated. Similarly, the negative adjective uncivilized is used the most by the Psychology students. The only group that is considered to be an out-group but is not assigned adjectives such as dirty/negligent or not integrated is the Chinese, which in this sense stands out as a group with particular descriptions different from the other out-groups.

With regard to the positive descriptors that appear more frequently in the answers, as expected, they refer to the endogenous groups (always with the exception of the Gypsies). The positive labels for the in-groups include hard-working, respectable, clean, sociable, and civilized; on the contrary, for the exogenous groups, the descriptors include religious, hard-working, and victim/exploited. It is worth mentioning that the label religious as applied to exogenous groups is not assigned to the Chinese

community, which may show cultural ignorance by the host society.

The following table contains a detailed analysis of every study group with the percentages of answers.

Groups	Positive adjectives	Negative adjectives
Latin Americans	Hard-working (29.1%) Religious (46.7%) Sociable (29.1%)	Lazy (42.4%) Unfaithful (23.6%) Liar (22.4%) Irresponsible (12.1%) Uncivilized (12.7%) Not integrated (17.6%)
Sub-Saharans	Hard-working (29.7%) Victim/exploited (43.6%) Religious (23.6%)	Dirty (36.4%) Uncivilized (12.1%) Lazy (12.1%) Not integrated (31.5%)
North Africans	Religious (40%)	Lazy (20.6%) Dirty (37%) Conservative (19.4%) Liar (13.3%) Unsociable (13.3%) Uncivilized (21.2%) Not integrated (39.4%)
Chinese	Hard-working (75.8%) Gifted/skilled (23%) Victim/exploited (27.3%) Responsible (21.2%) Civilized (12.7%)	Exploiter/dominant (21.2%) Mean/materialistic (15.2%) Unsociable (22.4%) Not integrated (32.1%)
Pakistanis	Hard-working (33.9%) Religious (27.3%)	Dirty (35.8%) Intolerant (12.1%) Not integrated (24.8%)
Gypsies	Religious (37.6%)	Lazy (44.8%) Dirty (45.5%) Traitor (15.2%) Conservative (18.2%) Liar (26.1%) Uncivilized (24.2%) Not integrated (23.6%)

Muslims	Religious (55.8%)	Unfaithful (12.1%) Dirty (33.3%) Intolerant (20%) Conservative (25.5%) Uncivilized (14.5%) Liar (14.5%) Traitor (12.1%) Not integrated (38.2%) Undemocratic (11.5%)
Newcomers	Hard-working (22.4%) Victim/exploited (34.5%)	Not integrated (40%) Adversary/enemy (10.3%)
Illegal immigrants	Hard-working (21.8%) Victim/ exploited (46.1%)	Lazy (14.5%) Unskilled (17.6%) Dirty (25.5%) Irresponsible (13.9%) Unsociable (13.9%) Uncivilized (18.2%) Not integrated (47.3%)
Europeans	Hard-working (47.3%) Gifted/skilled (18.8%) Respectable (23%) Clean (24.2%) Responsible (20.6%) Progressive (15.8%) Sociable (21.8%) Democratic (12.7%) Civilized (31.5%) Integrated (20.6%) Ally/friend (18.8%)	Exploiter/dominant (12.1%) Mean/materialistic (12.3%)
Castilians	Hard-working (40%) Loyal/faithful/patriot (28.5%) Clean (19.4%) Sociable (31.5%) Responsible (17%) Civilized (23%) Ally/friend (19.4%)	Conservative (21.2%)
Homosexuals	Hard-working (21.8%) Respectable (26.1%) Clean (32.1%) Flexible (24.2%) Progressive (27.9%) Sociable (31.5%) Civilized (12.7%) Reliable (13.9%) Ally/friend (15.2%)	

Some data concerning the perception of some out-groups should be highlighted. For the Latin Americans, the positive label mentioned the most often is religious (46.7%), as they are still associated with the traditional Catholic culture. They are also described as hard-working (29.1%) and sociable (29.1%), because from the demographic point of view they occupy an important place that probably encourages greater interaction with the host community. On the contrary, and paradoxically, they are also assigned many negative adjectives such as lazy (42.4%), unfaithful (23.6%), and liar (22.4% - a percentage they share with Gypsies). It can also be emphasized that they are the out-group with the lowest percentage for the adjective not integrated. From all this we can infer that, although they share the same language with the in-group, the linguistic factor does not seem to be enough for them not to be perceived as subjects with a different culture.

With regard to Sub-Saharans, the most commonly used positive descriptor is victim/exploited (43.6%), which they share with illegal immigrants (46.1%). In this group, there is no negative adjective that stands out except for dirty/negligent (36.4%).

The North African group is labeled religious by 40% of the respondent, and, in fact, this could be confused with 55.8% of the respondents who prefer the name Muslims. This is a clear connotation as a group defined by their religious denomination, as well as by negative adjectives such as dirty/negligent (37%) and uncivilized (21.1%), which makes them the out-group perceived to be at the greatest social distance from the host population, with descriptors like intolerant (20%), conservative (25.5%), and non-democratic (11.5%). What is more, they are second in the ranking as traitor (12.1%) and unfaithful (12.1%), which reveals the weight of cultural and historical reasons in such troubled neighbor relations.

The Chinese are assessed as an out-group with a peculiar balance between positive and negative adjectives. Among the former, we can mention that 75.8% of respondents label them hard-working; they are also perceived as gifted/skilled (23%), responsible (21.2%), and civilized (12.7%), which shows a strong social perception of the prestige of Chinese culture and values. Yet 21.2% of the respondents perceive them as exploiter/dominant, mainly from the image transmitted by the mass media of the Chinese mafia and protests by some local groups concerning their commercial practices. Their enthusiasm at working means that they are seen as mean/materialistic (15.2%), which also makes them the group with the highest score on this item. The same holds true with their perception as unsociable

(22.4%), making them the first group in the ranking of this descriptor, which may be due to a sense of secrecy that implies a gulf between them and the indigenous population.

After the Chinese community, the Pakistanis are the out-group labeled as hard-working (33.9%) the most often. As with the other out-groups, they are also perceived as dirty (35.8%) and intolerant (12.1%), but in comparison with other groups, they are not given a significant diversity of negative connotations, which only appear vaguely in the social perception.

The Gypsy community stands out because it is almost exclusively characterized by religious beliefs (37.6%) and by the lack of any other positive vision from the social standpoint. On the contrary, there is a predominance of negative qualifiers, where they rank the highest on the descriptors lazy (44.8%), traitor (15.2%), dirty/negligent (45.5%), liar (26.1%), and uncivilized (24.2%). We can see, then, that despite centuries of cohabitation, prejudices are strongly rooted as an expression of a difficult, long coexistence with the host society.

A full 34.5% of respondents describe the newcomers group as victim/exploited. Likewise, they are second in the ranking of not integrated (40%). However, the illegal immigrants are the group with the highest percentage in the label victim/exploited, with 46.1%. Unlike the newcomers, they are characterized more negatively, being perceived as unskilled (17.6%), irresponsible (13.9%), unsociable (13.9%), and not integrated (47.3%).

Several positive adjectives are reserved exclusively for the Europeans, Castilians, and homosexuals, with the sole exception being Castilians' description as conservative by 21.2% of the respondents. The most outstanding values in these groups are clearly positive: Europeans are perceived as hard-working (47.3%), democratic (12.7%), civilized (31.5%), and integrated (20.6%); Castilians are seen as loyal/faithful/patriotic, sociable, and ally/friend; finally, homosexuals are appraised as respectable, clean, flexible, progressive, sociable, and reliable.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion that springs from the analysis of the descriptors assigned to the different social groups identified as "others" is that there is a clear distinction between the groups considered endogenous (Europeans, Castilians, and homosexuals) and the groups considered exogenous (Latin Americans, sub-Saharans, North Africans, Chinese, Pakistanis, Muslims,

newcomers, and illegal immigrants). As expected, positive assessments are systematically assigned to the former, whereas the appraisals of the latter are almost always negative. The exception is the Gypsies, because although they are an endogenous group, they keep a very marked social distance from the host society to the extent that their (very negative) assessments are very similar to the perceptions of the exogenous groups. It is therefore clear that centuries of coexistence do not guarantee a perception of integration or cohabitation but sometimes can simply result in systematic rejection.

Nevertheless, a perception of greater contact with those groups that primarily work in retail (Chinese and Pakistanis) results in their being assessed above average compared to the other exogenous groups. Contact and proximity between the indigenous population and these foreign groups may somehow contribute to making some prejudices particular to foreignness vanish. We can see, then, that rather than time, what these data seem to point to is that relationship and proximity are what overcome psychoaffective and perceptual boundaries. A longer time settled in the host society does not necessarily imply the perception of greater integration, whereas contact and interaction do seem to help overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

It is also worth mentioning that political discourses and social language help to shape or overcome negative attitudes, as we have seen in how the group *newcomers* (which is a term mainly used by public administrations to refer to immigrants) is systematically assessed much more positively than *illegal immigrants*, even though the former group encompasses many immigrants in the latter group.

On the other hand, belonging to a minority does not seem to necessarily imply a negative assessment, as the group of homosexuals is labeled very positively, with a total of six maximum scores in positive descriptors (respectable, clean, progressive, flexible, sociable, and reliable). It seems that the number of people does not condition the appreciation of a social group; rather the appraising imagery that society has created about this group does.

It is interesting to note that all the groups with negative assessments are perceived under the label religious. This exaggeration (particularly in the case of North Africans), which associates religious denomination with such adjectives as conservative and intolerant, clearly shows that religious beliefs are generally perceived as a negative factor, close to fanaticism and fundamentalism. In this case, religious commitment appears to be one

of the factors that most forcefully creates a social gulf between Muslim immigrants and the local population, which perceives itself as immersed in a context of secularization and secularism.

To conclude, we can highlight two significant assumptions. First, the adjectives supportive and democratic are only given to endogenous groups (with the exception of Gypsies), as if both values were not present in the out-groups. Secondly, the descriptors adversary/enemy were not chosen in any case, perhaps to show that, no matter how negative appreciations may be, people never resort to extreme assessments.

In short, we can conclude that, in accordance with the responses gathered from the survey, in the group of prospective Education and Psychology professionals the concept of alterity is defined by the socialization of religious beliefs (high assessments in out-groups, and low assessments in the endogenous groups), by the social visibility of work and working performance (with the example of the assessments of Chinese and Pakistanis), by the concept of truth/honesty in interactions (high scores for adjectives such as liar, uncivilized, and not integrated in the exogenous groups and the Gypsies), and by the daily values that hinder cohabitation and the exchange of personal experiences (dirty and lazy as recurrent adjectives to qualify out-groups).

The analysis of data from the questions related to easy/difficult access to certain tasks or social achievements (access to civil service, Spanish citizenship, voting in local elections, housing, or affective relationships with a partner from the in-group), together with the answers to projective scenarios, will allow us to delimit the social imagery about alterity in more detail. However, this will be the subject of another article.

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