



Questioning privileged mixedness: identity, belonging, and racialisation among young people of Latin American and Spanish heritage in Catalonia, Spain¹

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Abstract

This article offers a critical analysis of identity experiences and processes of inclusion, exclusion, and racialisation among mixed-heritage youth of Latin American descent in Catalonia. Drawing on 119 qualitative interviews, the study challenges narratives that portray linguistic and cultural proximity between Spain and Latin America as pathways to automatic social inclusion. Findings show that Latin American mixedness functions as a form of “ambivalent privilege.” While some young people may “pass” as native when their phenotype aligns with dominant forms of whiteness, this form of recognition is fragile and easily disrupted when visible markers of origin – physical features, Latin American accents, or explicit references to family background – activate processes of stigmatisation and othering. The analysis reveals multiple forms of racialisation, ranging from microaggressions and everyday prejudice to stereotypes attached to parents’ countries of origin (hypersexualisation, poverty, criminality, or exoticism). The study also highlights the centrality of language and accent in the Catalan context, where linguistic hierarchies and glottophobic attitudes can reinforce symbolic boundaries of belonging, particularly for youth who speak Spanish with Latin American varieties. In response to these tensions, young people engage in various identity negotiation strategies: accent neutralisation, selective concealment of family origins, reclaiming racialised identities, or developing cosmopolitan forms of belonging. Far from linear integration, their trajectories are marked by ambivalence, intersectional inequalities, and shifting positionalities. The article underscores the importance of recognising the specific characteristics of Latin American mixedness and how these impact our understanding of the contemporary dynamics of racialisation in Spain.

Keywords

Mixedness. Youth. Latin American immigration. Racialisation.

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Questionando a mestiçagem privilegiada:

identidade, pertencimento e racialização
entre jovens de origem latino-americana e
espanhola na Catalunha, Espanha

Resumo: Este artigo analisa criticamente as experiências identitárias e as dinâmicas de inclusão, exclusão e racialização vividas por jovens de origem mista com ascendência latino-americana na Catalunha. Com base em 119 entrevistas qualitativas, o estudo questiona a narrativa que pressupõe que a proximidade linguística e cultural entre Espanha e América Latina facilita automaticamente a inclusão social desses jovens. Os resultados mostram que a mestiçagem latino-americana funciona como um “privilegio ambivalente”: embora alguns jovens possam passar despercebidos (“passing”) quando seu fenótipo se aproxima da branquitude hegemônica, esse reconhecimento é instável e pode se desfazer quando surgem marcadores visíveis de origem – traços fenotípicos, sotaques latino-americanos ou referências familiares – que ativam processos de estigmatização e alteridade. A análise revela diversas formas de racialização, desde microagressões e estereótipos cotidianos até estigmas associados aos países de origem dos pais (hipersexualização, pobreza, violência ou marginalização). O estudo também evidencia o papel central da língua e do sotaque no contexto catalão, onde hierarquias linguísticas e atitudes glotofóbicas reforçam fronteiras simbólicas de pertencimento. Diante dessas tensões, os jovens desenvolvem diferentes estratégias identitárias: neutralização do sotaque, ocultamento parcial da origem, reivindicação racial ou construção de identidades cosmopolitas. Conclui-se que suas trajetórias não seguem um modelo de integração linear, mas são marcadas por ambivalências, desigualdades interseccionais e formas situadas de pertencimento. O artigo destaca a importância de reconhecer as características específicas da mestiçagem latino-americana e como estas influenciam nossa compreensão das dinâmicas contemporâneas de racialização na Espanha.

Palavras-chave: Mestiçagem. Juventude. Imigração latino-americana. Racialização.

Cuestionando la mixticidad privilegiada:

identidad, pertenencia y racialización entre
jóvenes de origen latinoamericano y español en
Cataluña, España

Resumen: Este artículo analiza críticamente las experiencias identitarias y las dinámicas de inclusión, exclusión y racialización que afectan a jóvenes de origen mixto con ascendencia latinoamericana en Cataluña. A partir de 119 entrevistas cualitativas, el estudio cuestiona la narrativa que asume que la proximidad lingüística y cultural entre España y América Latina facilita automáticamente la inclusión social de estos jóvenes. Los resultados muestran que la mixticidad latinoamericana opera como una forma de “privilegio ambivalente”: aunque algunos jóvenes pueden pasar desapercibidos (“passing”) gracias a fenotipos asociados a la blanquitud hegemónica, este reconocimiento es inestable y puede revertirse cuando emergen marcadores visibles de origen – rasgos fenotípicos, acentos latinoamericanos o referencias familiares – que activan procesos de estigmatización y alterización. El análisis evidencia múltiples formas de racialización, desde microagresiones y prejuicios cotidianos hasta estigmas asociados a los países de origen de sus progenitores (hipersexualización, pobreza, violencia, marginalidad). Asimismo, la investigación muestra cómo la lengua y el acento, en el contexto catalán, funcionan como fronteras simbólicas que pueden reforzar tanto la inclusión como la exclusión, especialmente en situaciones de glotofobia o discriminación lingüística. Ante estas tensiones, los jóvenes despliegan estrategias de negociación identitaria: neutralización del acento, ocultamiento parcial del origen familiar, resignificación racial o construcción de identidades cosmopolitas. El estudio concluye que, lejos de una integración lineal, las experiencias de estos jóvenes revelan trayectorias marcadas por ambivalencias, desigualdades persistentes y procesos situados de pertenencia. El artículo subraya la importancia de reconocer las características específicas de la mixticidad latinoamericana y cómo estas influyen en nuestra comprensión de las dinámicas contemporáneas de racialización en España.

Palabras clave: Mixticidad. Juventud. Inmigración latinoamericana. Racialización..

Introduction

In recent decades, Spain has seen major demographic changes due to international migration. One key result is the steady rise of mixed families, defined as those with members from different national, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. In 2020, the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) data show 2,231,700 Spanish households included at least one foreign member, with 48% of these being mixed³.

Catalonia, due to its population density and long history as a destination for migration, has become a privileged space for observing these transformations and their social, cultural, and symbolic implications. Although we do not have official statistics on the children of these families, data from the INE allow us to infer this trend through indirect indicators, such as the mother's place of birth. Thus, in Catalonia, in 2021, births to foreign mothers and Spanish fathers or Spanish mothers and foreign fathers already accounted for 17.5% (12% in Spain as a whole), according to INE data.

As various authors have pointed out (Gil Araujo; Pedone, 2014; Golías Pérez; Martínez Buján, 2005; Pedone; Gil Araujo, 2008), Spain has established itself as a preferred destination for Latin American migration due to the shared language, historical relations, and existing transnational networks. In 2023, more than 29,000 children were born to Latin American mothers in Spain, representing approximately 9% of all births that year. Some of the most common Latin American nationalities among mothers were Argentine, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian and Venezuelan. These origins reflect a significant and growing presence of descendants with diverse transnational family and cultural ties, including a wide variety of migratory trajectories, educational levels, and legal situations, which also has an impact on different forms of social integration (García Ballesteros *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, we know that the Latin American population is one of the most prominent in mixed unions, especially in Catalonia and other areas of high urban concentration (Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2014, 2021b). Despite the growing child and youth population resulting from these unions, their life trajectories and identity dynamics continue to be poorly studied, tending to be invisible in both public discourse and academic analysis. Often, the categories used in migration or youth studies fail to capture the specificity of the experiences of those who do not fully fit into the notions of “native” or “foreigner.” In this sense, the sons and daughters of mixed families from Latin America, often associated with a supposed linguistic and cultural proximity, find themselves in an ambiguous space of belonging that deserves to be explored in greater depth.

3. Author's own calculations based on the INE household dataset: <https://www.ine.es/jaxi/Tabla.htm?path=/t20/p274/serie/prov/p01/10/&file=01001.px&L=0>.

This article critically examines how Latin American mixed-heritage youth in Catalonia experience identity, belonging, and inequality. It challenges narratives that portray mixed families as automatically integrated or culturally privileged and demonstrates that Latin American origins can still serve as markers of otherness, leading to experiences of racialisation and social hierarchy even when linguistic and national similarities exist.

Throughout the text, three interrelated themes are explored that allow us to understand the complexity of these experiences: the invisibility or neutralisation of otherness in young people who ‘pass’ as indigenous; experiences of everyday racialisation, whether due to phenotypic traits, language use, or cultural stereotypes; and strategies of resistance and identity negotiation navigating between invisibility and racialisation.

1 Theoretical framework and state of the art

1.1 Latin American immigration, mixed heritage, and identities

The phenomenon of mixed families and the emergence of young people of mixed origin in Spain, and particularly in Catalonia, must be understood from a perspective that recognises the complexity of identities in migratory and post-migratory contexts. Mixed-race, far from being a homogeneous or static category, involves the coexistence and negotiation of multiple cultural, linguistic, and symbolic references (Quiñones-Rosado, 2016; Sánchez *et al.*, 2014). The international literature on multiracial and multiethnic youth emphasises that these young people not only face the common challenges of adolescence and youth, but must also manage the ambiguity of their belonging (Cruz-Janzen, 2002; DaCosta, 2020; Evans; Evans, 2022).

The theory of intersectionality is particularly useful for analysing how factors such as national origin, racialisation, gender, and legal status intersect in the experience of these young people. Thus, mixed-race identity involves constant negotiation, where individual agency is conditioned by social structures and cultural hierarchies, giving rise to experiences of dissonance in which cultural self-identification and external identity attributions do not always coincide (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a). As Evans and Evans (2022) show, multiracial people often face specific forms of invisibility and ambivalence that make it difficult to assert coherent identities in social contexts that privilege fixed categories.

Children of families with one Latin American and one Spanish parent, like those of other origins, develop relational and hybrid identities influenced by their family, school, and social contexts in their destination country, but also in their country of

origin (Echeverri, 2025; Rodríguez García *et al.*, 2021a). The perspective of Latin American mixed-race, however, offers a fundamental key to understanding the processes of racialisation and belonging in contexts marked by ethnic and racial diversity, such as Spain. Unlike the dominant binary frameworks in Anglo-Saxon countries (white/black), Latin America has historically had a more ambiguous and fluid logic of racial classification, where mixing – biological, cultural, and symbolic – has been not only recognised but also celebrated in certain national discourses (such as “mestizaje” in Mexico or the “melting pot” in Brazil). However, as Wade (2005, 2010) points out, this apparent praise of mixing has also served to render structural racism invisible and perpetuate racial hierarchies under the guise of integrative rhetoric.

The “Latin Americanisation” of immigration (Golías Pérez; Martínez Buján, 2005; Pérez Caramés, 2004) has given rise to new family configurations and the emergence of descendants with transnational ties. This growing presence, although initially perceived as a “diluted presence,” has evolved into a majority visibility in certain urban regions, with implications for public policy, social perception, and integration experiences.

In any case, Latin American immigration does not constitute a homogeneous block, but is marked by differences in nationality, social class, educational capital, and migratory trajectories (García Ballesteros *et al.*, 2009). This diversity has an impact on the forms of integration and the construction of identities of the children of mixed families (Araujo and Pedone, 2014; Herrera; Carrillo, 2009). Many young people from these families undergo processes of continuous identity negotiation in which their Latin American origin may be rendered invisible or hyper-identified, depending on the context (Cuberos-Gallardo, 2014; Rebolledo, 2023; Rebolledo *et al.*, 2023).

Far from being a marker of full integration, mixed heritage can be seen as ambiguous or even suspicious by the majority society, especially when it shows phenotypic traits that do not fit in with the hegemonic Spanish whiteness (Rodríguez-García, 2022). In short, mixed heritage can generate tensions between inclusion and exclusion, especially in contexts where Latin American origin is racialised (Checa; Monserrat, 2015; Echeverri, 2015; Gil Araujo, 2006; Gil Araujo; Pedone, 2008; Walsh, 2008).

1.2 Dynamics of racialisation and discrimination against mixed youth of Latin American origin in the Spanish and Catalan contexts

Indeed, despite the discourse on integration and interculturality, dynamics of racialisation and symbolic hierarchisation persist in Spanish society, particularly affecting mixed-race youth of Latin American origin. *Racialisation*, understood as the process by which social and hierarchical meanings are attributed to phenotypic, cul-

tural, or linguistic traits (Baca Zinn; Wells, 2023; Roth, 2016), operates in a subtle but persistent manner, even in contexts where there is supposed “cultural proximity” based on shared language or history (Retis, 2007). Thus, although family mixedness may be perceived as a sign of integration, children from mixed families are not exempt from experiencing racialisation, especially if they have phenotypic markers or accents that distance them from the white-European ideal (Giliberti, 2013; Hansen, 2017).

In Spain, the growing presence of young people of mixed Latin American origin has highlighted the ambiguity of the boundaries of belonging. These young people often experience what we might call an ambivalent privilege: on the one hand, they can “pass” as native and benefit from a certain invisibility; on the other, their Latin American origin can be activated as a marker of otherness, generating experiences of discrimination or stigmatisation (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Giliberti, 2014; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a). Racialisation is likely to manifest itself in subtle ways (through questions such as “where are you really from?”) or through stereotypes linked to the origin of the migrant parent (Ballestín *et al.*, 2025a, 20125b; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, *id.*).

The literature on transnational and migrant youth in Spain has shown how everyday racialisation manifests itself in schools, the media, and public spaces (Ballestín *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Rebolledo *et al.*, 2023). Stereotypes associated with Latin Americans – crime, gang membership, sexualisation, exoticism – persist and are reinforced in daily interactions, affecting these young people’s self-esteem and opportunities (Giliberti, 2014; Rebolledo, 2023; Vono de Vilhena, 2011). Recent studies on the school experiences of young people of mixed origin in Spain point out how the neutralisation of otherness or hypervisibility, depending on the school context, contributes to the reproduction of racial hierarchies (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a). Furthermore, the persistence of colonial imaginaries and “colour blindness” in Spanish public discourse hinders the recognition of experiences of racial discrimination (Rodríguez-García, 2022).

Catalonia constitutes a particularly relevant setting inside Spain because questions of migration, belonging and language are embedded within broader political debates over territorial sovereignty, national identity and citizenship. Since the 2010s, the rise of the pro-independence movement has intensified public discussions around who belongs, how collective identities are defined, and the symbolic role of language in everyday inclusion (Clua; Fainé, 2014). Within this context, Catalan has often functioned not only as a minority language requiring institutional protection, but also as a marker of civic integration and legitimate belonging. For young people of mixed Latin American and Spanish heritage, these dynamics may generate additional ambiguities: while formally included through citizenship, schooling or family ties, they may still experience conditional recognition when linguistic practices, accents or phenotypic

markers are read as signs of outsidership. This helps to explain how institutional colour-blindness can coexist with subtle forms of racialised exclusion.

In this sense, although the “cultural proximity” of Latin American immigration has been based primarily on the common use of the Spanish language, in the Catalan context, the linguistic integration of young Latin American immigrants is marked by a double process of marginalisation: on the one hand, Catalan is privileged as the language of communication and a symbol of social integration from the school environment onwards (Ballestín-González, 2008, 2011, 2014), relegating Spanish to a secondary position in many educational and social settings; on the other hand, speaking Spanish with a Latin American accent reinforces the perception of foreignness and hinders full inclusion, as these young people are associated with migrant groups and attributed with negative stereotypes linked to their origin (Fuentes *et al.*, 2013; Henao-Agudelo *et al.*, 2016; Vono de Vilhena, 2011). Latin accents are often the target of glotophobia (Blanchet, 2016), understood as discrimination based on the way someone speaks or their accent, which translates into attitudes of exclusion and the need to neutralise the accent to avoid stigmatisation and facilitate school and social integration.

Strategies for adaptation and integration in the face of experiences of racist and/or cultural discrimination tend to range from avoiding explicit references to the country of origin to actively claiming multicultural heritage in spaces of socialisation and activism based on critical awareness of racial and ethnic-cultural inequality and a re-interpretation of one’s own social and family position (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a; Páez de la Torre, 2020; Rebolledo, 2023; Rebolledo *et al.*, 2023; Vono de Vilhena, 2010). Belonging to transnational networks and connecting with family and friends in countries of origin are key elements in the construction of complex and flexible identities (Gil Araujo; Pedone, 2014; Rebolledo *et al.*, 2023).

2. Objectives

Based on the subject of study outlined in the Introduction and the theoretical framework drawn from the literature and research background, the following objectives are formulated:

- To explore the patterns of experiences and identity dynamics among young people from mixed families with a Latin American parent in Catalonia.
- To examine the forms of inclusion and exclusion experienced by young people from mixed families of Latin American origin in their daily lives, considering factors such as phenotype, language and accent, gender, and social class.

- Identify the mechanisms of racialisation that affect their experiences of ‘othering’, pointing out the paradoxes relating to the assumption of privileges for social integration based on historical ties and linguistic proximity.
- Characterise the most relevant identity strategies among this mixed young population when facing the dynamics and experiences of racialisation, stigmatisation, and/or cultural discrimination.

3 Methodology

This paper is based on the qualitative analysis of a broad set of semi-structured interviews conducted in Catalonia between 2017 and 2020. The interviews were conducted as part of an R&D project dedicated to the study of identity processes, sense of belonging, and life trajectories of young people born and/or socialised in mixed family contexts – i.e., mostly with one native parent and one of foreign origin, or both parents of different nationalities (see Acknowledgements for more details on institutional support).

The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide organised by thematic blocks, which included aspects such as: the migration background of the foreign parent; everyday family dynamics; cultural and religious practices; participation in social and political activities; friendship networks and leisure spaces; processes of identification and identity construction; experiences of discrimination or differential treatment, as well as perceptions about the future and levels of life satisfaction.

In total, 119 young people were interviewed – most of them with one parent born in Spain and the other born outside the country – whose family origins reflect the large presence of Latin American countries: 16.7% of our interviewees had a male parent born in Central and South America; and the percentage relating to mothers was even higher, at 21.1%, making it the top area of origin.

The sampling strategy combined recruitment through migrant associations, youth networks, educational centres, cultural activities, and personal contacts. Snow-ball sampling was deliberately avoided in order to diversify profiles and minimise social or cultural homogeneity biases. The interviews were conducted in contexts close to the interviewees: in their own homes, in libraries, leisure spaces, cafés, or university campuses, always in conditions of privacy and comfort.

Interviewees ranged from adolescence to young adulthood, which allowed us to observe different experiences depending on their stage of life. Some of them were still in compulsory secondary education and lived with their families, while others were already independent, pursuing higher education, working, or had even started their

own families. Although most lived in the city of Barcelona or in municipalities in the metropolitan area, there were also cases from smaller towns in other Catalan provinces.

The interviews, lasting between 45 minutes and two hours, were conducted in Catalan or Spanish, depending on the preference of the interviewee. In all cases, detailed information was provided about the objectives of the study, and written informed consent was obtained. The confidentiality of the data was guaranteed at all stages of the fieldwork, and the names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

The recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the corpus was processed using Atlas.TI qualitative analysis software. A coding system was developed based on the categories in the interview script, which was then refined based on themes that emerged during the analytical process. For this article, we have mainly used codes and memos related to the experiences of othering, racialisation, and identity negotiation among young people with family ties in Latin America.

4 Results: identity experiences, racialisation and tensions of belonging

Our results show that, although in Spanish society the children of mixed families of Latin American origin embody a form of diversity that is often invisible, given the supposed cultural proximity and the fact that in many cases they have Spanish nationality and have been socialised here, they are often perceived from a logic of otherness, especially when they display phenotypic or cultural traits associated with “Latinidad” and/or indigenous or Afro-descendant heritage. Below, we break down the main findings into the following areas of analysis:

4.1 Experiences of invisibility and passing

One of the first findings in the analysis of the narratives collected is the relative invisibility experienced by many young people of mixed Latin American origin in Catalonia.

Many experiences coincided with that of Adrián (17 years old, Argentine father, Spanish mother), who pointed out that his mixed heritage was often a source of surprise among his schoolmates, especially when many of them discovered it on an end-of-year trip: “I told them my father was Argentinean and they said, ‘What are you saying? Really?’ They didn’t know, I mean, they never confuse me (with an Argentinean)”.

This phenomenon was experienced by most informants as a kind of passing (Ballastín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Rockemore; Brunsma, 2002; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a; Twine, 2020) or “social camouflage” that allowed them to move around with a certain degree of normality until their family background became verbally apparent,

especially in young people with phenotypes that did not stray far from the dominant white-European ideal in Catalan society.

In some cases, when mixed heritage was explicitly revealed by the previously “invisible” person as a migrant or mixed-race individual, there was a relative loss of that invisibility through the attribution of exotic traits based on stereotypes associated with being “Latino”: “When I tell them where I come from, they say, ‘Oh, you have slightly exotic features,’ but I think that’s a lie; they only say that when I tell them my father is Mexican. (María, 23, Mexican father and Spanish mother)”. This relational logic of post facto “discovery” was likely to activate mechanisms of symbolic exclusion based on stereotypes linked to the Latin American population (Giliberti, 2014; Roth, 2016).

The lack of ethnic or cultural marking denoted a polarisation of generational experiences in terms of inclusion and otherness. In some cases, such as that of Victoria (27 years old, Peruvian mother), the stigma fell on the mother figure, who was visible as a ‘foreigner’ phenotypically, while she herself went unnoticed as the daughter of a mixed couple: “My mother has received insults in public spaces, some people told her to go back to her country in front of me. And when I responded, they were shocked, because I don’t look Latin American, I don’t speak like them, and I have a high level of education”.

In short, “invisibility” was experienced as a form of protection against discrimination and racism, but it also diluted the ability to denounce symbolic or institutional attacks based on the origin of the immigrant parent (Rodríguez-García, 2022).

4.2 Experiences of phenotypic and cultural racialisation

In contrast to the previous cases, other young people reported experiencing exclusion or direct discrimination on phenotypic grounds from an early age. In particular, skin colour or certain indigenous (Amerindian) physical features were often the subject of ridicule or contempt at school. Alba (19, Dominican mother, Spanish father) recounted: “When I was little, I had problems. Because, you know, they were little kids and, you know, they said the first thing that... So, of course, they used to call me ‘black’ and stuff. I had a hard time, but little by little, I became tough”.

Sonia (18), with a Colombian mother, recalled a similar scene: “I remember once a boy said to me in the playground: ‘black girl!’ I was very young... And it took me a while to realise he was talking to me”.

Our informants often reported everyday situations of public alienation based on their phenotype when it was visibly ‘non-white’. Sandra (16), whose mother is Dominican and father is Spanish, told us:

Yes, yes, they can tell right away that I'm from outside. People who sometimes give you dirty looks, or people who do the opposite and say, 'You're from outside, aren't you?', and you say, 'No, I'm from here', and then they say, 'Really?'. But I do look like I'm from outside, and I have to say, 'No, no, I'm from here'.

These are subtle forms of discrimination, or micro-racism, which are particularly difficult to detect and address, as they are not always perceived as explicit acts of racism (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025b).

The hypersexualisation of racialised bodies was a recurring experience among girls of mixed origin, highlighting how colonial imaginaries persist that associate Latin American women with supposed excessive sensuality, submission, and docility (Cruz-Janzen, 2001; Kempadoo, 2004; Seck, 2013). These gender and race stereotypes continue to operate in everyday life. As Erica (18, Colombian mother) eloquently put it:

And when you say 'Latina', 'oh, hot blood', and when you say 'Colombia, Brazil', 'oh, the explosive mix in bed, boom, boom!'. These stereotypes, man. I mean, just because I'm from Latin America, I should know how to dance, I know how to fuck, I know how to cook... Why? And when I say I'm mixed-race, they get really scared.

On other occasions, our informants had been caught up in confusion with other stigmatised origins, such as Moroccan or Arab. Illustratively, María (23, Mexican mother) stated: "They've called me 'Moorish'", and Mar (same age, also Mexican mother): "They think I'm Egyptian".

In addition to experiences of phenotypic racialisation, many mixed-race Latin American young people must face cultural stigmas linked to the country of origin of their father or mother. These experiences generate a critical awareness and a reinterpretation of one's own social and family position (Rebolledo, 2023; Rebolledo *et al.*, 2023).

Sandra (27), for example, spoke with resignation about the persistence of negative clichés about Colombia, her mother's country of origin: "Not racism, but clichés like 'your father is a drug dealer' and things like that... Come on, even today, many people still believe that. [...] Just like bullfighting in Spain, or cocaine, as a joke...".

In Esteban's case, racialisation was articulated around socio-economic origin and schooling in an elitist environment (private school): "If you said you were from Ecuador, it was like... 'you're poor or a panchito'. So I told my classmates that my mother was Ecuadorian, but then that she was white, so they wouldn't think I was a 'panchito'".

Esteban, whose Ecuadorian mother came from a white and relatively well-off family, highlights the intersection between class and racialisation, in line with the analyses of Sánchez *et al.* (2014) and DaCosta (2020). His experience shows how young peo-

ple face prejudice and discriminatory treatment not only because of their ethnic-cultural origin, but also because of the symbolic and economic capital associated with their family backgrounds.

These types of dynamics reinforce collective imaginaries marked by othering, exoticisation, and, in many cases, symbolic violence. As Vono de Vilhena (2011) argues, negative stereotypes about Latin Americans – drug trafficking, poverty, promiscuity – operate as devices of everyday othering for second generations.

In any case, most young people of mixed Latin American descent experienced what we might call an *ambivalent privilege*: they could “pass” as native and benefit from a certain invisibility thanks to the cultural proximity of their migrant family heritage, but their Latin American origin, especially in cases of phenotypic visibility (indigenous and Afro-descendant populations), could be activated as a marker of otherness, favouring dynamics of discrimination or stigmatisation (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a).

4.3 Language, accent, and glottophobia in the Catalan context

The dynamics of otherness and racialisation among mixed-race Latin American youth also revolve around linguistic usage, despite their supposed proximity to Spanish. In several interviews, the issue of language emerges as a key marker of social inclusion or exclusion in the Catalan context. The testimony of Mar, 23, whose mother is Mexican, reveals just how relevant this is:

(I haven’t felt discriminated against) ... Because I also think my Catalan is normal, it’s like the Catalan spoken here. [...] My mother is asked to switch to Spanish when she speaks Catalan. [...] But that has never happened to me because I speak Catalan really well.

These types of experiences coincide with those documented by Henao-Agudelo *et al.* (2016) in relation to Latin American families who have immigrated to Barcelona, and by Blanchet (2016) with regard to glottophobia, i.e., discrimination based on accent or speech pattern. Speaking with a Latin American accent can be interpreted as a sign of foreignness, even if the young person was born and has lived their entire life in Catalonia. Alba (19), whose mother is Dominican, expressed it clearly: “Some elderly women who speak Catalan when they address me, well, they do so in Spanish, and of course, it’s like saying ‘you don’t know Catalan’. So I answer them in Catalan, as if to say, ‘there’s no need to classify’”.

These situations illustrate how accent, beyond language, becomes a marker of identity, operating as a symbolic boundary of inclusion. This linguistic discrimination adds to racialisation, creating an additional burden for those seeking to integrate into a social space that, in theory, shares their mother tongue.

In the case of indigenous Latin American languages, some testimonies showed how certain cultural heritages, especially indigenous ones, can be silenced even within the family environment. Carla (27, Peruvian mother) recounted how Quechua, her mother's mother tongue, was never passed on to her or her sisters: "My mother speaks Quechua, but she never taught it to us... It was frowned upon there, just like speaking any minority language".

This testimony illustrates not only the loss of linguistic heritage, but also the effects of double stigmatisation: in the country of origin and in the destination country. The rejection of Quechua is influenced by linguistic colonialism and a cultural hierarchy that privileges Spanish, even within the migrant communities themselves (Pedone; Araujo, 2008). Unlike European languages, indigenous languages such as Quechua are not recognised as valuable symbolic resources, and their intergenerational transmission is hampered by feelings of shame, subordination, or fear of discrimination.

4.4 Strategies of resistance, agency and identity negotiation based on Latin mixedness

We have shown how experiences of otherness and racialisation based on phenotype, stereotypes associated with the culture of origin, and language or accent generate ambiguities and tensions between socially assigned identities and subjective self-identifications. In response to these, our research revealed a wide range of adaptive strategies: some young people chose to neutralise their accent or avoid explicit references to their country of origin, while others actively claimed their multicultural heritage.

For example, the fluent and normative use of Catalan and Spanish allowed Victoria (21, Argentine mother) to "blend in" with the social majority, but her Latin American accent when speaking with her mother "gave her away." However, this passing was not a conscious strategy but rather a habitual practice of cultural and linguistic code-switching that reflects the conditionality of this privilege of invisibility (Evans; Evans, 2022): "I have always tried not to lose my (Argentine) accent, but not because I don't want to, but because it's something that happens every day... my mother calls me, and I change my accent very quickly, and the truth is that my friends are quite surprised".

This ability reflects a form of 'cultural bilingualism' which, although it allows them to avoid direct discrimination, also requires them to constantly negotiate between identity codes. In the same vein, Lucía (22 years old, Mexican father) recounted how she changed the way she spoke depending on the country she was in: "They see me as Spanish because my Spanish has no accent here in Catalonia... But when I'm there (in Mexico), I switch to Mexican Spanish in two seconds, eh?".

The above testimonies reveal the everyday nature of transnational identities that adapt to the context in a performative way. Belonging or exclusion in relation to transnational networks and connection or separation from the extended family in the countries of origin were key elements in the construction of identities with respect to mixedness (Hansen, 2017; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a).

Far from assuming a stable or unambiguous identity, many of the young people interviewed constructed their identities based on ambivalence, flexibility, and, at times, detachment. The experience of Lucía (23), whose father is Mexican and whose family background is affluent and “white” (both parents were university professors), is paradigmatic of this latter attitude or strategy:

When I’m there (in Mexico), they constantly remind me that I’m Spanish. [...] And when I’m here, they remind me that I’m Mexican. [...] I feel at home everywhere, I feel like I’m from Barcelona, I feel like I’m from Mexico, I feel like I’m from Chicago... The thing is, I don’t identify with anything in particular. I just can’t...

Despite these “reminders” that limited opportunities for negotiation and choice, Lucía’s case demonstrates the presence of cosmopolitan identities capable of transcending national borders and traditional ethnic labels, yet more accessible to young people of mixed ancestry with greater sociocultural capital and an appearance assimilable to the cultural majority, who rarely saw their feelings of belonging or social inclusion questioned (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a). In the words of Esther (22, Spanish father and Dominican mother): “It’s very difficult. I was born here, and I’ve lived here all my life. I have things that are part of Catalan culture, but I’m not really able to go out in a demonstration with the (Catalan) flag, because I don’t feel like I belong anywhere. It’s like a feeling... that I’m part of the world and that’s it”.

In contrast, some racialised young people developed black pride or an ethno-racial identification linked to their immigrant parent in response to experiences of racialisation, as a reaction to the dissonance between their self-perception and the racial identity socially attributed to them (Burke & Kao, 2011). Thus, Justina (20), whose mother is Dominican, said significantly: “Yes, at home my mother has always called me ‘my little black girl’, and at school too. I am ‘the black girl’, and I am not offended at all!”.

At the same time, transnational family ties frequently operated as concrete resources of emotional support and symbolic recognition. For several respondents, regular communication with grandparents, cousins and aunts abroad, together with occasional visits, offered a social space in which their mixed background was ordinary rather than problematised. Sandra (16, Spanish father and Dominican mother), who strongly

valued her maternal kinship network, explained that contact with the Dominican Republic was maintained “through WhatsApp, Facebook... whatever,” and that when she visited she experienced the country as “another world... very different, but very beautiful,” highlighting the warmth and generosity of people despite material hardship. In her case, digital communication, music and recurring family gatherings in Barcelona around Dominican food and dance sustained a positive everyday connection with her maternal heritage, allowing “Latinidad” to be associated with joy, solidarity and family cohesion rather than with stigma.

Likewise, Esther (22) expressed a desire to reconnect more intensely with the Dominican side of her family, stating: “I would like to have more contact. It is something that is inside me and I think I would discover things about myself that would be interesting”. Her words illustrate how transnational belonging was not simply inherited but actively sought as part of a process of self-discovery. For respondents who experienced ambiguity in Catalonia – being read as not fully Catalan, Spanish or legitimate members of the majority – these cross-border ties functioned as an alternative repertoire of agency. Rather than signalling failed integration, connections with the migrant parent’s country often enabled them to re-signify their Latin American ancestry on more favourable terms, strengthen self-esteem, and construct more plural identifications spanning several social worlds simultaneously.

In short, as we pointed out previously (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b), young people of mixed origin develop identity strategies that allow them to move between different worlds, although this does not guarantee that they will be fully accepted in any of them, especially when they display phenotypic, cultural, and/or visible traits that make them appear as “foreigners”.

Discussion and conclusions

The results of our research show that the identity trajectories of young people of mixed Latin American origin in Catalonia are marked by dynamics of ambivalence, polarisation, and tension between belonging and exclusion or discrimination. Contrary to narratives that associate mixed heritage with a privileged process of integration, especially in contexts of linguistic and cultural proximity such as the Hispanic American one, this study demonstrates that such assumptions are, to a large extent, integrationist fictions that conceal persistent structural inequalities.

One of the main findings is the confirmation that mixed-race is not an *a priori* privilege (Ballestín-González *et al.*, 2025a, 2025b; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2021a). Although some young people experience what has been termed passing – that is, the

possibility of “passing for native” when their phenotype aligns with hegemonic whiteness – this ambivalent privilege is fragile and easily reversible. Racialisation is triggered when visible markers such as skin colour, Afro-descendant or indigenous features, or explicit references to family origin emerge, activating processes of stigmatisation and symbolic exclusion (Rodríguez-García *et al.*, id.).

Likewise, the use of non-normative accents or variants of Spanish associated with Latin America can generate glottophobia, especially in a context such as Catalonia, where proficiency in normative Catalan is seen as a marker of integration and prestige (Ballestín-González, 2008, 2011). Young people who speak both languages are excluded when their way of speaking (accent) or their appearance does not fit in with local perceptions. In the words of Blanchet (2016) and Henao-Agudelo *et al.* (2016), discrimination based on speech reinforces linguistic-racial hierarchies, demonstrating that language is not only a tool for communication but also a symbolic boundary.

Another fundamental issue that emerges from the analysis is the asymmetry of cultural capital within mixed families themselves. Despite the integrative discourse that presents mixing as a balanced cross between cultures, the truth is that elements linked to Spanish origin – language, name, phenotype, cultural references – tend to be socially legitimised, while elements of Latin American origin are often folklorised, made invisible, or directly rejected. This is the case, for example, with indigenous languages such as Quechua, whose intergenerational transmission has been blocked in many cases by fear of discrimination (Pedone and Araújo, 2008).

These forms of hierarchisation are intensified by intersectional logics that combine race, ethnicity, gender, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989; DaCosta, 2020; Sánchez *et al.*, 2014). Our study, therefore, refutes the essentialist view of mixed families as spaces of harmonious integration. Latin American mixedness in Catalonia is permeated by power structures that hierarchise bodies, accents, and cultural heritages. Cultural proximity does not eliminate structural racism, but rather transforms it, generating new forms of symbolic exclusion that are less visible but equally effective (Rodríguez-García, 2022). The polarisation between invisibility (passing) and racialised hypervisibility is conditioned by phenotype, the context of interaction, and different types of accumulated capital.

Faced with these tensions, young people develop various strategies for negotiating identity. Some of these include linguistic and cultural code-switching, accent neutralisation, pride associated with blackness or indigenous identity, or the adoption of cosmopolitan identities, either from an integrative perspective or from a generic detachment. These tactics allow them to move between contexts and manage their belonging in a situational way, but they do not guarantee full inclusion free of con-

traditions. As Evans and Evans (2022) point out, these relational identities respond to a situated multi-referential consciousness, which, while empowering youth agency, also reveals the social limits of recognition, especially for young people subjected to dynamics of racialisation.

Therefore, transnationalism should be understood not merely as the maintenance of family continuity across borders, but as a concrete repertoire of agency through which young people of mixed Latin American and Spanish heritage respond to experiences of ambivalent belonging in Catalonia. For many interviewees, regular contact with grandparents, cousins, and extended kin, together with recurrent visits, digital communication, music, food practices and family narratives, provided symbolic resources through which their Latin American background could be normalised and positively valued rather than stigmatised. This was particularly relevant for those who, in Catalonia, experienced racialisation linked to phenotype, accents, or stereotyped associations with “Latinidad”. In these cases, cross-border ties offered alternative spaces of recognition where mixedness was not read as anomaly or deficit, but as an ordinary and legitimate family condition. Unlike dominant assimilationist expectations, these practices did not reflect weak local integration; rather, they often enabled respondents to cope with exclusion, reaffirm self-esteem, and construct more plural identifications. This was especially visible among youths whose Spanish nationality or local upbringing coexisted with strong affective attachments to the migrant parent’s country of origin. As transnational scholarship has argued, migrants and their descendants mobilise social fields connecting several societies simultaneously, generating flexible identities and resources beyond the nation-state framework (Basch *et al.*, 1994; Gilliéron, 2021; Lacroix, 2012; Tedeschi *et al.*, 2020). In our case, mixed youth trajectories show that belonging is negotiated simultaneously through local hierarchies of race, language and legitimacy, and through transnational resources that allow them to re-signify their Latin American heritage on more favourable terms.

In conclusion, the study presented provides evidence of the multiple ways in which Latin American mixed heritage is articulated as a lived experience of ambivalence, inequality, and resilience. Far from being an automatic marker of integration, being the son or daughter of a mixed family in Catalonia can involve a complex journey of identity negotiation, resistance to discrimination, and the construction of hybrid belongings. It is essential that public policies, school practices, and media discourse recognise the specificity and richness of these mixed trajectories, without obscuring the inequalities that run through them.

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