Article

Mixedness and Intersectionality: The Use of Relief Maps to Understand the Experiences of Multiracial Women of African Descent in Spain

Teresa Habimana-Jordana * and Dan Rodríguez-García *

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), 08193 Bellaterra, Spain
* Correspondence: nyiraberateresa.habimana@uab.cat (T.H.-J.); dan.rodriguez@uab.cat (D.R.-G.)

Abstract: This article analyzes the experiences of multiracial women of African descent in Catalonia, Spain—looking at their identity processes, social relations, experiences of racialization and discrimination, and strategies of resistance—using a novel qualitative research method called "Relief Maps," a very useful tool for the study of social inequalities from an intersectional and multilocational perspective. Relief Maps are a data collection tool and a means of visualizing and analyzing data—providing a graphical representation of interviewee narratives that discuss processes of social inclusion and exclusion. The maps represent three dimensions of experience: (1) psychological (indicating the respondent's level of discomfort or well-being); (2) geographical (including at least five physical or experiential locations: e.g., home, street, work, school); and (3) social (examining seven social variables or aspects of identity: i.e., gender, ethnicity/skin color, age, sexual orientation, social class, physical appearance, and religion). In this way, the maps show where greater or lesser well-being or discomfort is experienced by the respondent based on each aspect of identity, thus indicating personal places of oppression, places of controversial intersections, neutral places, and places of relief. We argue that this supplementary investigative technique is highly relevant to research in the social sciences, particularly in the field of mixed-race, critical race, and ethnic studies, as it provides an intersectional, reflective, nuanced, and contextual lens for understanding complex social phenomena, leading to information of greater analytical strength.

Keywords: mixedness; qualitative research methods; Relief Map; discrimination; intersectionality; multiracialism; mixed-race studies; Afro-feminism; Spain

1. Introduction

Mixedness (i.e., mixed couples and multiracial or multiethnic individuals) is a critical social phenomenon for revealing salient dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion, as the crossing of social boundaries and categories, in addition to the in-between spaces that emerge, exposes group boundaries and also indicates their transformation. In this sense, mixedness can be understood as a "third space" of intercultural negotiation in which socio-cultural differences (ethnicity, "race," class, gender, religion, etc.) intersect and are contested and transformed (Ali 2003; Anthias 2007; Varro 2003; Rodríguez-García 2015).

Currently, there is little published research that focuses specifically on the life experiences of multiracial and multiethnic individuals living outside English-speaking countries. In Spain, for example, the study of mixedness—as well as the field of mixed-race studies in general—is still emerging in comparison with traditional immigration countries (Rodríguez-García 2022; Rodríguez-García and Rodríguez-Reche 2022; Rodríguez-García et al. 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

Spain is an interesting case study because of its historically problematic relationship with diversity. It is in Spain where we can find some of the first detailed constructs of the idea of "race" and "whiteness," dating back to the 13th century (Rodríguez-García

2021, 2022). This racist ideology also underpinned and shaped Spain's colonization of the Americas and of parts of Asia and Africa, with enduring effects. During the entire period of Spanish colonization, mixedness was problematized and even prohibited (see Rodríguez-García 2021). This specific history, together with the important contemporary experiences of international immigration and growing "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2007) in Spain, has made this country an important research case for examining ethnic and race relations and questions of social inclusion/exclusion.

Previous studies conducted in Spain have pointed out that skin color and other physical traits that are interpreted as attributes of "race" are crucial markers for interaction, social inclusion/exclusion, and differential treatment (Cornejo Parriego 2007; Flores 2015; Giliberti 2013; Rodríguez-García 2022; Rodríguez-García et al. 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Specifically, with regard to Spain's Afro-descendant[1] populations, Garcés (2011, 2016, 2018) analyzes how identity claims arise as a response to and consequence of social injustice and structural processes of exclusion suffered by certain individuals/groups, whose access to common resources and goods is systemically limited. This author proposes different types of identities that have developed as a result of the external gaze and the process of "ethnocolonization" (i.e., the process by which an imposed identity resulting from a context or history of colonization is internalized and assumed as natural (Garcés 2011)).

Specifically regarding the experiences of multiracial and multiethnic populations, previous studies have found that people experience mixedness in very different ways, depending on factors such as specific ethno-racial ancestry, gender, and social class; such studies point out that a crucial factor determining dynamics of mixedness in Spain is "visibility"—that is, the external markers perceived as shared or not shared with the majority population. People who are perceived as "other" due to historically stigmatizing markers (such as a darker skin color) have more limited options in their social interactions and identity choices. "It is greatly through these visible and phenotypical markers that individuals are socially categorized and valued as either members of the host society ('us') or as outsiders ('them')" (Rodríguez-García et al. 2021b, pp. 841–42). In the case of Spain, some of the strongest levels of rejection and discrimination are experienced by people of black-African heritage (Rodríguez-García 2022; Rodríguez-García et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Previous research outside of Spain also points out that racialized groups are more constrained in their identity options and social interactions (see, for example, Song 2017; Brunsma 2006; Khanna 2010; Chito Childs 2006, 2014; see also critical race theory studies by Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Gonzales 2019).

However, there is still a dearth of studies that focus in particular on the experiences of women who navigate these processes, not to mention studies that apply an intersectional perspective to these experiences. Remei Sipi's (1997, 2000) and Mercedes Jabardo's (1998, 2002, 2005) pioneering work on Afro-descendant women in Spain has already pointed out the importance of undertaking more nuanced analyses that simultaneously analyze a variety of variables—such as race and gender—in order to arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the experiences of Afro-descendant female populations in Spain.

This article aims to contribute further to filling this research gap, both in terms of the subject matter addressed and the methodological approach selected. Our study analyzes the intersectional identity and discrimination experiences of multiracial women (including young women) of African descent in Catalonia, Spain—looking at their identity processes, social relations, and experiences of racialization and discrimination, as well as their strategies of resistance—through the use of "Relief Maps," a novel methodological tool that can be used to supplement and complement more traditional data collection methods. Most qualitative studies on mixedness, whether involving families or individuals, fall short in fully capturing the intersectional dynamics at play in multiracial and multiethnic experiences. In this article, Relief Maps are presented as an effective way of capturing nuanced intersectional dynamics and illuminating the contextual nature of experiences of social inclusion and exclusion. Relief Maps emerge as an innovative and useful qualitative technique for visualizing genealogies and personal trajectories and for revealing to what

extent people's—specifically multiracial women's—experiences of social inclusion or inequality are contextual, interdimensional, and multiform. A key goal of this article, then, is to contribute methodologically to the study of mixedness.

The information provided in this article draws on ongoing doctoral research titled "Life Trajectories and Everyday Spaces of Afro-descendant Women in Catalonia, Spain: An Intersectional Approach to Mixedness and Identity," which was part of a larger study on the social relations and identity processes of descendants of mixed unions in Spain.[2] One of the main findings of the larger study was the pervasiveness and persistence of constructs of "race" in Spanish society—having their origins in historically constructed visible markers, such as darker skin color—which have a significant impact on the identity processes and the everyday life of multiracial youth. As previously mentioned in this Introduction, racialized individuals in Spain, mostly of black-African and North African descent, experience more discrimination and constraints in their identity choices than other groups.[3] The current doctoral research focuses on analyzing the self-identification, sense of belonging, experiences of stigmatization/discrimination, and strategies of resistance and agency of Afro-descendant multiracial women in Spain (i.e., the racialized daughters of African-Spanish mixed couples)—themes that will similarly be explored in this article, using Relief Maps as an important analytical tool.

The research that is presented here employs a biographical-narrative approach, in keeping with both the self-ethnography paradigm and a dialogical feminism perspective, and was prompted by the personal "identity equation" of one of the authors, who is a mixed Afro-descendant woman (see also Habimana-Jordana 2021). As social researchers, we cannot ignore the inevitable influence that our bodies and our perspectives exert on the production of knowledge (see Blanco 2012; Collins 2017; Esteban 2004a, 2004b; Harding 2004). It is crucial to recognize the constant interaction and tension between one's own experience and the research process, especially when both universes are so intertwined that they become inseparable and it becomes impossible to identify where each begins and ends (see Ellis 2004; Ellis et al. 2015; Holman Jones 2005). Adopting a perspective that considers race, ethnicity, and gender as intertwined factors, this article determines its analytical criteria based on the theory of knowledge (Haraway 1991), on the one hand, and the intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hancock 2007; Yuval-Davis 2006), on the other, although both theoretical corpuses are inextricably linked (Jorba and Rodó-de-Zárate 2019). An important idea that also informs our study is that perceptions and experiences of identity and discrimination are context-dependent, flexible, multiform, relational, and shifting in both time and space (Anthias 2020).

2. Methodology

In our study we have used the biographical-narrative methodological approach, which gives centrality to the narrated experience of the research participant, thus assigning it epistemological value. In this way, the narrative becomes a source of knowledge that is of great value for understanding the social fact (Arias Cardona and Alvarado Salgado 2015; Martínez-Guzmán and Montenegro 2014; May 2015). These narratives are developed through a methodology of dialogue, where the relational link established between researchers and participants constitutes the main source of knowledge (Arias Cardona and Alvarado Salgado 2015; Ferraroti 1981). The emphasis here is, therefore, on the dialectical relationship established between human action and social structure (Ferraroti 1981), which, in turn, in narrative territory, translates into a dialectic between text and context (Ferraroti 1981) and also between biography and history (Mills [1960] 1970).

We believe that it is essential to adopt this dialectical vision that links the individual and their biography or personal story with the larger social structure in order to understand the logics and dynamics that take place within the different systems/contexts of inequality as well as the repercussions that these dynamics have on social interactions and identity processes. Rodó-de-Zárate (2021)—the creator of the Relief Maps method, which will be discussed later on—reveals this dialectical tension between personal experience and social

structure very well when alluding to the crucial contributions made by Black American female authors such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks, who have reflected on their own biographies. She states that

> (. . .) reflection on one's own life is what makes it possible to politicize the experience of oppression and to name concrete forms of violence, discrimination and inequality, but also of agency, which were not even named (p. 137) (. . .) [B]y analyzing the concrete situated experience, one tries to understand how the different systems of inequality function, how they relate to each other and what role emotions and places play in their reproduction (pp. 173–74).

This last point, the link between systems of inequality and emotions/places, is a necessary consideration in order to advance our analysis of racialized visibility and its connections with the "third space" carved out and experienced by mixed-race people. In this sense, Relief Maps are an ideal research technique for smoothly connecting social, psychological, and geographical dimensions of experience.

Using a hermeneutic epistemological approach, which focuses on the construction and interpretation of personal history in the first person, seven in-depth case studies of the experiences of female descendants of mixed marriages, each one having an Afro-descendant phenotype, were conducted; five of these cases have been detailed in this article. For each case study, different sessions were held with the respective participant in order to collect their life story via a methodology of dialogue. This type of methodology encompassed different techniques designed ad hoc to complement the prototypical semi-structured interview and to capture in greater depth the more complex aspects of subjectivity and intimacy that characterize this study. The various data collection techniques that were applied, importantly Relief Maps, aimed to overcome the usual inertias and dynamics of the ordinary interview context and instead to offer the participant more space for introspection, monologue, and reflexivity.

If there is one example that perfectly illustrates why it is so important to trace genealogies and return to origins in order to understand any event in its entirety, it is the Relief Map. It is precisely in its origins that we find the richness and multifaceted approach that characterize this methodological and reflexive tool, leading it to become a pioneering model and a point of reference in the study of intersectional dynamics. Although the Relief Map was initially designed as a methodological tool, its development and multiplicity of applications have taken it beyond the strictly academic sphere, making it a very useful pedagogical tool in the fields of intervention, activism, and teaching, among others.

Its creator, Maria Rodó-de-Zárate, designed the Relief Map as a complementary technique to conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups in order to analyze, through an intersectional lens, the access of Catalan youth to the public space (Rodó-de-Zárate 2014, 2016). In her research, the author conceives of public space as a place where power relationships and structures constrain citizens' experiences. In other words, public space does not act only as a place where experiences simply occur, but the space itself fosters certain tensions between individuals and collectives, which have repercussions on people's emotional state, and, in turn, consequences at the social level (see Massey 2005). Both spheres (emotional and social) feed back into each other, as the lived emotional experience will condition future perceptions and actions in certain spaces, generating and reinforcing certain social dynamics that often imply social inequality. In this way, the researcher's aim was to connect the three dimensions that come into play when analyzing public space as a place where power dynamics that influence the reproduction of social inequality occur. These three aspects are the geographical, psychological or emotional, and social dimensions. Hence, the aim was to be able to analyze the relationships between different power structures and identify which identities conditioned certain experiences in public space (Rodó-de-Zárate 2016, p. 149).

Relief Maps are a data collection tool, an analytical method, and a means of visualizing data—providing a graphical representation of interviewee narratives that discuss processes of social inclusion and exclusion. The maps represent three dimensions of experience (social,

geographical, and psychological) and ultimately indicate four types of "places," locations, or experiential spaces (i.e., places of oppression, places of controversial intersections, neutral places, and places of relief), illustrating graphically the links between respondent experiences and locations (e.g., family, work, and leisure spaces) to show where greater or lesser well-being or discomfort is experienced. Originally designed to be produced on paper, Relief Maps are also available as a digital tool, using technology to facilitate the tasks of data collection, codification, transcription, data analysis, and viewing.

To facilitate the understanding of this tool, we provide a figure from an article published by Rodó-de-Zárate in 2016, in which she presented the uses and the applicability of this tool within what she refers to as "geographies of intersectionality."[4] Visuality is one of the Relief Map's main features, as it allows the complex interconnections that take place between the three dimensions to be presented in a very clear manner (see Figure 1).
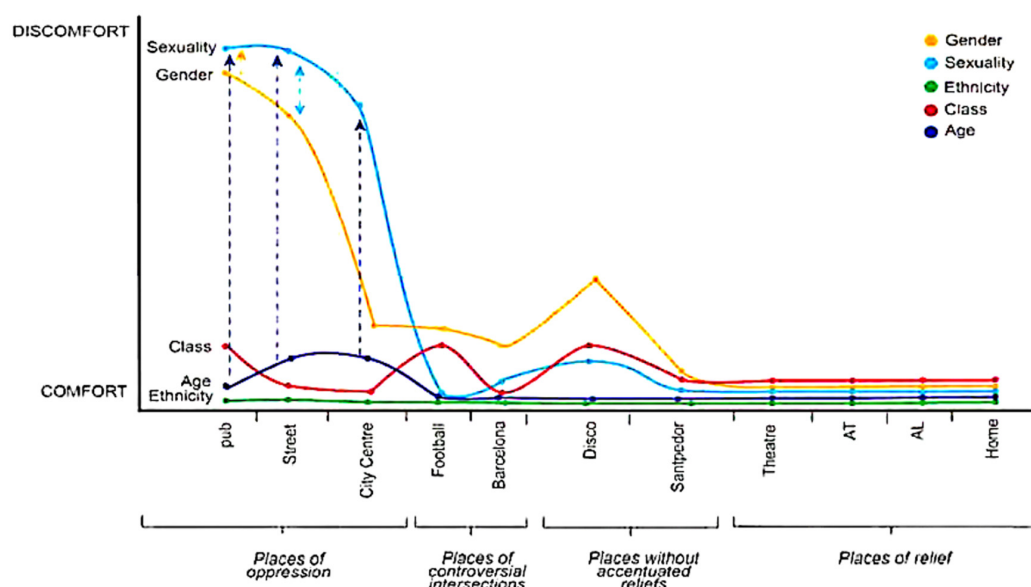

Figure 1. Sample Relief Map (Rodó-de-Zárate 2016, p. 150).

As can be seen in the above example, the Relief Map presents a structure similar to that of a classic graph composed of (x) and (y) axes. However, in no case does it represent a graph with quantifiable data. On the contrary, the Relief Map collects and visualizes subjective perceptions of how individuals may feel in certain places according to certain social axes or overlapping social factors related to privilege and oppression. That is, far from being a graph that quantifies lived experience, Relief Maps are a representation of intersectionality as lived experience (Rodó-de-Zárate 2016).

The (x) axis represents the geographical dimension of experience and includes different spaces or experiential locations (e.g., home, street, work, school). And the (y) axis corresponds to the psychological dimension of experience, in which the participant evaluates their experiences of comfort or discomfort according to different social variables or aspects of identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, social class, physical appearance, religion), each of which is differentiated by a distinct color in the legend of the graph. Intersectionality is represented through the interplay between all these dimensions of experience and the social and psychological variables at play.

"Intersectionality" is a sort of catch-all term nowadays that is increasingly employed from different perspectives (academic, institutional, activist, etc.) and for a wide variety of purposes. Such is the level of popularity of this concept that its use (more than its implementation) has become mainstream (Collins 2015, 2017; Lugones 2008; Vigoya 2016). On the one hand, we can interpret this development in a positive sense, as the interest in the study of oppression and privilege from an approach that recognizes multiplicity

and that goes hand in hand with feminism—and which also embraces so many sectors of society—is something unprecedented. On the other hand, we join the voices that warn of the danger of this superficial "obsession" with intersectionality (Bastia 2014; Curiel 2014; Verloo 2006) that often results in depoliticized and uncritical proposals. In this sense, we consider it appropriate to present our position in relation to this popular concept (see Cho et al. 2013) by linking it to the use and application of Relief Maps in research case studies.

As we explained earlier, being able to identify the confluence of different categorial elements (gender, ethnicity, etc.) is vital to our analysis in each case study, as we recognize the importance and effects that these social categories and their convergences can have on identity processes and social relations. Undoubtedly, the research participants and their stories must be approached from an intersectional perspective. To this end, we adopt May's (2015) proposal for an intercategorial approach to intersectionality, which advocates a provisional and strategic use of categories. In other words, we defend the Relief Map's use of analytical categories (gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, etc.), as we consider these social factors or groupings to be directly connected to relations of inequality, but we do so provisionally and with a critical attitude. In no case do we seek to create or reify identity categories and confine them within rigid structures; on the contrary, we consider that the temporary use of certain categories can shed light on intersectional dynamics and their connection to power and inequality (see Rodó-de-Zárate 2021). In this sense, Relief Maps become the perfect allies when it comes to making these tensions between analytical categories and inequality visible, since the fact of representing different categorial axes and connecting them with the psycho-geographical dimensions allows us to focus on the structural dimension, which is where inequalities are (re)produced. Rodó-de-Zárate (2021), the creator of Relief Maps, resolves this tension very well when she states the following:

> Relief Maps propose an approach to intersectionality that is not based on social categories, but on power structures (p. 195) (. . .) By making structures visible, and not identities, and by adding the dynamism of place, [Relief Maps] focus on the effects produced by positions and not on the positions themselves. In other words, they focus on the systematic dynamics of the (re)production of inequality, rather than on questions of identity (p. 196).

This approach is crucial when analyzing the dynamics of inequality from a structural perspective. In this sense, intersectionality, far from using identity categories as rigid containers that limit and essentialize identity (and identification) processes, is a very useful concept for the study of intersectional dynamics, which are understood as the result of structural, changing, and constantly reformulating processes (Rodó-de-Zárate 2014, 2016; Rodó-de-Zárate 2021).

In the analysis of inequality, this dialectic between the psychological dimension (from an individualistic perspective) and the social dimension has been widely discussed, especially in the study of racism as a social phenomenon. Authors such as Fanon (1952a, 1952b), Davis (1981), Grosfoguel (2009), and Mbembe (2016) have shown the connections between racism and the historical material structures and conditions that make its (re)production possible. Within this context, the notion of corporeality acquires a fundamental role in analyses of intersectional dynamics that include social axes and categories related to racialization. It is for this reason that the category of "ethnicity" is defined in our study in a way that encompasses notions of racialization.[5]

However, racialization is not the only reading of corporeality that we make in this study. As a category of analysis in the case studies undertaken, corporeality includes dual aspects: we analyze it, on the one hand, in terms of its influence on processes of racialization, and, on the other hand, in relation to the hegemonic canons of beauty (Reece 2019; Yuval-Davis 2006). In summary, our proposed Relief Map as applied to the case studies considers the notion of corporeality through both the category of ethnicity (and its correspondence with Afro-descendant racialization) and the category of "physical appearance," although both dimensions are intertwined.[6]

The seven case studies on which this article is based were conducted with working- and middle-class multiracial Afro-descendant Spanish females between the ages of sixteen and forty who resided in the Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia, both in rural and urban areas (including Tarragona, central and inland Catalonia, central-eastern Catalonia, the coast of Girona, and some cities in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona). As previously mentioned, the biographical method was used for this research. The "life-story" interviews with the participants in the study were conducted between the years 2019 and 2021. The recruitment of participants took place through two channels: (1) through our larger R&D project (see notes 2 and 3), as some participants in that project expressed interest in continuing to contribute to our research on gender and racialization; and (2) through a call for participants that was circulated among our personal and professional networks.

Each life-story required several meetings with the respective participants and lasted an average of two and a half hours per session. The meetings generally took place in the participants' homes or in quiet public settings. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder before being fully transcribed and analyzed. Before beginning the recorded interview, all the participants signed an informed consent form, which guaranteed the confidentiality of the information collected and their anonymity.[7] The life-story guide was organized into various sections, each of which included questions related to a variety of themes: migratory trajectory of the immigrant parent(s), daily life, family relations, schooling and work, socializing and leisure activities, friendships, identity, experiences of discrimination, life satisfaction, and so forth.

Relief Maps, modified for this particular research study, were applied in the following way. The participants were asked to note on the (x) axis the main spaces for socializing in their daily lives: that is, the places they frequented most regularly (e.g., home, educational centers, leisure spaces). They were then asked to rate how they felt in each place according to different identity variables or categories, each one of which was represented on the map by a different color. The variables/categories included on the Relief Maps were gender, ethnicity (skin color), age, sexual orientation, and social class; physical appearance and religion were also included in most cases. In order to indicate (i.e., on the map) the level of comfort or discomfort they experienced with respect to each variable in each distinct location, the participants were asked to take into account the (y) axis, where the values of comfort and discomfort appeared by default.

The category of ethnicity was operationalized in this study based on the experiences of perceived racialization articulated by Afro-descendant populations in Spain. As has been argued earlier in this article, bodily elements such as skin or hair color acquire great social relevance, as they are considered constitutive elements of Afro-descendant racialization. In the Relief Map created by participants, this category was, therefore, named "ethnicity (skin color)."

Relief Maps were one of the main techniques used in the study, but not the only one. Within the framework of the biographical method that characterizes this research, the Relief Map was introduced as a complementary tool to the in-depth interview; therefore, it must be conceived of as an auxiliary technique that supplements—and dialogues with—the oral narrative provided by participants. Although the visuality of the Relief Map makes it a very attractive tool, it is important to bear in mind that the drawing/graph itself only partly represents the potential of this technique, since without a narrative to accompany and describe it, any possible interpretation or inference would be incomplete and biased. In other words, the Relief Map, as a technique applied ad hoc to the in-depth interview, has to be understood from the first-person account of the participant, who interprets it by narrating their own experiences. The drawings and their narrative interpretations, in dialogue with an intersectional approach—as discussed earlier—allow us to focus on certain questions and findings that we consider particularly relevant, which will be set out below in the Results section. The findings obtained from the Relief Map analysis, therefore, should not be interpreted as total results, but as a part of the whole set of data obtained in the framework of the study.[8]

3. Results

In this section, we present some findings and reflections resulting from the application of Relief Maps during the life history reconstruction sessions with selected participants in our research.

In keeping with the objectives of the study, we will focus on the information provided by the Relief Maps that reveals effects produced by certain intersectional dynamics in the participants' social interactions and identity processes. For reasons of space, we will show only some of the Relief Maps that were created by the multiracial Afro-descendant female participants and will concentrate our descriptive and analytical discussion on key research findings that emerged concerning self-identification, sense of belonging, and experiences of stigmatization and discrimination, as well as strategies of resistance to cope with the latter.

Discomfort, Well-Being, and Places: An Intersectional Reading

Drawing on Rodó-de-Zárate's (2021) proposed typology of "discomforts" that either stem from oppression or are directly associated with privilege, for the case at hand, we will focus on a specific type of discomfort and well-being: systemic and systematic. These types of emotions are directly linked to structures of oppression and privilege, and therefore facilitate understanding of the dialectical connection established between the psychological/emotional dimension and the social/structural dimension. Rodó-de-Zárate (2021) describes systemic/systematic discomforts as those that are related to positions of oppression in a system (systemic) and/or that occur regularly in places of everyday life (systematic). The spatial aspect is very relevant, as these types of discomforts often limit, restrict, or even deny access to, participation in, or enjoyment of certain spaces of everyday life. The corporeality component, therefore, often becomes very relevant (e.g., young bodies in a political decision-making space, black bodies in academia, or female bodies on a professional football pitch). In contrast, systemic/systematic discomforts of well-being would be well-being that is derived from any of various positions of privilege that contribute to the embeddedness of certain bodies and statuses in the spaces of everyday life. These forms of well-being are configured as non-emotions, since they are identified only when they are lost (Ahmed 2010).

In the Relief Maps drawn by the participants of our study, we identified a systemic/systematic type of discomfort that reproduces a fairly similar pattern in all cases. Associated with the category of ethnicity/skin color, a heightened degree of discomfort was described by participants in their school experiences. Although this perception of discomfort may have varied among participants and may not have been uniform across all educational settings or at all academic stages (e.g., primary school, high school, college, etc.), in general, this axis—in theoretical terms and as visually indicated on the Relief Maps—stands out significantly, and it does so above all in places of education.

The first case we present (see the Relief Map shown in Figure 2 below) describes the experiences of Sara, a 22-year-old woman born in Colombia, with parents from Brazil and Colombia. She migrated to Spain as a result of family reunification: that is, to stay with her mother, who had been living and working in Spain for several years. Her arrival in Spain took place at a very crucial moment in her school career (i.e., secondary education/high school), which, as illustrated in her Relief Map, is reflected in her perceptions of discomfort. Her map provides an effective example for visualizing the distance that may occur between ethnicity and other identity dimensions in terms of perceived social impacts in different contexts (i.e., effects on social interactions, effects on sense of belonging or exclusion, etc.). Importantly, her map shows levels of pronounced discomfort in various learning environments in Spain.[9]
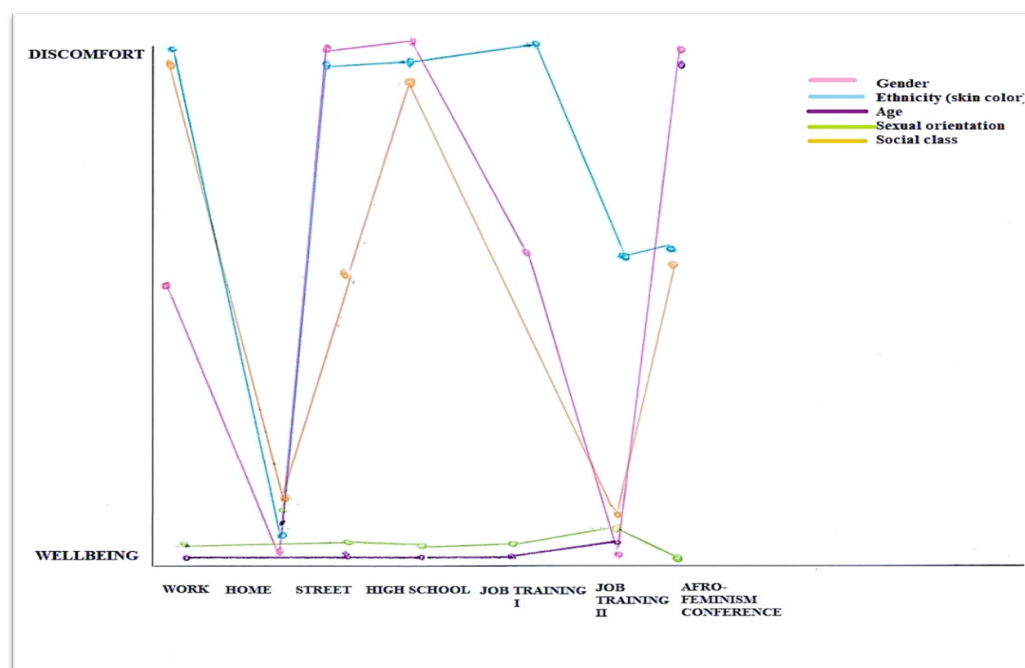
Figure 2. Relief Map drawn by Sara.

In this same diagram, we see how the systemic/systematic discomfort produced by the category of ethnicity is heightened in other locations: on the street (i.e., in the public space of the street) and at work (as a waitress). Both locations constitute spaces with a strong component of public exposure. While the street is more evidently a place where public life occurs, the specific work context of waitressing also has strong links to the public sphere, owing to the number and type of relationships it fosters (Netto 2012).

Looking at Sara's Relief Map, we can also see that in some of the locations—for example, on the street and in high school—another aspect of identity stands out significantly: gender. The greatly increased discomfort experienced by Sara in certain settings, which she described both through her Relief Map and her storytelling, sheds light on how the mutually constitutive factors of gender and ethnicity—both crucial to understandings of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991)—can intersect with one another in a complex manner and intensify experiences of discrimination/marginalization/oppression.

If we continue to examine Sara's story and her Relief Map (Figure 2), we more clearly understand how gender and ethnicity intersect in the space of the street. Although Sara's map indicates high levels of discomfort experienced in the street context for both these aspects of identity, her narrative, in fact, revealed that the street is sometimes a place of relief for her in terms of experiencing shared ethnicity (e.g., same visibility due to racialization based on skin color), as the street is a place where different people, often of wide ethnic diversity, converge. In this sense, as Sara related during the mapping process, shared ethnicity becomes more powerful as a source of well-being and relief in the street location because it contrasts with the systemic/systematic discomfort that is experienced daily on the basis of one's racialized ethnicity/skin color. However, when we add the gender dimension to the equation, this sense of well-being can become diminished. From a classical gendered reading of spaces (Moore 1988; Rosaldo 1974), public space, as a space of male power with a strong component of objectification of the female body, can be an evident place of systemic/systematic discomfort, especially when the intersectional framework is also shaped by age (e.g., young) and/or a possible hypersexualization of the female body that is accentuated by the ethnicity component (i.e., "exoticization"—see hooks 1992; Lutz et al. 1995; Nadal et al. 2015; Quijano 2005). Sara's case shows how these various factors can converge. As she explained, when referring to a fellow citizen with whom

she a priori might have felt a sense of relief because of their shared racialized ethnic minority status,

> [The fact] that your people also treat you badly (. . .) It makes you feel insecure. (. . .) He stopped me—and I am used to being stopped because of [my dog]: "Oh, she's lovely! Can I pet her?" And I said, "OK, you can pet her." That's what people do, isn't it? [People just] touch her head and that's that. At that moment, he petted her head, but he touched me too—that is, he touched my breast. I haven't worn a bra for a long time and I felt very uncomfortable, and I pulled back, and so did he, and I pulled back farther and said, "Well, I'm going. Bye." And I turned to go and saw that he [still] had his hand on my chest. And I said, "I'm going! I'll pass!" (. . .) [And he said,] "Oh, but what's your name?" And I said, "Let me get by, please." [And he said,] "Oh, I want a girlfriend like you." And I said, "I already have a boyfriend. Let me pass. I won't tell you again."

> *Sara, 22 years old, Brazilian father, Colombian mother*

The next case we present (see Figure 3 below) is that of Judith, a 16-year-old female (she is the youngest of our participants), born in Catalonia, Spain, with parents from Senegal and Spain. Here we can also see an inflection of discomfort regarding ethnicity as experienced in the school environment (during both primary and secondary school). Once again, this particular Relief Map allows us to establish an important nuance that would not exist without the complement of the narrative, and vice versa. We can see that for the category of ethnicity/skin color, less discomfort is experienced by Judith in high school compared with her experiences in primary school. However, through analyzing this interviewee's narrative, we know that this decrease in the negative valuation of the experience of ethnicity is due to Judith exercising her own empowerment during her high school years in order to confront certain situations of discrimination and oppression linked to skin color. Although exposure to this type of situation not only continued from one school stage to the next but also, in fact, increased, Judith's different evaluation of the ethnicity factor in her Relief Map can be attributed to a change in her attitude and to her increased agency in these types of situations. As put by the interviewee herself,

> A joke is a joke and even I sometimes find them funny, but . . . sometimes they did go too far. You'd say, "I just don't feel like it; it's not necessary right now." But there were many jokes of this kind (. . .) When I was younger, I even thought, "I wish I'd been born white; everything would be much easier" (. . .) It affects me less [now], yes [in high school]. I've reached a point where I feel good about who I am and this part of me [my skin color]. And when I'm fed up, I just don't listen to them [the jokes]. I reach a point where I don't care and I block it out (. . .) They throw as many [jokes] at me as they want and I laugh because I don't want to have problems (. . .) I reach a point at which I feel fed up with it and then I triple block it.

> *Judith, 16 years old, Senegalese father, Spanish mother*

We can consider Judith's response to be a good example of a strategy of contestation that highlights the transformative potential and agency that take place when an individual identifies—and challenges—a systemic/systematic discomfort that affects them.

Without changing the focus from ethnicity, we now look at another variable that in some cases is experienced in a similar manner: physical appearance. As we have already argued, there is a very close relationship between these two "visible" aspects of identity. However, we have decided to analyze them on separate categorial axes in order to achieve greater precision in our analysis of the physical dimensions of identity. In this way, we are able to appreciate how the non-ethnic elements of appearance may be interconnected with the ethnic elements and the consequent effects that this intersection has on perceived experiences.

Although questions, doubts, and reflections were expressed by all the participants in this study concerning the difficulty of separating ethnicity/skin color and physical appearance into distinct identity categories and analyzing them in isolation, there were two

cases in particular that clearly illustrated the interconnectedness and mutual constitution of these two dimensions of identity/experience.
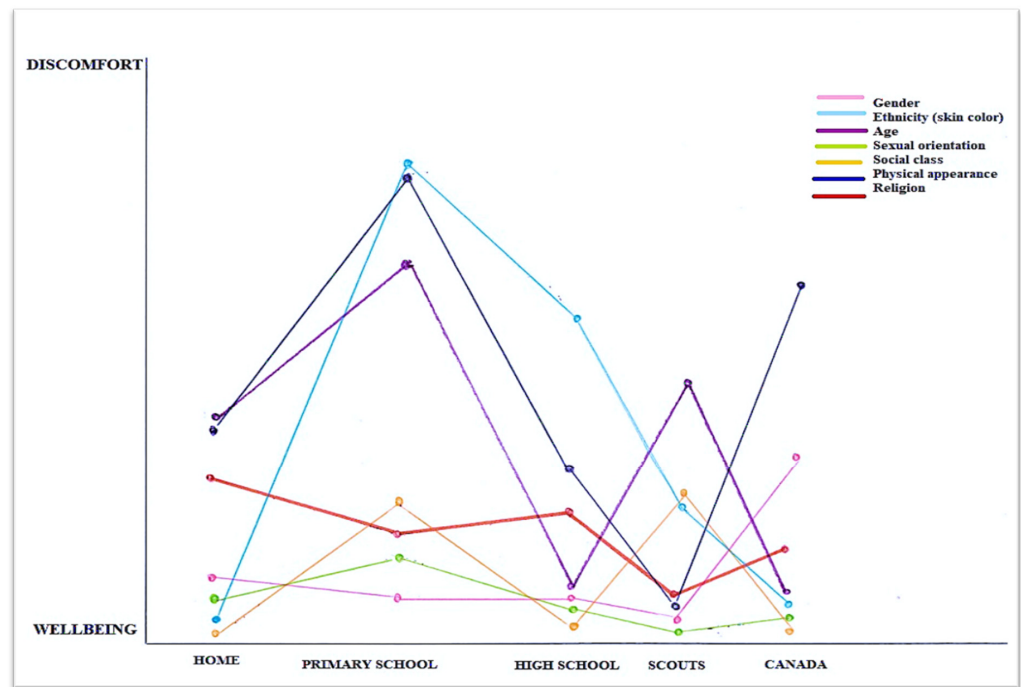

Figure 3. Relief Map drawn by Judith.

In Figure 4 (below), the Relief Map that represents the experiences of Anna, a 19-year-old female born in Catalonia, Spain, with parents from Spain and the Dominican Republic, we can see that both ethnicity and physical appearance follow an almost identical path in terms of emotional appraisals—that is, the degree of discomfort or well-being that is felt in each geographical or experiential location.
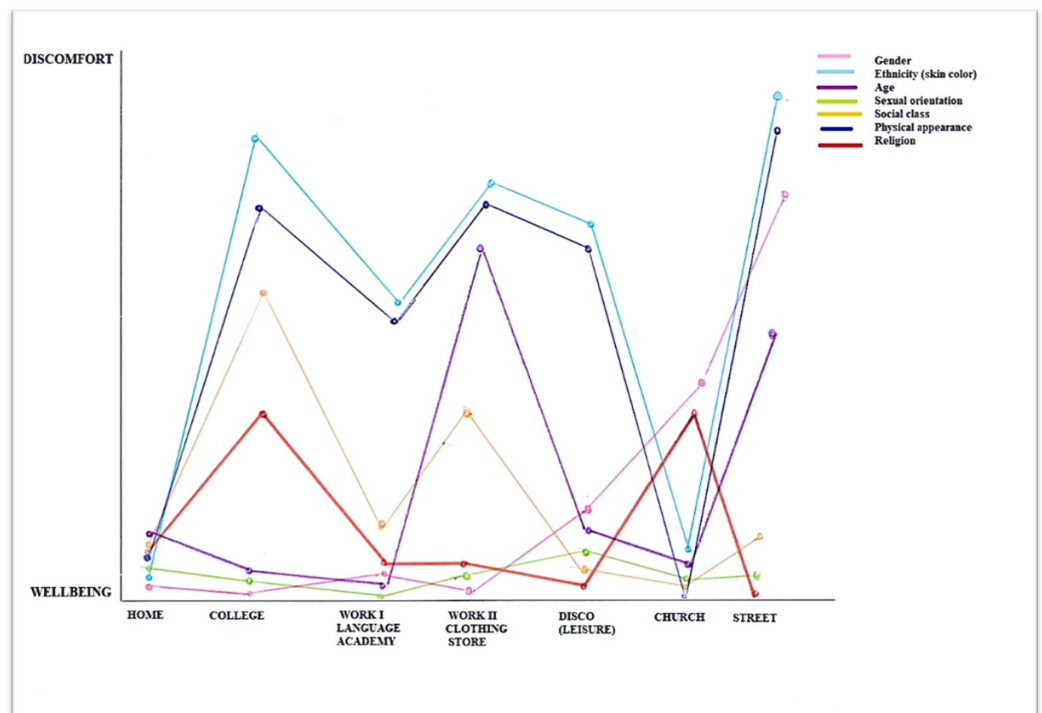

Figure 4. Relief Map drawn by Anna.

Once again, places of schooling (in this case, college) and public space (as illustrated by the street) are the main sources of systemic/systematic unease in terms of the ethnicity category, but this time, these spaces also produce almost identical effects in terms of physical appearance. As Anna explained during her interview,

> Because of the color of my skin and my physical appearance, I don't feel identified with anyone. The fact that I am the only racialized girl makes me feel different (. . .) These are my feelings, but sometimes [this perception] makes me feel uneasy. Sometimes I think, "Maybe if I were white, this wouldn't happen to me."
>
> *Anna, 19 years old, Spanish father, Dominican mother*

This participant placed great emphasis on her "feelings," often almost in the form of an apology for not being able to justify her comments with concrete facts or situations. We see this anecdotal observation as a highly significant finding, as it allows us to address the psychological dimension of racism—a dimension that is very important in experiences of discrimination but that often is underestimated and minimized. We regard emotions as fundamental in the analysis of racism precisely because the psychological aspects/effects of racist processes may go unnoticed or be deliberately ignored, which can then be used politically to play down grievances that point to everyday racism.

The second case in which we can identify a very close association between ethnicity and physical appearance corresponds to the experiences of Maria, a 25-year-old woman born in Catalonia, with parents from Congo and Spain. However, Maria's Relief Map (see Figure 5 below) and her emphasis during the interview on another crucial element related to physical appearance suggest a different and complex reading of her experiences. On the one hand, as in Anna's case, Maria's experience of systemic/systematic discomfort related to Afro-descendant racialization presents a similar narrative in terms of interiorizing self-perception, as the following interview excerpt shows:

> The color of my skin (. . .) I was really in over my head and it was one of the times when . . . I have also put it in my reflections [she refers to another activity called *Intimate Writing*]—that there was a time when I quite detested my skin color.
>
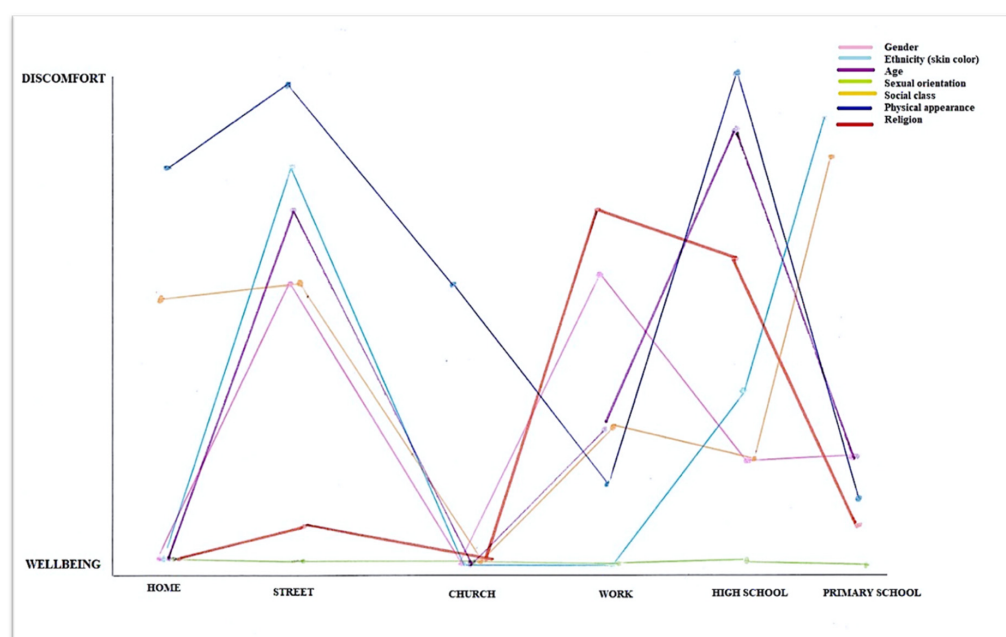> *Maria, 25 years old, Congolese father, Spanish mother*

Figure 5. Relief Map drawn by Maria.

On the other hand, in the case of this participant, there is another factor that shapes the specific experiences of systemic/systematic discomfort: fatphobic discrimination. This

issue emerges as one of the most influential conditioning factors in Maria's experiences of her own body. Looking at her Relief Map diagram (Figure 5), we can see that the experience of weight bias/weight stigma affects most areas of her everyday life. As Maria explained,

> I've always been the chubbiest person (. . .) [I've received] the typical comments of "You shouldn't eat so much" [or] "These clothes, don't they make your thighs look more pronounced?" (. . .) In this society in which we live, in the end, women have to be 36-23-36 and it's quite shameful (. . .) I didn't decide to be this way.

Another aspect that both Anna's and Maria's cases (Figures 4 and 5) have in common is the confluence of certain factors that facilitate a relieving sense of well-being in the space of the church. This fact is very significant, as it can reveal important information—including complexities that we may not at first recognize—about spaces for socializing that also constitute spaces of refuge. While both Anna and Maria identify the church as a place that provides relief in many respects, they do not group together feelings of well-being in the totality of the identity variables: Figure 4 illustrates how aspects such as religion and gender produce a certain degree of discomfort for Anna in the church setting; and Figure 5 shows that physical characteristics that are not related to ethnicity produce discomfort for Maria in this location. We could, therefore, consider these participants' respective churches as places of "controversial intersections" (Rodó-de-Zárate 2016, p. 150). That is, on the one hand, these places act as spaces of refuge and relief from the oppressions that are experienced on the basis of certain identity factors, but at the same time, these spaces are sources of discomfort when considering other aspects of identity. In her interview, Maria articulated this complex relationship:

> So I've heard comments like, "You've put on a bit of weight." They say that with all the love in the world, but they don't have to (. . .) My family and my friends [in the church] are the people who can destabilize me the most psychologically, I mean, totally, totally, totally.

Similarly, even the domestic space (home), which is often regarded as the "place of relief" par excellence, can be read as a place of controversial intersections, as sometimes not all aspects of identity are aligned with experiences of well-being in this space. We can observe this dynamic, for example, in the case of Maria, whose Relief Map (Figure 5 above) reflects the discomfort she feels because of experiencing fatphobia at home.

The case of 16-year-old Judith (see again Figure 3) also reveals complex feelings and intersections occurring in the home space. She expressed in her interview that discomfort can be caused both by adult-centric authoritarianism and by aesthetic (fatphobic) comments made by her parents:

> "You are too young, shut up" (. . .) "Girls your age, you shouldn't dress like that" (. . .) They know that if they say something to me, it gets into my head and if I go out, I will be uncomfortable all day long and I won't wear it [the outfit or item of clothing] anymore (. . .) My mother has a major complex about her legs . . . and [that] I'll have the same legs as her (. . .) Her complex has been passed on to me [by telling me,] "Don't get fat; be careful about this (. . .) Later on, you'll feel bad."

Another example where this type of dissonance is very significant is in the case of Carla, aged 19. As in the case of Anna, Carla's father is from Spain, and her mother is from the Dominican Republic. Looking at Carla's Relief Map (Figure 6 below), we can see that although home is a place of well-being with respect to most aspects of identity, it also represents a space of oppression by producing a high level of discomfort regarding the category of sexual orientation. As Carla explained,

> It's because of my mother. She doesn't accept my sexual orientation, but she respects it. But her way of respecting it is not to talk about it. So, it makes me uncomfortable and there are comments I have to keep quiet. [Regarding my mother's awareness of my sexual orientation] I think it was three weeks, a month, that she didn't look at me or talk to me (. . .) From that moment on, I have

never brought up the issue with my mother again. Sometimes, I've thought about telling her that I have a girlfriend, but then I am scared shitless, and I think, "Better not; don't tell her anything," because I don't want her to stop talking to me again.
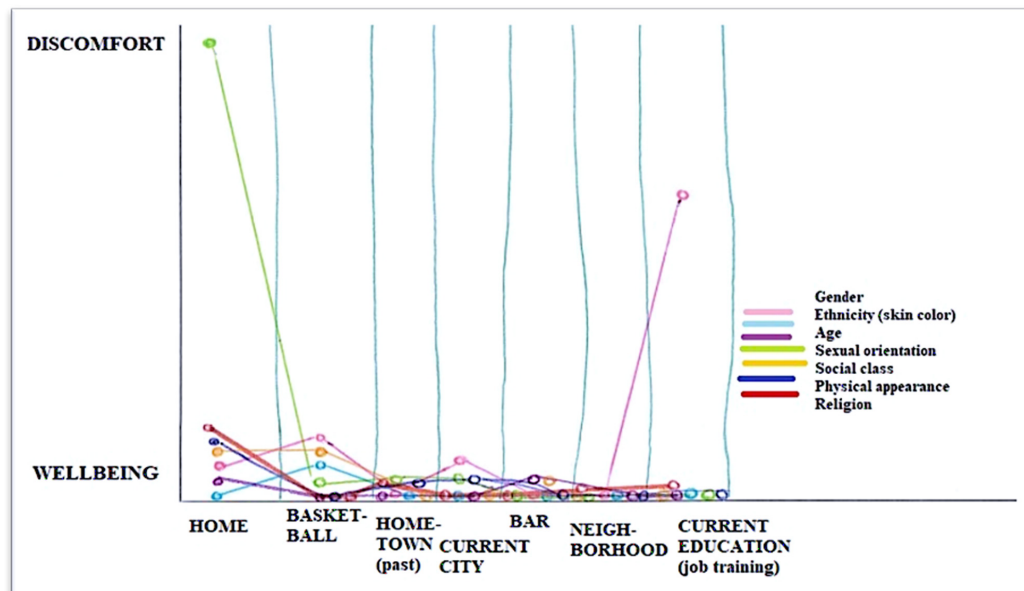

Figure 6. Relief Map drawn by Carla.

As a final point, in the analysis of the Relief Maps, it is necessary to emphasize the significance of the valleys, or intermediate spaces of inflection, that occur between the different peaks or emphases of discomfort, as these valleys provide very useful information about the relationship between the privileges and the oppressions experienced by each participant; that is, certain spaces act as alleviators of the oppressions suffered in other places. For example, if someone experiences discomfort or discrimination while out on the street because of their phenotype or their gender, or both, it will make the relief that they may feel in their space of Afro-feminist activism especially comforting—a contrast that will be reflected in the valley of the Relief Map. This crucial experience of "relief" that is highlighted by these inflections in the diagram is, in fact, what gives this methodological tool its name.

4. Conclusions

In this article, we have presented information about the identity processes and perceived discrimination experiences of multiracial women of African descent in Catalonia, Spain, using the Relief Maps method as an important investigative tool. We have argued that this supplementary qualitative research technique can be of great value to research on mixedness, as it allows for a more nuanced analysis of complex social phenomena by providing an intersectional, reflective, contextual, and multilocational lens.

After contextualizing the study of mixedness in Spain and discussing the relevance of Relief Maps as a tool within the biographical-narrative and "auto-anthropological" methodological approach that characterizes our study, we have presented some findings that draw on the life-story interview sessions conducted with our Afro-descendant mixed-race female participants. We have focused our analysis on issues of self-identification, sense of belonging, and experiences of stigmatization and discrimination, also taking note of participants' strategies of resistance and expressions of agency. Although our study gives centrality to meanings and lived experiences associated with the racialized "black body," the Relief Maps method enables participants to explore the multiple aspects of intersectionality and to indicate the specific impacts—in terms of social inclusion or social exclusion/inequality—that distinct private and public locations have on how identity is

experienced (i.e., which combined elements of identity are subjectively experienced more strongly or weakly, or more comfortably or uncomfortably, in different contexts).

Relief Maps allow us to appreciate the heterogeneity and complexity of processes of identity and discrimination, as this research tool factors in the interplay between the different dimensions and variables involved. In this way, we can discover, as was shown in the case of Carla, that a multiracial female may, in fact, experience more discomfort in her daily life due to her gender or sexual orientation rather than on the basis of her ethnic or racial background, the latter of which might be a less salient marker of discrimination in this particular case. This complex reality might not have been uncovered were it not for the nuanced intersectional analysis that Relief Maps make possible.

Overall, our findings acknowledge the heterogeneous, multifaceted, context-bound, shifting, and agency-based nature of identity and discrimination processes (Anthias 2020; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Deaux 2018). Importantly, and in line with previous studies (see, for instance, Campion 2021; Zambelli 2021), our research shows that space and place play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and experiences of identity and discrimination, which, at the same time, are mediated by people's biographies, subjectivities, and positionalities.

We cannot ignore the role played by reflexivity in the genesis of this study. As explained earlier, the design of this study was born of a profound exercise in reflexivity and embodied anthropology (Esteban 2004a), and we argue for the value of social knowledge that is derived from a perspective of subjectivity and reflexivity. One of the potentialities that has aroused our interest as researchers is the level of deep reflexivity that Relief Maps permit. To be able to reflect on one's own experiences of oppression and privilege from a structural perspective is, in itself, a priceless personal experience. All in all, we consider the therapeutic function of Relief Maps to be highly relevant, as they enable reflexive connection between self-identity and social and spatial processes (Cahill 2009).

The set of reflections—methodological, epistemological, political, etc.—that shape this article contribute to the transformation and vindication of *other* ways of conducting research. By highlighting feminist and reflexive methodologies, this article argues in favor of incorporating personal experiences and subjectivities into the study of social phenomena (May 2015).

Finally, we would like to point out the inherent dynamism of Relief Maps and also of intersectionality, categories, reflexivity, and subjectivities. Although Relief Maps and narratives are inscribed and embedded in a particular moment (i.e., represented in a diagram), they must be interpreted as dynamic elements that are in continual transformation. As we have argued in this article, the intersectional dynamics represented in Relief Maps permit and invite multiple readings and inferences.

In particular, we were fascinated by Relief Maps' catalytic effect in fostering agency among research participants. Although the phenomenon of how political awareness can be transformed into agency has been widely explored in the study of racism and discrimination, the fact that, in the case of our study, the interviewees' heightened awareness resulted from the use of a unique research tool—which conceptually and visually connects psychological, geographical, and social dimensions of a person's experience—is unprecedented. Intrigued by the transformative power of Relief Maps as a novel research method, we encourage other researchers to continue applying innovative analytical perspectives and research tools in order to better understand the nuances involved in complex social phenomena and to reveal the capacity for agency in people.

Author Contributions: Both authors, T.H.-J. and D.R.-G., conceptualized the idea for this article. T.H.-J. conducted the "life-story" interview sessions, which included the creation/use of Relief Maps. Both T.H.-J. and D.R.-G. conducted the formal analysis and interpretation of the research data and collaboratively wrote and revised the manuscript until its final form. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Notes

1   "Afro-descendant" is the term that is commonly used in Spain (including by activist groups and civil society organizations) to refer to people of African descent, so we have used it in this article when specifically discussing the Spanish context.

2   The larger study was titled "Social Relations and Identity Processes of Children of Mixed Unions: Mixedness—Between Inclusion and Social Constraints (MIXED_YOUTH)" and was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, National Program for Research Aimed at the Challenges of Society (Grant No. CSO2015-63962-R), 2016–2020; PI: Dan Rodríguez-García. The doctoral thesis was funded by the Agency for Management of University and Research Grants of the Catalan Government (Grant No. 2018FI_B_00605).

3   For this study, a total of 152 in-depth interviews were conducted with Spanish-born youth from very diverse ancestries, representing 51 different nationalities. To know more about the scope, methodology, and results of this study, see Rodríguez-García (2022) and Rodríguez-García et al. (2018, 2021b).

4   "Geographies of intersectionality" are a sort of theoretical corpus within spatial studies that promote and claim the need to incorporate the intersectional and critical perspective, establishing bridges between intersectional studies, feminist geographies, and critical geographies (Rodó-de-Zárate 2021, p. 65).

5   As we argued at the beginning of this article, our approach to the analysis of racialization is based on the social significance of certain perceived "visible" elements that are associated with the social construct of "race." In this sense, we join the line of critical thought that argues for the importance of including "race" as a category of analysis on the basis of its social function despite its biological fiction (Haider 2020, p. 23; Hughey 2017, p. 27). For further discussion on this matter, see also Rodríguez-García (2022).

6   It should be noted, as Rodó-de-Zárate (2021) explains, that the identification of separate axes, dimensions, and variables is an abstraction of reality, as, in fact, they all occur simultaneously and are interrelated.

7   We have used pseudonyms to refer to the research participants in order to ensure their anonymity.

8   Mari Luz Esteban (2004a) defines this objective and approach very well when referring to the *itinerarios corporales* (itineraries of the body) that she describes in her book *Antropología del Cuerpo: Género, Itinerarios Corporales, Identidad y Cambio*, "itineraries" that in our case would be equivalent to the Relief Map of each participant. She defends her intention to show them from both "the singularity and the complexity of each itinerary, configuring them as what they are: open, porous, contradictory and unfinished itineraries" (p. 13).

9   As explained in the Methodology section, we insist that a purely visual reading of the Relief Map, without the complementary information that interpretation and first-person accounts allow, is both biased and incomplete. We, therefore, advise caution before making hasty assumptions. We try to provide here as much information as possible to allow the reader to make a more complete reading of each Relief Map. However, because of space constraints, it will not be possible to qualify the multiple connections and readings permitted by this tool.

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