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"I will never be spanish enough". Gender-based islamophobia in Spain: socio-educational aspects.

Recent studies have highlighted that Muslim women, as the most likely recipients of Islamophobia, are uniquely vulnerable to this complex phenomenon. In Spain, these are still very incipient, and practically non-existent from a socio-educational approach. Based on the life stories of 10 Muslim women, this research analyses in depth their experiences with gender-based Islamophobia in the Spanish context, and how it influences their processes of identity construction, feelings of belonging and religiosity. The sample includes Moroccan women, women of Moroccan origin (belonging to the so-called second generation) and converts. Four main thematic blocks emerged from the analysis: identity/feeling of belonging, religiosity, Islamophobia and education. In the discourses analysed, the hijab emerges as a key element of empowerment for many of them. ~~Processes of racialisation and foreignisation associated with its use are also evident.~~ In a context where Islam is often presented as incompatible with Western values, the analyses revealed how the participants experience continuous identity contradictions, producing both a rejection of their culture and roots, and a greater identification with it, sometimes in a reactive way. We argue that it is important for educational and social institutions to address the stereotypes and prejudices associated with Muslim women and to promote the positive construction of multiple, positive and non-exclusive identities.

Keywords: Gendered Islamophobia; Muslim Women; Islam; Spain; Education

Introduction

An exponential rise in Islamophobia has occurred in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York, particularly worrying in the West (Rashid, Iqbal & Tanvir, 2023; Rehman & Hanley, 2023). In this line, studies are needed to analyse the different experiences of Muslim youth with this complex phenomenon (Farooqui & Kaushik, 2022; Khalaf et al. 2023), especially women, who are the most likely recipients of Islamophobia and who present a unique vulnerability (Baboolal, 2023; Babacan, 2023; Carland, 2023). Some authors indicate that in Spain, unlike in other European countries

such as France, attitudes towards Muslims are generally less hostile (Burchardt, Grier & García-Romeral, 2015). However, there are reports that do not support this allegation, concluding that Islamophobia is quite widespread in Spanish society, especially that directed at Muslim women (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, 2020; Citizens Platform against Islamophobia, 2018).

In Spain, stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims as a group have been aggravated by the recent terrorist attacks (Observatory of Islamophobia in the media, 2018). Indeed, Muslims and, more specifically, Moroccans, are among the groups that suffer the greatest rejection and discrimination (Aparicio, 2020). Research on Islamophobia in Spain is still very incipient and, to our knowledge, there is no research that analyses in depth the experiences of young Muslim women with gender-based Islamophobia in this context from a socio-educational approach.

Muslim women are situated on multiple margins of society and face unique experiences of discrimination (Seta, 2016). **Their 'visibility' (e.g. having an Arab surname or name, or the decision to wear hijab, etc.), plays a crucial role, bearing the brunt of anti-Muslim violence (Baboolal, 2023).** In the face of this violence, they do not respond in a fixed or static way, but rather the variation in their responses stems from the very heterogeneity that characterises these women in the West (Iner, Mason & Asquith, 2022). Alizai (2021), in her study of Muslim women in Canada, finds how they construct a strong religious identity in response to experiences of Islamophobia. This identity often stands as a source of coping with these negative experiences (Steele et al. 2023).

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the life stories of 10 Muslim women who have experienced episodes of gender-based Islamophobia in the Spanish context. They are Moroccan women, of Moroccan origin (second generation) and converts. The life stories allow us to delve into their deepest and most identitarian selves, and facilitate

an examination of how they negotiate their multiple identities and sense of belonging to Spanish society from their minority status (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Giorgi, 2020).

In several studies carried out with Muslim women in Spain, high levels of religious and racial discrimination have been found, and this phenomenon has been described as "morphobia" (Rodríguez-Reche, & Cerchiaro, 2023). García Yeste et al. (2020), in their study with Muslim women who wear niqab (veil covering the face), highlight how they face multiple forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism and Islamophobia. Gil- Benumeya (2023), for his part, visualises how this religious group internalises some of the cultural and ideological aspects that underpin racism and Islamophobia. Of the different ways of confronting Islamophobia, the research highlights the social activism exercised especially by women (Eseverri -Mayer & Khir-Allah, 2022).

Going further into this aspect, it is important to discuss the media and what role it plays in the development of this type of discrimination. Media discourse is undoubtedly a key indicator for assessing Islamophobia (Corral et al. 2023). In recent years, several research studies have been carried out that analyse the production and reproduction of Islamophobia in the media. For example, Cervi, Tejedor & Gracia (2021) conducted a comparative study between the most influential newspapers in Spain and Italy. The results revealed how Muslims are related to phenomena such as terrorism and immigration, presenting them as the "others" whose values are incompatible with the West.

In this sense, social networks have become the platforms from which hate speech is disseminated to a greater extent. Fuentes-Lara & Arcila-Calderón (2023) analysed this discourse towards Muslims on Twitter. Most of the Islamophobic messages are related to migrant minors, religion, terrorism and gender. More specifically, focusing on the gender factor, Zamora, Garrido & Martínez (2021) analysed the Twitter messages generated as a result of the "Remove the veil labels" campaign launched by the Al Fanar Foundation.

Their findings highlighted the Western superiority with which Islam is labelled as a sexist religion and the veil as an oppressive symbol imposed on women. By including voices of Muslim women, some of them belonging to the second generation, we contribute to enrich the few studies carried out so far in Spain, which have not focused exclusively on Muslim women (Boland, 2020; Collet-Sabé, 2020; Ortiz, Rodríguez & Solana, 2021).

Furthermore, the present research complements previous studies that have analysed experiences of gendered Islamophobia in the West (Babacan, 2023; Iner, Mason & Asquith, 2022; Maysoon, 2019; Mustafa, 2020; Najib & Hopkins, 2020; Zempi, 2020).

Theoretical framework

Islamophobia. Defining and debating the term

Islamophobia is by no means a new term. However, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, it has become the focus of political debate. Although the term has come into common usage, there is currently no universally accepted definition of Islamophobia. The British NGO "The Runnymede Trust" defines it as the fear, hatred and/or aversion, often unfounded, towards Islam. A number of erroneous assumptions lie behind this phenomenon: Islam is a monolithic and static religion; it does not share values with other cultures; it is irrational, violent, primitive and inferior to the West; etc. (The Runnymede Trust, 1997).

As to whether or not Islamophobia is a type of racism, there is a deep and wide debate. Authors such as Barker (1981) define it as the new racism. Modood (1997) understands it as a form of cultural racism, since Muslims are often identified as "non-white" people of non-European descent. For others, such as Rana (2007), religious hatred is not necessarily racial, as religion is a social practice. Moreover, the very diversity that

characterises the Islamic world in terms of nationality, language, culture, ethnicity, etc., negates the notion of Muslims as a singular racial group.

According to Bravo (2010), we can wonder: are Muslims rejected because of their skin colour, ethnicity or religion, or is it a mixture of all of these? The author argues that religious intolerance and cultural racism can be mixed in an Islamophobic attitude. However, one can be racist and not necessarily Islamophobic. As Liu (2021) points out, Islamophobia is an intersectional phenomenon, where racism and religious identity are often intertwined. It is a polysemous concept, which can encompass different phenomena with porous boundaries between religious discrimination and racism (Alietti & Padovan, 2013).

In this vein, what is known as the racialisation of Islam makes sense. Indeed, Islamophobia often translates into a process of racialisation that homogenises Muslims (Najib & Teeple, 2020;), applying racial meanings to cultural or religious symbols and signifiers (Garner & Selod, 2015). An illustrative example is provided by Muslim converts or returnees to Islam, who often experience racialisation and alienation, especially when they are 'visibly identifiable' as such (Moosavi, 2015).

Intersectionality and gender islamophobia

One of the first women researchers to refer to gender Islamophobia as a specific type of discrimination was Jasmin Zine, who defined this concept as "specific forms of ethno-religious and racial-ethnic discrimination directed at Muslim women that stem from historically contextualised negative stereotypes" (Zine, 2006, p. 240). According to the author, these stereotypes have served over the years to justify the West's imperial and colonising domination of Muslim women.

Muslim women, especially those who wear hijab or other veils as a visible religious 'marker', have become the primary target of Islamophobia and racialisation in the West. They are continually portrayed as victimised, oppressed and submissive women in need of 'salvation' and 'empowerment' (Iner, Mason & Asquith, 2022; Garner & Selod, 2015; Spini, 2022; Steele et al., 2023). In fact, research that has explored specifically Islamophobia towards Muslim women wearing hijab supports this by arguing that Muslim women face greater discrimination (Khan, 2018; Read, 2019). In this regard, studies advocate the need to address the negative prejudices and stereotypes that perpetuate this type of discrimination (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013).

In recent years, there have been multiple studies analysing the Islamophobic experiences of Muslim women in the West (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Alizai, 2022; Iner, Mason & Asquith, 2022; Maysoon, 2019; Najib & Hopkins, 2020; Zempi, 2020). They reveal a wide range of responses to these experiences, reflecting the very heterogeneity that characterises them.

A study carried out in eight European Union countries sheds light on the intersectional discrimination that affects these women. The report shows how they are simultaneously affected by a combination of different factors (Seta, 2016). In fact, different factors such as race, gender, religion, social class, etc., often interact in experiences of Islamophobia (Mustafa, 2020). In this line, the theory of intersectionality, a term coined by the American academic Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in relation to discrimination against black women, makes sense. This explains how multiple factors converge to give rise to unique experiences of oppression (Zempi, 2020). The author uses the following metaphor of a crossroads to explain the term:

Intersectionality is what happens when a woman from a minority group tries to navigate the main intersection of the city (...) the main highway is <<the race of racism>>. One intersection can be colonialism, and then Patriarchal Street. It has to deal not only with

one form of oppression, but with all forms, which come together to form a double, triple, multiple, many-layered blanket of oppression (Grosfoguel, 2020, p. 165).

In this way, intersectionality is crucial in feminist research. In the same way, it is also crucial not to start from "universal" criteria that respond only to the interests of white, Western, heterosexual, middle-class women, and that marginalise the needs and demands of poor, immigrant and racialised women (Cubillos, 2015).

In short, the intersectional approach studies how different systems of oppression overlap or intersect at the same time in social identities in such a way that they are inseparable (Seta, 2016; Paz & Kook, 2021).

Islamophobia in the Spanish context

Spain represents the most obvious link with Islam in the European Union due to its geographical position and the Muslim presence that took place for almost eight centuries in the country (Astor, 2014). According to the latest demographic study conducted in Spain, Muslims represent approximately 4 per cent of the population. Fifty-six per cent are immigrants, of which 37 per cent are Moroccan, and 44 per cent Spanish (UCIDE, 2023). However, despite the large percentage of Spanish Muslims, Islam is still wrongly considered an alien religion. Islam is thus placed in this context on the margins of the national identity debate (Ortega, 2022).

The stereotypes surrounding Islam and Muslims in the Spanish context are not disconnected from their historical past (Bourekba, 2017). In this sense, the theory of Sánchez-Albornoz stands out, who defends the idea of recovering the territory invaded by the Arabs through the notion of "Reconquest". This theory, which has marked entire generations (Manzano, 2013), interprets that both the 'Reconquest' of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs, and the subsequent colonisation in the form of a protectorate that

Spain exercised over Morocco, gave rise to the image of the 'Moor', full of prejudices and stereotypes that continue to this day (Olmos, 2020). In Spain, there is even talk of "Moor-phobia" or "anti-Moro" racism (Olmos, 2020).

This negative image of Arab-Muslims was reinforced after the September 11 attacks in New York and 11-M in Madrid, placing them among the groups that suffer the greatest discrimination and rejection in Spain (Aparicio, 2020). As a recent report on Islamophobia in Spain has shown, during 2022 discrimination against this community is very present in different spheres (renting housing, physical and verbal aggressions, graffiti on mosques, etc.) (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2022).

Currently, it is necessary to highlight the unprecedented breakthrough achieved by the VOX political party in the 2019 elections. A party with a clear Islamophobic discourse that has contributed to perpetuating the discourse of the "clash of civilisations" in Spain (Boland, 2020). **This political party employs a discourse based on the existence of a supposed Islamic 'invasion' with a notable epic charge (Oleaque -Moreno & Pellisser, 2023. Farkhani, Baidhawy and Kuswaya (2021) illustrate how this political party, based on populist rhetoric, revives memories of Islamic rule in Al-Andalus and the Reconquista in order to win votes.**

However, it is necessary to point out that Islamophobia, as Gil-Benumeya, Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid (Spain), rightly states, cuts across the political spectrum. Examples include the law on foreigners or the border regime applied indiscriminately by left-wing and right-wing governments (IEmed, 2021, p. 1).

During Franco's dictatorship, the Spanish state was officially Catholic. With the advent of democracy, the 1978 Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and worship, stating that no denomination shall have a state character and that cooperative relations

shall be maintained with the Catholic Church and other religious denominations (art. 16). The State signed its Cooperation Agreement with the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) in 1992. However, there are many Muslims who denounce a lack of compliance with the rights contained in this agreement, such as Muslim cemeteries, construction of mosques and Islamic religious education in public schools (Alonso, 2012).

Around the 1980s, conversions of Spaniards to Islam began to take place. Moreover, especially in the 1990s, there was a considerable increase in Muslim immigrants from Morocco (Laíz, 2021). Spain, traditionally a country of emigration and with great cultural and religious homogeneity, became a country with greater diversity (Pérez-Agote, 2010). This growth in religious diversity, especially Islam, has brought with it a series of challenges and challenges regarding its management and accommodation (Astor & Grier, 2016).

Methodology

This study was developed from a biographical-narrative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Specifically, life story methodology was employed within the framework of the collective case study (Stake, 2005). Authors such as Goodson & Sikes (2001) argue that life histories are a privileged means of studying life experiences situated in a particular socio-cultural context. Such approaches provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the lives of these women and delve into their own reality to explore the perceptions and meanings they attach to their own world and their ways of being and acting in it (Cruz-González, Lucena & Domingo, 2021; Kelchtermans, 2016).

Through this methodology we aimed to investigate the life stories of Muslim women who have lived experiences of Islamophobia in Spain, exploring through their life

discourses (Craig, 2007), the deeper meanings of these women's lives, their leitmotifs and how they have developed a resilient response to such adversity (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Participants selection

Participants included in this research met the requirements of the research projects in which this study is framed: "Discrimination and Islamophobia towards the Muslim community in Andalusia: Education for peace and non-violence" [REF: AYP/14/2020] and "Women as an essential agent in the construction and education of Islam. The value of peace" [REF: AYP/14/2020]. In order to locate the participants we developed the "snowballing" technique (Pujadas, 1992) in which we came into contact with various case studies, looking for truly constructive and relevant stories. Ivor Goodson (2012) explains that the selection of case studies for biographical studies must be deliberate. This is due to the fact that our aim is not to generalise, but to understand their reality. For this reason, what we look for in the participants is the richness of their dialogue. Participants are therefore chosen for their interest in their own life story and their suitability for our research purposes. The selection of the life stories of our participants was made with the following in mind:

- Our participants are Spanish and Moroccan Muslim women because they are the two majority cohorts in Spain (UCIDE, 2023). In order to be more representative of the Muslim community, we included immigrant, second-generation and converted women (Rogozen-Soltar, 2020).

Our selected informants provided a real contribution to the issue of this study, showing a high degree of commitment to the development of the research.

- They represent a clear example of **resilient** Muslim women, who have developed a strong and consolidated identity in the face of gendered Islamophobia in their social and educational contexts.

The following table provides demographic data on the sample:

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Place of residence	Level of studies	Country of birth	Country of birth of parents	If immigrant, age at which she arrived in Spain	Returned/conversa	Children	Hiyab	Age at which the hijab was worn
Amina	29	Catalonia	Bachelor's Degree in Nursing	Morocco	Spain	1 year	Her parents	Yes (2)	Yes	11
Daouia	26	Almeria	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work	Morocco	Morocco	3 months	-	No	Yes	19
María	29	Malaga	Higher level cycle of socio-sanitary care	Spain	Spain	-	Yes	Yes (4)	Yes	25
Karima	29	Catalonia	Master's degree	Spain	Moroccan father and Spanish mother	-	-	No	Yes	16
Hafida	30	Germany ¹	Bachelor's Degree in Nursing	Morocco	Morocco	6 years	-	No	Yes	15
Yasmin	32	Huesca	Secondary education degree and intermediate socio-sanitary degree	Spain	Moroccan father and Spanish mother	-	-	Yes (3)	Yes	19
Meriem	30	Murcia	Undergraduate Degree in Primary Education	Spain	Morocco	-	-	Yes (7 and 3)	Yes	15

¹ She currently lives in Germany but spent his childhood and adolescence in Spain.

Iman	42	Catalonia	Administration assistant intermediate degree	Spain	Morocco		-	Yes (2)	Yes	29
Fátima	31	Catalonia	Bachelor's Degree in Marketing and Public Relations	Morocco	Morocco	8 years	-	Yes (2)	No	-
Nisrin	27	Catalonia	Higher level cycle of administration	Spain	Morocco		-	Yes (1)	Yes	22

Table 1. Demographic data of the participating sample

Information collection

Information was collected through in-depth biographical-narrative interviews (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1997). This process was developed between academic years 2022-2023. It should be noted that, throughout this methodological stage, we tried to create with our participants an act of collaboration and co-creation of their own narratives, for which the construction of an environment of trust and honesty between researcher-participants was essential (Goodson et al., 2017). In that act, we suggested to our participants that they try to narrate their lives as if it were a literary work, summarizing in it those most important and decisive events that had been key in their identity development as Muslim women, and that had managed to face the challenges of being Muslim in a context of adversity.

The interviews were based on the methodological principles of authors specialising in this type of method (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1997). Therefore, the interviews were conducted using cascades of reflexive deepening (Kelchtermans, 1993). In other words, after each interview, we analysed and synthesised her own discourse, constructing an outline of main ideas that was subsequently shown in the following interview so that the participant herself could validate her discourse and contribute significant information or considerations (see figure 1). According to Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin (2011), this dialectical validation brings greater coherence and solidity to the information gathering process.

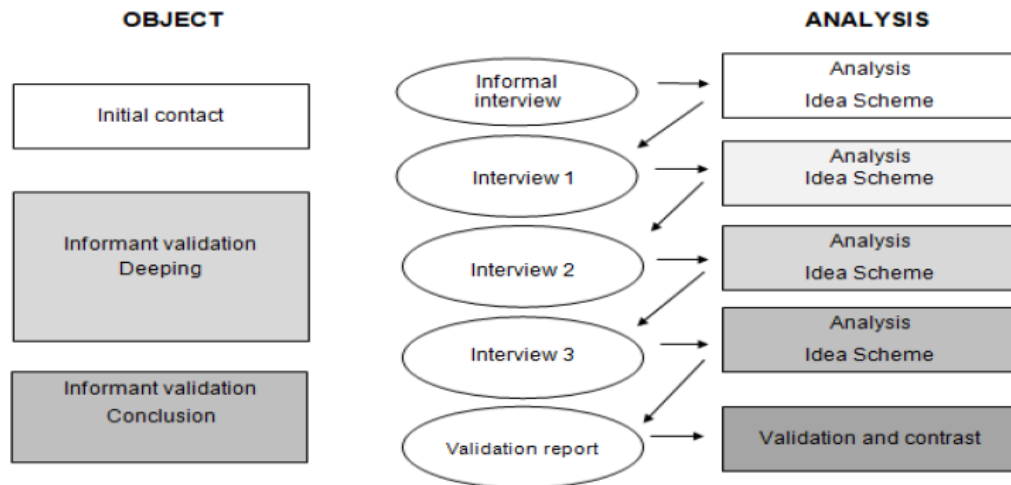


Figure 1. Cascade process of reflective deepening
Source: Cruz-González, Lucena & Domingo (2020)

In addition to biographical-narrative interviews, data collection was also complemented by field notes that were recorded in a logbook (Schensul, Schensul & Lecompte, 1999). Non-verbal language elements that could not be captured in the interviews were recorded, as well as sensations, feelings or emotions, details and situations that might be relevant to our study.

Data analysis

This study is hermeneutic-interpretative in nature, so one of our main objectives in the analysis of the information was to understand the values and perceptions that the participants attributed to their environment, religion and adversities (Bruner, 2006). For this reason, this analysis focused on those critical incidents and decisive elements that marked the academic, social and personal trajectory of our participants and which, at certain stages, involved life crises and identity reconstructions as an adaptation to the environment.

As explained above, in the process of collecting information, a partial analysis of this information was carried out by means of dialectic validation. In this phase of partial analysis, the objective was to extract the main personal and educational background that made up the life history of our participants.

In a second analytical phase, the aim was to identify emerging themes in the discourse, using a thematic analysis based on grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To this end, all the transcripts of the in-depth biographical interviews and the data recorded in the logbook were entered into the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12. This tool was key to facilitating the management of information and the creation of emerging thematic nodes.

Ethical considerations

When conducting research on life stories, it is important to consider conditions of honesty, respect and protection towards the participants of the study. Authors such as Munhall (1998) and Moriña (2017) agree that research on life narratives entails a responsibility and ethical commitment on the part of the researcher, as well as a consensual and sensitive treatment of the information collected. In the course of this type of study, researchers become true confidants for those who share crucial moments in their lives. Therefore, we have taken a number of actions to make our participants feel safe in this process (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

We constructed and signed an affidavit of commitment to confidentiality and anonymity for the participants in our study. In this document we not only ensured that their data would not be published without prior consent, but also that the analysis of the data and the drafting of reports would be supervised by the participants themselves to ensure that the information provided was completely truthful. Furthermore, with regard

to anonymity, measures were taken such as the use of pseudonyms and/or the alteration of the names and places reported.

Findings

In this section, we present the life stories of the 10 Muslim women who bring this study to life. In order to visualise and present the findings, a categorisation of emerging themes in the data analysis was carried out. The aim was to make it easier for the reader to find commonalities and discrepancies in their own discourses, as well as to achieve thematic coherence and coordination in the presentation.

Identity/sense of belonging: weaving your identity profile between two cultures

The participants' life stories reflect the fact that we are all a set of events and circumstances. In this sense, they express that, according to their experiences, Spanish identity is not understood as plural and diverse. Those who were born in Spain argue that, despite this, they will never be considered "sufficiently" Spanish in the eyes of others. The following argument of Daouia, who arrived in Spain with her parents from Morocco at the age of 3 months, is interesting:

The first discourse we hear from Spaniards is: "oh, you are Moroccan", "that's the Moor". From an early age at school, in the street... they always point you out as the Moroccan, even if you were born here. Spanish identity is not understood as diverse. I ask myself, what does it mean to be Spanish? Now, when we go to Morocco, you are not accepted as Moroccan either, you are the person who was born and grew up in Europe. We will never be Spanish or Moroccan enough, and we are not 100% of both (Daouia).

While the majority say they feel foreign in both Spain and Morocco, others indicate that in Morocco they do not have the same feeling even if they were not born in Morocco: "*When I go to Morocco, nobody asks me where I am from, they automatically treat me as*

Moroccan because my parents are Moroccan, even if you don't speak Arabic well" (Iman).

They mention the identity crisis as the real drama of immigration. Many of them claim to live in a constant identity contradiction that affects their sense of belonging to Spanish society: *"you end up feeling that you live in a country that is not yours. In reality, we are immigrants without being immigrants"* (Iman). This issue is aggravated by the rejection and Islamophobia received. This sometimes leads, as Amina (29 years old, born in Morocco) points out, to a rejection of their culture of origin and roots: *"my nephews, when they see that Darija is made fun of at school, they don't want to be linked to it at all. They want to be with the strong, not the weak"*. Other times the opposite happens, they withdraw into their community and religion, producing the phenomenon known as reactive religiosity, which we will deal with in the following section.

Finally, with regard to the identity perspective, the interviewees emphasised the importance of being made to feel proud of one's roots and to have a point of reference in society:

Not having a point of reference from a young age had a negative influence on my construction of identity. It also happens to my son. He asks me, "Mum, am I Spanish or Moroccan? I tell him that he is Spanish but that he can also feel Moroccan, that he can be whatever he wants. I feel that my son is ashamed of his roots and it scares me a lot (Yasmín).

Religiosity: unravelling the religious paradigm

When our participants related their stories and experiences, the words "demonstrate" and "attrition" dominated the conversation. If there is a common thread among the interviewees regarding how they experience their religiosity in Spain, it is the feeling of having to continually demonstrate twice as much as a white Christian/atheist

woman. This causes frustration for many of them: *'there was a time in my life when I was very worn out, because I had to justify, explain and convince everyone that Islam is not what they think'* (Fátima).

I have to continually try to show that I go beyond the image of Muslim women in Spanish society: submissive, not having many goals or aspirations, immigrants who come to take advantage...we not only have to face machismo but also being considered an immigrant, of another race/ethnicity and all the negative things that this entails (Nisrin).

The participants report experiencing obstacles to practising their religiosity as Muslims in Spain. One of them is the lack of mosques with a space for women to pray that is adapted to their needs. In this sense, Yasmín's argument stands out, reflecting the opposition of some people in the neighbourhood to the construction of a mosque:

Today I can only practice my religiosity at home. In the village where we live, a lot of money was raised by the whole community to build a bigger mosque where we women could pray in our own room, go to school, take the children, etc. However, a group of neighbours from the neighbourhood collected signatures so that the mosque could not be opened and it has remained half-open. It is very sad to realise that you cannot practice your religion freely in a country that is supposed to be a non-denominational state. (Yasmin).

Through the life stories of our interviewees, it can be perceived how in their daily lives they face small and invisible adversities, which seem to be unnoticed by others, but which become a barrier to living their religiosity.

... in the work/study timetable there is no space or time for prayer. In Ramadan I have to take days off from my holidays and they don't make it easy for me to work shifts. The

same happens at university with exams and assignments. Nobody takes religiosity into account as a necessity (Daouia).

The interviewees point out differences in the way they understand and live their religiosity compared to that of their parents. In the words of Iman and Meriem, we can see how they proudly claim their religion and fight every day for their rights as Muslim women in Spain to be fulfilled:

My parents lived their religion in secret. I remember when I was little my mother used to tell me that there was no need to say that we were doing Ramadan. She didn't even wear hijab here, she only wore it in Morocco. Thank God the generations of today defend Islam first and foremost (Iman).

It is very different. My parents came to Spain and their objectives and priorities were different, they were looking for economic improvement. We have had to fight for our rights as Muslims in the country where we were born (Meriem).

Because their parents live and practice an Islam that is closer to Moroccan culture, this has led them to have to find out much more about their religion in order to distinguish the religious bases from the merely cultural: "*the fact that your parents follow an Islam that is very marked by culture means that we have to look for information on everything, I could not find answers at home to the questions I asked myself*" (Meriem); "*although the pillars are the same, many of the activities or how we demonstrate this religiosity are different*" (Daouia). This fact led Daouia, in her process of searching and constructing her identity, to consider herself agnostic during her adolescence.

Sentiments revealed: Islamophobia as a common denominator

In the discourses analysed, the hijab emerges as a key element in the Islamophobic acts they report having suffered in different areas such as education and work: "*During*

my nursing internship, my supervisor told me some words that I will never forget: the headscarf you wear is a rag, always remember that what you have is mental subjugation. It was really painful" (Amina).

Many of our participants indicate that wearing the headscarf was a vital turning point in terms of the emergence of Islamophobic situations in their lives:

My experience with the hijab is very long and complex. On the one hand, my parents were thrilled that I wore it, but on the other hand, they were very afraid of it, and they were right. I started the first year of secondary school in a new town and I was bullied. This led me to a war with myself and I turned it into a rejection of my beliefs. I took it off at the age of 15 and refused any religion, falling into a deep depression. In the second year of high school I started to investigate again and I came across Islam again. It was when I was 19 that I wore the hijab. The teachers asked me if it was OK, if something had happened at home, if my parents had forced me, if I wanted to talk to the counsellor... many people no longer wanted to talk to me in the corridors and they blocked me from social networks" (Daouia).

Another issue linked to wearing the hijab is the racialisation and foreignisation it entails: *"when they see me wearing the veil at work, the first thing they do is talk to me louder and approach me because they assume I don't understand Spanish" (Meriem).* María, a Muslim convert, has not changed her name, but the hijab and her dress identify her as a Muslim. In her case, she states how the phenomenon of reactive religiosity has come about in response to the rejection she experiences in her daily life: *'The biggest impact for me is that they think I am not Spanish or that I don't know how to speak Spanish. They take it for granted that I am a foreigner. It happens to me almost every day. Sometimes I have even worn the niqab that covers your whole face in reaction'.*

They are aware of the obstacles and difficulties involved in wearing the hijab, but they all see it as a form of empowerment that allows them to remember what their beliefs

and values are: *"I see it as a form of empowerment. It involves fighting and always showing twice as much, putting up with stares, comments, looking for job opportunities when you know that 90% of the doors are going to be closed to you"* (Nisrin).

Faced with such situations of discrimination, most of the women interviewed do not feel that the western-centric feminist movement supports them or backs them in their struggle: *"When I myself go to the 8M demonstrations I am the object of many stares and I am always attacked with the same thing: the veil"* (Hafida); *"Feminism is reduced to a hegemonic discourse that defends white and atheist women, forgetting the reality of many Muslim women who are racialised. Diversity is fought for but there is no consideration or sisterhood"* (Daouia).

Education: when educational spaces fabricate discrimination

The interviewees denounce the fact that the school system does not always welcome in a positive way the diverse realities they encounter in their classrooms. Thus, in the discourses analysed, we detected both positive and negative experiences with regard to the education received in the school system. We observed a common concern in all of them regarding the education currently received by their children in Spain:

Many times, teachers make inappropriate comments to children who are still trying to build their identity. My son, who does not speak Arabic and was born in Spain, says to me: "Mum, they tell me at school that I come from another country because they have seen you wearing the hijab". Moreover, the teacher says to me: "Oh, you shout a lot, like in Morocco". I think my son has been to Morocco 3 times. [Of course, then I hear him in the park telling other children that his name is Juan. He is ashamed of his roots (Yasmin).

Participants report great concern about how teachers themselves sometimes contribute to perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims:

One year, lice were detected at school. My father is white with green eyes, so apparently, he looks Spanish. He went to the meeting and the teacher started saying that they thought they were brought in by a Moorish woman in the classroom. He got very upset and the teacher didn't expect him to be my father because of the way he looked. I was only 7 years old (Daouia).

In the 4th ESO ethics class, the teacher tried to work on prejudices towards immigrants. He confused Muslim with immigrant. They are not trained or prepared to work on these kinds of issues in the classroom (Karima).

In addition to the school setting, the formative discourse of the imam in mosques emerged as a common theme among our interviewees. For some of them, the mosque has not been a place of refuge from adversity. They also insist that they do not feel represented in the discourse of many imams, who do not adapt to their needs or interests as Spanish citizens:

I don't usually go to mosques. I have used it as a tool because at university I didn't dare to pray. The speeches are usually given by men and I don't feel identified. Also, most of them don't have space for women to pray and the imam doesn't know Spanish (Amina).

Part of my decision to become an atheist as a teenager was justified by the many contradictory messages I heard from the imams. They give messages that you have to think twice before saying them. Arabic is a very complex polysemous language and is prone to errors if not properly interpreted. That is why the first word that Allah revealed is "read" (Daouia).

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the life stories of Muslim women who have experienced Islamophobia in the Spanish context and how these experiences

have influenced their processes of identity construction, sense of belonging and religiosity. Delving into their life discourses was key to understanding the ways in which they negotiate their multiple identities and sense of belonging to Spanish society from their minority status (Ali & Sonn, 2017; Giorgi, 2020).

The present research underlines a vitally important element regarding the identity question of our interviewees. In this sense, the findings highlight that, despite being born in Spain, they believe that they will never be considered "sufficiently" Spanish in the eyes of others. This issue is related to the processes of foreignisation, which are determinant in the construction of the social imaginary of Islam in Europe, through which the Muslim population is identified as foreign (Planet & Camarero, 2022). In this way, Islam acquires the character of a religion of migrant communities and is placed on the margins of the debate on national identity (Ortega, 2022). In the discourses analysed, we can see how this fact leads them to a continuous questioning of their identity as Spanish Muslims, which they end up internalising.

Moreover, the life stories of our participants warn that there are gendered dimensions to manifestations of Islamophobia in the public sphere, such as the wearing of the veil, which further aggravate prejudices about women's submissiveness, as well as the idea that their Muslim identity is immutable and cannot be questioned or hidden. This contributes to making these women targets of anti-Muslim hostility as if they were 'ideal objects' (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012). Research along these lines highlights that wearing the veil is often interpreted as a threat to integration and cohesion in society, and as a visible manifestation of concerns about gender oppression. This makes Muslim women who wear it more likely to be targeted and discriminated against in public places (Zempi, 2018).

The findings reflect the complexities of identity construction and management among the Muslim women under study. We concur with the results of research conducted by Torreken, Kavadias & Bensaïd (2023) in Brussels, who show that these processes are highly heterogeneous and multifaceted. In a context where Islamophobia is present, our interviewees carry out different processes that are porous to each other (Khan & Mythen, 2021). Thus, we find women who:

- They feel that they belong neither to Spain nor to Morocco. This is related to processes of marginalisation and uprooting (Spiegler, Wölfer & Hewstone, 2019), which is especially worrying among second generations.
- They feel that they belong more to Morocco than to Spain, despite being born in the latter.
- They reject, at some point in their lives, their origin and roots due to the stigmatisation and discrimination they suffer in Spanish society. We found this to be particularly worrying among the children of the women interviewed who are at school. This could form an interesting future line of research.
- They withdraw into their ethno-religious group, developing what is known as "reactive religiosity or ethnicity", as a source of coping with discriminatory processes (Steele et al., 2023).

According to Fleischmann & Phalet (2015), second-generation Muslims in Europe often retain a strong commitment to their ethnic and religious minority identities. In our study, we found that this is not always the case, especially among the children of these women. Being born and raised in Spain does not inexorably lead them to develop a sense of belonging to this country. Nor do we agree with the previous study by Aparicio & Portes (2014), who do not detect the formation of reactive identities among second-

generation Muslims in Spain. This is a really worrying fact among future generations that will have to be analysed with greater precision and depth in future research.

In the midst of the current debate on whether or not Muslims of immigrant background are successfully integrated into Western societies, and in line with Leszczensky, Maxwell & Bleich's study (2020), we conclude that the identity crises and feelings of uprootedness reported by the interviewees are strongly implicated in the Islamophobia they experience in their daily lives, rather than an alleged incompatibility between Islam and the West.

With regard to Islamophobia, the women shared the emotional impacts of Islamophobia, as well as their resilience in the face of it. The results underline the deep-rooted nature of this phenomenon in Spain. Despite the fact that several authors point out that in Spain, unlike other European countries, attitudes towards Muslims are generally less hostile (Burchardt et al., 2015). In the discourses of the interviewees, we can glimpse what authors such as Selod (2018) call 'gender racialisation', in which Muslim women have become the standard-bearers of 'otherness'.

Our study shows that, although the Muslim community cannot be lumped together as a singular racial group, it is a form of cultural racism. As Modood (1997) argues, the Islamophobia reported by the interviewees is a form of cultural racism, as many of them are identified as 'non-white' people of non-European descent. An illustrative example in our study is that of María, a Muslim convert who wears the hijab as a visible religious sign and who denounces the racialisation and foreignisation she suffers in the Spanish context.

As Mustafa (2020) argues, these women are hypervisible but at the same time invisibilised. Moreover, the diversity that characterises them is overshadowed, lumping them into a monolithic and homogenous group (Ali & Sonn, 2017). In particular, personal

reasons for wearing the hijab have become the subject of public debate (Mirza, 2013). For the West, only by abandoning their faith would they become "liberated" women (Keddie et al. 2021). The narrow, stereotypical and objectified view of Islam in the West does not contemplate that many Muslim women choose to express their religious identity in their own freedom (Spini, 2022). In fact, for all the interviewees who wear the hijab, it is for them a form of empowerment and a struggle for their ideals.

In this sense, it is also noteworthy that none of the interviewees feel represented by a feminist movement that they consider Western-centric, hegemonic and often Islamophobic. This Islamophobia, as Ramadan (2022) argues, is based on the discourse of the supposed incompatibility of Islam with Western values. In this case, authors such as Terman (2015) and Hasan (2012) agree on this complex situation, explaining that it is in no way incompatible to be a believer and a feminist, and reaffirming the idea that being Muslim and wearing hijab is a sign of identity and another option for freedom of dress. We conclude that it is important for the feminist movement to inexorably adopt an intersectional and antidecolonial perspective (Paz & Kook, 2021). Thus, in our study we see how these women suffer particular forms of discrimination at the intersection of different factors such as gender, "race" (in which the hijab is the religious signifier that has acquired primarily a racial meaning), religion, etc. (Baboolal, 2023).

We are facing a generation of Muslim women who are fully aware of their rights and are committed to defending them. They denounce a series of important challenges when it comes to practising their religion freely in Spain. Among them, the following stand out in particular:

- The construction of prayer spaces in mosques for women. In this sense, our findings point to various criticisms from the perspective of Islamic feminism. Our interviewees call for a more active participation of women in the mosque

context. Moreras (2017) argues that behind this claim, they also question the roles that women seem to be destined to occupy in such an institution.

- Being able to count on Spanish-speaking imams who are familiar with the realities and challenges of Muslim women in Spain. In this sense, we consider that the Islamic Commission of Spain, which gives its approval on imams (Law 26/1992), must continue to work to respond to these needs. However, the training and regulation of imams in Spain is a complex aspect that remains unregulated (Ferreiro, 2011). If Islam is to respond to the needs and challenges of Muslims in Spain, we are committed to requiring them to be trained in accordance with and regulated by the state.
- Work and academic flexibility in their festivities. With regard to employment, Muslims may request the substitution of one of the public holidays recognised in Article 37.2 of the Workers' Statute for one of the Islamic holidays listed in Article 12 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain (Law 26/1992), provided that there is an agreement with the company. However, most of them are obliged to request days off in order to celebrate their holidays. Only Ceuta and Melilla have set the Day of Sacrifice as a local holiday (Rodríguez & Cano, 2021). As for the academic sphere, despite the fact that the Spanish State defines itself as non-denominational in its Constitution (BOE, 1978, art. 16.3), the Catholic religion continues to hold notable privileges, with most of the annual holidays that mark the school calendar being of a Catholic nature (e.g. Christmas, Easter...). Therefore, although the spirit of the aforementioned Cooperation Agreement is conciliatory towards the Muslim minority, it is necessary to continue working in this field.

All their narratives coincide in the perception of having to relegate their religious practice to the private sphere. Moreover, despite the fact that the interviewees who were born in Spain or who arrived in this country when they were very young adopt strategies of religious differentiation, trying to live and practice an Islam far removed from Moroccan cultural norms and values, Spanish society continues to confine them to the same migrant category as their parents.

This study highlights a complex problem in Spanish society that requires urgent multidisciplinary measures, in which we believe it is necessary to include the voices and active participation of Muslim women themselves. From a socio-educational perspective, we propose the following measures to facilitate the true inclusion of the Muslim community in Spain. Considering that the culture of origin is a facilitating and necessary component for inclusion in host societies (Feffali, 2022), we conclude the importance of favouring the construction and development of multiple and diverse identities, which allow them to recognise and embrace both their culture of origin or that of their parents, as well as that of Spanish society in this case. In agreement with Andújar (2006), we observe in our study how these women refuse to be isolated and locked into restricted identity categories. Likewise, it is important to make them feel proud of their roots and to show them references in which they can feel reflected.

In this field, teachers and different social actors are of vital importance. It is essential that they understand the diversity within the Muslim population (Zempi, 2020) and, more specifically, Muslim women. It is important to carry out training and awareness-raising campaigns in order to avoid prejudices and stereotypes which, as shown in this study, continue to be perpetuated, especially in schools, by teachers themselves. Similarly, it is necessary to work on the construction of a discourse that goes against the theory of the "clash of civilisations" that promotes a conflictive

discourse of "us vs. them", a matter of utmost importance in order to avoid the identity crises that the interviewees pointed out.

With the stories of our interviewees we do not claim to offer generalisable statements, but we do argue that these voices are likely to represent a more collective reality.

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