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IMAGINING AND ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER IN MANCHESTER AND BARCELONA: THE NARRATIVES OF POLISH MIGRANT WOMEN

Abstract: In the context of post-2004 European migration, Polish migrants encounter super-diverse population (Vertovec 2007) in terms of different ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, religions, languages and social classes. Drawing on narrative interviews and focus groups with Polish migrant women, I explore my research participants' imaginaries about the classed, raced and gendered Other upon their arrival in Manchester and Barcelona. I explore the constructions of the classed English Other different from the imagined upper class and white British society; 'closed' Catalans contrasting the stereotypical perceptions of open and friendly Spaniards and foreigners; and ambivalent perceptions of black and Oriental others. I use the postcolonial critique in de-coding some of these constructions. I stress the importance of the context and space in which these perceptions may have developed and reinforced. I also explore the possibility of changing perceptions and the emergence of conviviality understood as a practical and dynamic process, which emerges from routine interaction between the recent arrivals and established individuals, not necessarily free from tensions. My work contributes to a better understanding of everyday social relations as it introduces a cross-cultural comparative and gendered approach to research on conviviality. Furthermore, instead of focusing on majority-minority relations, it explores encounters between post-2004 migrants not only with the native population but also with settled ethnic minorities and other migrants with attention to whiteness and deeply rooted classed and racialised perceptions of the Other.

Keywords: Barcelona, conviviality, encounter, Manchester, Polish migrant women, racialisation, super-diversity, whiteness

Introduction

There is a common perception in the public, media and scholarly debates that Polish migrants, who arrive from a racially and culturally homogenous country, struggle to deal with cultural diversity in host countries, mostly in terms of race and ethnicity. My empirical data confirms that the attitudes towards others are not always clearly negative or positive, but rather ambivalent and contextual (Ząbek 2007), and influenced by time, space, context, personal histories, previous experiences of migration and contact with difference. I argue in this article that the process of encountering difference demonstrates the dynamic and changing nature of conviviality, often influenced by the imaginaries of the Other.

The aim of this paper is to explore diverse and complex narratives of Polish migrant women about their first encounters with difference upon their arrival in Manchester and Barcelona. I discuss the main themes I identified in the empirical material based on narrative interviews and focus groups when exploring research participants' raced, classed and gendered perceptions of difference, but also their reflections disrupting stereotypes. My study fills the gap in research literature by concentrating on convivial experiences of recent migrants coming from a predominantly white society to super-diverse cities. Therefore, I draw on whiteness that may contribute to a wider understanding of encounters with difference experienced by Polish migrant women in Manchester and Barcelona. I consider the influence of the images of Otherness shaped in both Poland and the host countries.

I begin by a brief discussion of conviviality, races, classed and gendered discourses and whiteness, followed by a short discussion about the context of Polish migration in Britain and Spain. After briefly discussing the methodology employed in my research, I concentrate on the most common perceptions of difference among the interviewees upon their arrival in Manchester and Barcelona. Firstly, I focus on the imagination of upper class and white English society. Secondly, I reflect on the perception of 'closed' Catalans and how it contrasts the stereotype of the open and friendly Spaniards and 'foreigners'. Subsequently, after briefly outlining the imaginary of the black Other, I discuss the recurring images of blackness in several accounts in both cities. The final section focuses on the perceptions of orientalised men and women of South Asian and Arabic origin. Some of these representations echo the images known from postcolonial studies. Therefore, I use the postcolonial critique to de-code some cultural representations. Furthermore, there is a specific vocabulary some interviewees use in both contexts to speak about classed, raced, ethnic and cultural difference which will be explored throughout this article.

Conviviality, race and whiteness

Conviviality in this research is explored as a process of interaction embedded in social practice, which is not necessarily free from racism and tensions (Gilroy 2004). Drawing on *convivencia* in medieval and in contemporary Spain reveals the complexity of relations between different groups involving not only by positive forms of interaction but also conflict. Wise and Velayutham (2014: 14) highlight the existence of various forms of social relations that "are never entirely rosy, nor entirely negative and thus the challenge is to comprehend the full range of interactions, patterns, behaviours and meanings at work, and the interconnections between 'happy' and 'hard' forms of coexistence". The research material I have gathered through my fieldwork presents a constant tension between everyday conviviality and classed, gendered and racialised discourses, demonstrating a very dynamic and fragile character of conviviality. Amin (2013: 4) refers to 'the other face' of the daily encounter with difference as 'phenotypical racism' defined as the precognitive coding of surface bodily differences, for instance, pigment and attire, as racial markers generating aversion and hostility. Racialised discourses construct the visible difference as inferior, dangerous and threatening. Race and the practice of racial coding has deep historical roots linked with western colonialism and imperialism which coincided with the formulation of scientific ideas about race in the late eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries associated with inherent physical traits, followed by a process of racialisation as a mode of categorisation of different populations ordered hierarchically with whites at the top and blacks at the bottom (Miles 1982; Cashmore 1996). As Goldberg (1993) argues, racist thinking and racialised discourses in the Western world have become increasingly normalised through modernity, although the word blackness acquired its negative meaning through the Medieval Church associating it with darkness, evil and sin, in opposition to whiteness considered in terms of purity and perfection (Yuval-Davis 1997; Cashmore 1996).

Even though claims about the innate superiority of whites and inferiority of non-whites have been scientifically discredited, in many societies race is still perceived as a fixed objective category and socially constructed racial categorisation is reproduced in everyday discourses (Miles 1982). Nevertheless, at the heart of the racist discourse are not just physical difference but other variables, including country of origin, religion, nationality and language (Solomos 2003). The focus of racist discourse has shifted to culture and ethnicity seen as fixed categories giving rise to the new forms of racism (Miles and Phizacklea 1984). Furthermore, constructions of racialised Other do not only refer to non-whites, migrants, people from different religions or with another accent (Yuval Davis 1997). Racialised discourses also encompass class and gender differences (Byrne 2006), often overlooked in literature on migration and encounters. According to Skeggs (1997: 82), the body carries the markers of class, gender, race and other categories. British working-class was perceived as the Other by the middle classes in the nineteenth century and was positioned as a distinct racial group with distinct characteristics (Bonnett 2000). Nowadays, in the popular imagination, a very diverse category of working class is often considered as a "deficient social type" whose interests are often pitched by the media and politicians against those of migrants (Bottero 2009: 7). Byrne (2006: 105) argues that, "perceptual practices of seeing (and hearing) difference are as important in constructing class as they are with 'race'".

In the Spanish context, the ideology of race was manifested through the ideology of *pureza/limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), referring to pure Christian ancestry, which originated in mid-fifteenth century Spain (Martínez et al. 2012: 1). Initially, Spain's 'difference' with regards to its place in Europe was linked to notions or racial impurity due to its connection to "oriental and African elements and the mingling of Christians with Jews and Arabs" (Flesler 2008: 20). Spanish thinkers deeply engaged with European visions of the Spanish nation and, in order to overcome its inferiority, Spain made the effort to erase its Moorish past. Since the 're-conquest' of Granada in 1492, the construction and imposition of Spanish-Castilian hegemonic identity legitimised measures of inquisitorial religious persecution – *Santa Inquisición* – implemented through 'laws of blood purity' (Dietz 2004: 1098). As a result of this ideology, Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity (*conversos* and *moriscos*) were considered as impure and became subject to discriminatory and segregation laws and subsequently expulsion (Martínez et al. 2012). This judgment was extended to the Spanish colonies. Martínez et al (2012) suggests that blood became a powerful proxy for lineage or descent and acquired religious-racial significance. The notions of blood and race became strongly connected in the Spanish context. Nowadays, Spain is seen as the southern gate to the 'Fortress Europe' due to its geographical location. Therefore, the immigration issue has become one of the main issues on the Spanish political agenda. Zapata-Barrero and van Dijk (2007), who blame

the elites for spreading racism discursively by influencing people's mental representation of migrants, consider that the Spanish racism follows the trend of Europe and they call it the ideology of Iberian and western racial supremacy.

Unlike Spain and Britain, Poland has had no colonies. Nevertheless, Polish people have been exposed to a very definite construction of blackness influenced by the Western discourses (Gilman 1985; Ząbek 2007). Despite cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in Poland for centuries, the tragic consequences of the Holocaust during World War II, border changes and the communist regime have left it as one of the most ethnically, culturally and religiously homogenous countries in the world (Podemski 2012). While before the war, ethnic minorities constituted about 36% of the Poland's population, they made up merely 2-4% of the Polish population immediately after the fall of the communist regime (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Okólski 2003: 24-25). With the end of socialism, Poland began to deal with arrivals of various groups of migrants, mainly Southern and Eastern European countries, as well as from Asia and Africa who mostly regarded Poland either as a transit or as a temporary place where they engaged in informal trade and short-term employment in several major cities (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Okólski 2003: 24). During the first years of the political transformation, there was an atmosphere of excitement and curiosity about diversity (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Okólski 2003: 24). Nevertheless, in the light of the economic recession and high levels of unemployment in the second half of the 1990s, the initial euphoria about difference was replaced with anxiety, stereotyping and prejudice. Despite some claims branding Poland as multicultural (Kempny et al. 1997), encounters between Polish people with non-whites and non-Europeans are still rare in many areas of Poland and, as some of my research participants note, the presence of their non-white partners and mixed-raced children often attract a lot of attention, staring and surprise in public spaces.

While visual difference has become highly marked in Poland, whiteness has remained unnoticed, unacknowledged and beyond analysis (Imre 2005). According to black critique, whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, which has the effect on the bodies of non-whites. Whiteness is produced by assigning race to others. Therefore, the study of whiteness as a racialised position is to contest its dominance (Ahmed 2004) and its notion as a 'mythical norm' (Lorde 1984: 116). While Poland has adopted racist discourse from Western Europe, in turn, according to postcolonial studies, it was constructed by the West with the use of imperial master narrative as the 'Other Europe', poor, backward and under developed (Imre 2005). Owczarzak (2009: 4) argues that, "Eastern Europe served as the West's intermediary Other, neither fully civilised nor fully savage". Poland's ambiguous position is described as "not-quite-Western and not-quite-Eastern" (Owczarzak 2009: 11). Grzymała-Kazłowska (2007) suggests that the Polish imaginary about Others has been largely determined by the geo-political and cultural position of Poland between the East and the West. She claims that the opposition of 'us' and 'them' is a result of historical experiences of Polish people and the place of Poland on cultural borderland. One of the most important elements shaping the Polish identity and attitudes to Others in Poland is argued to be, on the one hand, a certain inferiority complex towards the Western nations, including admiration of civilizational achievements; and on the other, a sense of superiority towards the Eastern nations, fascination with difference and at the same time fear of destruction (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007). The fall of Iron Curtain and subsequently the accession of Poland into the EU in 2004 have constituted

significant markers of the 'return to Europe' and helped Poland in asserting European-ness closely linked with whiteness. The EU accession of the new member has resulted in a large-scale migration of Polish people into the UK in recent years and a smaller scale to Spain, where many Poles have become conscious of being white (Parutis 2011) as a result of contact with super-diverse population (Vertovec 2007). It has been argued that these migrants, along with other Central and Eastern European arrivals, have been involved in the process of 'whitewashing' and whiteness has been used by them as a tool of racism in order to establish their own racial superiority towards those seen as racially inferior (Fox 2012).

It could be argued that the socialisation in Poland, where a) constructions of blackness have been deeply rooted in the Polish consciousness and influenced by Western discourses (Gilman 1985; Ząbek 2007), and b) contact with difference has been rare in many parts of Poland; may provide a context for socio-spatial encounters with difference upon their arrival in super-diverse cities. However, previous experiences of migration and contact with difference as well as current experiences of mobility and everyday encounters may reshape the way the Other is imagined.

The context of post-2004 Polish migration in Britain

While until recently labour migration in the UK was often discussed in terms of the arrival of postcolonial migrants from Commonwealth countries, most notably from the British Caribbean and South Asia in the 1950s; over the past three decades, the nature of immigration and diversity has changed dramatically in Britain, characterised by diversification of countries of origin (Vertovec 2007). The EU expansion in 2004 has resulted in the most significant impact on migration into the UK in recent years. The reason behind the immediate labour market access of A8 nationals[1] into the UK was severe labour marker shortages, mainly in low-wage and low-skill occupations in construction, hospitality, transport sectors and public services. Freedom of movement attracted many Polish people, especially the young ones, affected by high rates of unemployment, low wages, and lack of opportunities in Poland (White 2010). Low-cost transport lowered the cost of travel, encouraging 'fluid migration' (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009) with no settlement goal and for an undefined period of time. These newly arrived migrants constituted the largest group from the A8 countries entering Britain. The Home Office registered the peak of this migration between 2005 and 2007 when Polish migrants constituted 65% of those registered (Home Office 2009). Between 2003 and 2010, the Polish-born population of the UK increased from 75,000 to 532,000 (ONS 2011a), although the exact number is unknown. According to 2011 data, Poland remains the most common country of birth for non-UK born migrants (ONS 2011b). Furthermore, Polish is the second most spoken language after English in the UK (ONS 2011c).

Polish migrants have been distributed very widely across the country. Their socio-demographic profile is varied, given the population of over half a million. They are mostly young (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2008) and their qualifications not very

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1   The A8 countries consist of Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

often match their employment. Many speak English and a vast majority (71.6 per cent) have finished secondary school or have even obtained a degree (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009). They work in a variety of sectors including administration, business and management, hospitality and catering, public services, agriculture, manufacturing and food, fish and meat processing, as well as construction. In addition, there has been a growing population of university students.[2]

Manchester has been a city attracting migrants since the end of the eighteenth century and it has been one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse cities in Europe with up to 200 languages spoken by residents in the Greater Manchester area with the largest number of speakers of Urdu, Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Polish, Panjabi, and Somali (Multilingual Manchester 2013). In the post-2004 period, the city has witnessed the arrival of Polish migrants, amongst other A8 national, who have contributed to a greater diversity among the city's population. The official statistics on the numbers and distribution of Polish migrants in Manchester are very limited. No local authority in Greater Manchester has published up-to-date figures on post-2004 European migration. According to the Census 2011 data, Central and Eastern European migrants are incorporated in an imprecise category 'White Other', which also includes other Europeans, Jewish, Irish, Americans or Australians. According to the statistics, Polish migrants constitute approximately 1 per cent of the total population of Manchester (503, 127) (CoDE 2013).

The context of post-2004 Polish migration in Spain

In contrast to Britain, Spain was predominantly an emigration state until the 1980s. Since its acceptance into the European Economic Community in 1986, Spain has become a country of immigration and a multi-ethnic society (Escandrell and Ceobanu 2009). Initially, the immigration flows reflected former colonial ties between Spain and Latin America, the Philippines, Equatorial Guinea and Morocco. In recent years, Spain has been attracting migrants from other European countries, Northern and sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (Escandrell and Ceobanu 2009). Along with six other member states, Spain adopted a restrictive immigration regime, which effectively blocked access to their labour markets for at least two years following accession of the A8 member states to the EU (Drinkwater et al. 2006). Spain did not open its labour market to the new accession countries until May 2006. The extent of post-2004 Polish migration to Spain is substantially smaller than in Britain. The January 2013 statistics show that out of 5,520,133 foreign residents with the registration certificate or residence card, there are about 78,952 Polish migrants living in Spain (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica 2013). Initially, Polish men mostly worked in construction, while Polish women worked in domestic sector (Stanek 2007). Since the transition period, Polish migration has been characterised by the new type of Polish migrants: young, educated, coming from bigger cities entrepreneurial or students (Nalewajko 2012). Many of them have arrived to Spain not only for economic reasons, but to gain work experience, attend exchange programmes Socrates-Erasmus, postgraduate studies and language learning courses; to get to know the culture, search for

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2   Poland is one of the top ten EU countries sending students to study in England in 2013/2014 (HESA 2015).

new experience and adventure. Their employment often matches their qualifications or serves to improve them.

Polish migrants arriving in Barcelona encounter a very diverse population from Spain and other parts of the world. Barcelona is situated in Catalonia, one of the seventeen *Comunidades Autónomas* and a stateless nation where its citizens have distinct or mixed national attachments from the rest of Spain (Rodon and Franco-Guillén 2014). Catalonia is historically characterised by strong ethnic, linguistic and cultural movements. Between the 1940s and 1960s, a great number of Spaniards arrived in Barcelona from the rest of Spain to escape unemployment (Zapata-Barrero 2014). Since the last decade of twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Barcelona has experienced major social changes following the arrival of transnational migrants from very diverse backgrounds, including countries from Latin America, Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, China and Europe (Escandrell and Ceobanu 2009). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Barcelona saw an increase of Polish population as a result of the EU expansion in 2004. Between 2001 and 2009 the number of Polish migrants multiplied nearly eightfold (Władyka and Morén-Alegret 2013: 147). In 2006 it was 1.146 and at the time of my fieldwork in 2012 it was 2,224. In January 2015 it increased to 2,453 (Departament d'Estadística 2015), although the representatives of Polish groups claim that there are many more. The majority live in Raval, Poble Sec and Sagrada Familia, but they are dispersed in many other areas of Barcelona and they do not tend to live in a particular area.

Methodology

This article is based on my doctoral research exploring the narratives of Polish migrant women about encounters with difference in Manchester and Barcelona. The fieldwork for this research was carried out in these two cities between June 2012 and March 2013. Both are multicultural cities with super-diverse and mixed neighbourhoods, making them significant settings for studying convivial encounters. Both are post-industrial with migration friendly narrative characterised by a wide organisational support of intercultural coexistence. I adopt a use of a more flexible comparative lens to studying conviviality in two different contexts as my research does not aim to present a perfect set of comparisons between Manchester and Barcelona. Instead, it aims to advance a better understanding of conviviality and explore different ways in which it is experienced in two different cities, although historically similar in modern times, with attention to differences in social, political, cultural and geographic context. Furthermore, I engage in feminist theory and practice, which challenge dominant forms of knowledge and recognise the importance of migrant women's lived experiences. The ethnography was initiated by participant observation with several associations, for instance Europia in Manchester and Catalan-Polish Cultural Association and Casa Eslava in Barcelona. I conducted narrative interviews with twenty Polish migrant women in each city. The sample was chosen to be as varied as possible and it included informants from different class, educational, age and religious backgrounds, who entered Britain and Spain just before or after Poland joined the EU in 2004. The interviewees were mainly contacted through the groups with which I conducted the participant observation and subsequently snowball sampling was applied.

This research was not intended to be statistically representative of Polish women's experiences. On the contrary, it challenges the dominant regimes of representation of human agency and privileges positionality and subjectivity. The third method employed in this research was a focus group conducted in each city made up of five to six women previously interviewed. In order to explore similarities and differences across cases, the thematic analysis was applied, with some attention to the structure of the narratives. The findings were cross-checked with data from the focus groups and the participant observation. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Imagining white and affluent Britain

For centuries, there has been a conviction in Poland about the superiority of Western civilization. In particular, Britain has been perceived as part of the affluent West and it has been imagined as the place of the best universities, royalty and aristocracy associated with high culture, excellence in education and civilizational development (Horolets and Kozłowska 2012: 51). This part of the paper focuses on the narratives of encountering working class British people contrasting the above perception. Upon their arrival, many interviewees expected to find an upper class and white British society. Aldona, 34-year-old university graduate perceived the "poor English class" as visibly different in her narrative about Harpurhey, an inner-city area in the North Manchester:

> *What stands out over there, when I pass by, is the poor English class [laugh] so to speak. The majority of people living there are on benefits, right? (...) I don't go there very often. I will tell you with all honesty I don't like that area because when I went there (...) and when I walked through the shopping centre... if you spent there five minutes, you would know what I am talking about. These women were so fat, tattooed, poor people, it stands out, and white, right? There are migrants living there, but you can't really see them that much, especially kolorowi [the colourful], you can't really see them. These are my impressions. Polish people also live there but you can't see their difference.*

Aldona stressed the visual and embodied features of the poor white working class. The construction of the 'classed Other' is gendered as Aldona's narrative highlights the working class female bodies. Furthermore, in Aldona's narrative the gendered and classed Other is defined by the immediate locality. The emphasis on the geographic location of the 'hot spots' with high unemployment, deprivation and with grim features adds up to the visibility of the classed Other (Rogaly and Taylor 2009). Furthermore, the emphasis on whiteness adds to the idea of distinctiveness of the collective. Interestingly, while the visual Otherness of the poor white working class is stressed, the "colourful" are constructed as less visible, possibly as a result of fear that to see race is to be seen as racist (Byrne 2006). It appears that Aldona might have adopted the social norms in Britain, although in Poland it gradually becomes less acceptable to talk about race in negative terms or with racialised language as a result of reinforcement of the norms of political correctness (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Okólski 2003). The term 'colourful' was used by several interviewees to refer to non-whites, although this word is not as contextually loaded as the term 'coloured'. Even though the latter term was accepted in Britain until

the 1960, nowadays it is widely regarded as offensive and out-dated (Oxford Dictionaries 2015). The informants seemed unaware of this contextual difference and ambivalence attached to this terminology. The degree of awareness, social censure and the penalising of abusive and discriminatory language are still relatively low in Poland (Gawlewicz 2014). In my doctoral thesis, I discuss in more detail how the perceptions of the classed Other seem to be a result of a combination of classist discourses in both the Polish and British context.

Another interviewee, Oliwia, a 32-year-old mother of two from southern Poland, admitted that her myths about Britain collapsed upon her arrival. Even though she stressed that she did not really experience a cultural shock because of her visits in countries in Asia and Africa perceived as less civilised, she recounts her profound surprise when she walked for the first time through Rusholme, a commercial inner-city area in the south of Manchester characterised with its super-diverse population, including a longstanding Asian presence:

> *I have to say that when you walk through the Curry Mile it is in some sense like in Pakistan and Iran. When you walk by the shisha bars or the rubbish bins the smells are the same as over there. It smells like that a lot because this is a Pakistani neighbourhood. These smells and these people, because some are dressed the way they are dressed, you don't feel you are in England when you are in this neighbourhood. Here you feel more like in Asia, as if it was something totally different. I feel that I don't really know what it is like to live in England (…) In some sense, I don't really know what England is, do I? You can't feel England here. When you open the door to the back yard or when you return home or go somewhere, you can smell curry and the smell comes from every direction by the evening (…) I don't feel like this is England (…) I would say I am in Pakistan, especially when I am on the Curry Mile.*

'Curry Mile', is a section of Wilmslow Road with a variety of South Asian and Middle Eastern restaurants, take-aways, shisha bars, grocers, boutiques and other shops. It is one of the most popular areas of Manchester among locals and visitors (Kirmani 2006). Oliwia compared this area to Pakistan and Iran she had visited in the past. She emphasised the visual difference of the inhabitants and the smell several times and used it to construct her neighbourhood as Pakistani. Oliwia, as many other interviewees, used the 'Pakistani' category to зrefer to people of South Asian and Middle Eastern origin, thus homogenising these groups and constructing them and the neighbourhood through over-visualisation and heightened sensual perception. Her narrative also illustrates Simonsen's (2008: 153) notion of a "practical orientalism" reflected through the noticing of dress and smell of the Others which mark their strangeness influencing everyday experiences. Furthermore, this example illustrates how spatialised Otherness is constructed. Oliwia orientalises the neighbourhood through positioning it in the exotic East contrasting her idea of Englishness and England.

Oliwia's perception of the 'Pakistani neighbourhood' does not fit into her imagined notion of England and Englishness. She did not consider the idea of a more inclusive notion of Englishness due to adherence to the notion of imagined collectivity marked by underlying assumption of whiteness and superiority of Western civilisation. It is clear

that, for Oliwia, Englishness is synonymous with whiteness. This transpired more clearly when she recounted a conversation with a black woman:

> *She was fascinated that my son speaks Polish and English and she asked me where I was from and so on, and then I asked her where she was from. She was black, and she replied, 'from England' [laugh] so it's like… I mean I understand she was born here or came here when she was little, but for me she is not Eng… [Unfinished word 'English'], I mean she may have English citizenship, but she is not from England and I didn't really know how to react to it.*

The non-white Other is explicitly excluded from the category of Englishness. This example reflects the wider contested and racialised nature of Englishness (Byrne 2007). Oliwia's imagination of England and English people echoes the stereotyped version of idyllic, closed and fixed notions Englishness as 'pure' white, middle-class and incompatible with blackness and other forms of otherness. This perception of Englishness is reflected in Byrne's research findings based on interviews with white mothers in London. She argues that the classic notions of Englishness "are clearly raced and build upon a racialised discourse of national and imperial superiority" (Byrne 2007: 527). By stressing differences of colour, they become sharpened in opposition to whiteness perceived as the norm (Fox 2012).

The narrative of Lucyna, a 34 years old part-time PhD student from southern Poland offers alternative possibilities. Even though she was also surprised to encounter super-diversity in Britain, she began understanding Englishness as a more inclusive category:

> *I remember that when I came to England it was a sort of culture shock for me. As I told you, I didn't* expect *that there would be so many different people with different skin colour. I thought that they were all white, posh, English, but this is not the case. In terms of black people, I've had very positive relations with them and all of the ones I have met were really nice (…) and once in the beginning when I worked at a nursery, I worked with a colleague who was black and we went together to the bus stop. This example shows how people judge others unfairly (…) only because I was white… there was a group of teenagers and they started using racist language directed at her and they were asking me what I was doing with her. They were English, brats, they were 15, 16 years old, and I thought to myself, how wrongly they judged the situation. She was native English, born and bred in Manchester. They were asking her why she came to this country while I was standing next to her and only because I was white, they thought I was alright.*

Lucyna's perception of her colleague as "native English, born and bred in Manchester" sharply contrasts Oliwias's lack of broader understanding of Englishness. While the encounter between Oliwia and the black woman does not shift her static and unchanging perception of Englishness synonymous with whiteness, Lucyna's experience of conviviality demonstrates a shift in her perception of Englishness as a more inclusive category. Furthermore, Lucyna is positioned in a highly racialised space where her difference is invisible and where her whiteness is constructed as the norm. As Byrne (2006) points out, people may become conscious of being white in the presence of racialised others. Lucyna understood that her positioning as white in the new multicultural

environment is a form of privilege of being unnoticed as the Other. Nevertheless, as she had explained earlier in the interview, this white privilege only applies until she opens her mouth and her ethnic difference becomes more apparent through her accent. Whiteness as a racial identity ascribed to Polish migrants therefore varies according to social context. When they are compared to more visible groups, they are considered 'like us' (van Riemsdijk 2010). This confirms Frankenberg's (1993: 21) argument that "whiteness is always emplaced, temporary and spatially".

Open Spaniards and foreigners versus closed Catalans

The Catalan context, on to which the discussion will now move, is characterised by ambivalences and contradictions regarding its bilingual status and therefore it is very different from the British context. In the aftermath of a dictatorship, during which Catalan language had been violently repressed, Catalan language, culture, history and territory were recognised by the 1978 Constitution (Pujolar 2010). Immigration to Catalonia has profoundly changed the social landscape of the region and questioned the cultural and linguistic characteristics defining its national identity (Pujolar 2010). While in the previous context the informants were surprised with class and cultural diversity, many interviewees in Barcelona were astonished to learn that Barcelona was part of Catalonia, a stateless nation in Spain with its own language and culture:

> *My first reaction was when my husband, who used to take part in meetings during which he practised building castellers [human towers], took me to the meeting and introduced to his friends and I remember when I had a conversation with one of them. I said that few months earlier I wouldn't believe that I would come here, to Spain and that I would start a new phase in my life. When he heard this, he said 'No, you are not in Spain, you are in Catalonia'. So this was the first time when I realised I was in Catalonia and not in Spain, when before it was one country for me. I didn't know these differences. (Weronika, 31)*

The lack of awareness about Catalan language and culture is argued to be considered a result of the persistence of presenting the entire Spain as monolingual, despite its linguistic and cultural diversity (Burgueño 2002). The research participants largely assumed Spanish to be the language of communication. To their surprise, many interviewees stressed an immense pressure to speak the Catalan language (see also Władyka and Morén-Alegret 2013), seen as an obstacle in establishing convivial relations. Furthermore, the exclusive language practices of some Catalans may contribute to the homogenous construction of 'closed Catalans'.

Many interviewees discussed Spaniards and Catalans in binary terms. While the former were portrayed in stereotypical terms as open, welcoming, optimistic, sometimes compared to 'foreigners', the latter was often depicted as closed and difficult to communicate with. Zofia (28) offered her interpretations of Barcelona marked by clear ethnic divisions and stereotypes:

> *Basically, there are two Barcelonas. One is multicultural, Barcelona of tourists, foreigners where you can speak to people in foreign languages (…) open*

and multicultural, and the other closed, Barcelona of Catalans, Gaudi, monuments and Catalan culture where the stereotype of the open Spaniard, who after the first 'hola' [hello] becomes your best friend does not apply (...) It was a huge shock for me in the beginning that these two groups coexist next to each other.

These narratives illustrate Simonsen's (2008: 145) idea of 'the multiple faces of the city' based on difference. Catalanness is constructed as a spatially embedded Otherness, which produces boundaries between different groups. The idea of Catalan 'closedness' also constitutes the hegemonic view from other parts of Spain (Denis and Matas Pla 2002). As seen above, my research participants constructed a distinction between Catalans and Spaniards along with foreigners in terms of parallel groups "coexisting next to each other" without much interaction. Here, conviviality is limited not only by the lack of interaction but also by the constructions of 'closedness' of Catalans, linked with Catalan national territory, language and identity, essentialised as a cultural difference and seen as an obstacle to interaction and establishing contact. At the same time, the research participants emphasised their identification with Spaniards and other migrants as a result of common narratives of rejection by Catalans and shared experience of migration facilitating conviviality.

Natalia, a 24-year-old volunteer at Casa Eslava was surprised to learn that Barcelona was not as open to newcomers as she thought. However, her narrative demonstrates a possibility to transcend the linguistic barriers and the discourse of Catalan closedness. She recalled a positive experience with a Catalan shop assistant who, at first, was not very pleasant to her, but as a result of regular visits to the shop over a period of time; she started recognising Natalia and participating in casual conversations. This made Natalia feel part of the local community and partly changed her perceptions about enclosed Catalans. Habitual contact over an extended period of time is likely to generate familiarity and lead to possibilities of convivial interaction across difference. As a result, migrants' attitudes towards others may also change over time as they become more familiar with others.

Several interviewees tried to make sense of Catalan closedness and the pressure to speak Catalan language by comparing the oppression of Catalan identity during the Franco regime to the Polish historical context of the loss of independence during the partitions starting in 1772 by Russia, Prussia and Austria. Many interviewees revealed that Catalans frequently shared with them humorous anecdotes that Spaniards refer to Catalans as *polacos* [Poles], which often brings the interviewees and Catalans closer. This is illustrated in Weronika's narrative: "In terms of Catalan culture, many times people react sympathetically when they find out that I am Polish. You probably heard that outside of Catalonia, Catalans are called *polacos*, so this is the moment for jokes and it breaks the ice". This shows how a derogatory term emphasising Catalan otherness in Spain is used in a positive context promoting conviviality across difference.

Imagining the black Other

A recurring image in several interviews was that of the black Other discussed in a highly stereotypical terms. As I mentioned earlier, the imaginary of black people are highly influenced by the Western colonialist discourses. This is particularly reflected in

the Polish literature characterised with stereotypes ascribed to black people during the colonisation of Africa (for instance, in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad; *W pustyni i w puszczy* [In Desert and Wilderness] by Henryk Sienkiewicz; *Murzynek Bambo* [Bambo the little black boy/ Pickaninny/ Nigrette] by Julian Tuwim). Moskalewicz (2005) offers a powerful postcolonial interpretation of the popular poem *Murzynek Bambo* constituting a discursive element of the Polish national heritage, and he argues that it has a strong colonial undertone referring to simplistic and essentialist representations of black people and strongly impacting the Polish consciousness. According to Ząbek (2009: 170), the perception of black people through the prism of race is closely linked with widely used in contemporary Poland term *Murzyn*.[3] This term appeared in Polish language in 14th century derived from the same root as the English word 'Moors' - *maurus* in Latin, and it indicates a black person (Ząbek 2007). Although in the opinion of many Poles it is not an offensive term, many people of African origin do not accept this word because of its pejorative connotations influenced by negative stereotypes and ambivalent translations as 'Negro' or highly offensive term 'nigger', both echoing the context of the slavery and colonialism (Piróg 2010).[4] In contemporary Polish language, the word *Murzyn* has largely negative social connotations. Many popular sayings or idiomatic expressions have racist undertones referring to a situation in which somebody is a servant, a slave, a cheap work force or backward (Ząbek 2007). Średziński (2010) suggests that Polish people hardly have a chance to challenge their opinions about black people with reality since they constitute a very small number in Poland, between two and three thousand (Ząbek 2009: 170).[5] The stereotypical perceptions about black people may change through experiences of migration or they may be reinforced.

Dual images of blackness

According to Homi Bhabha (1992), there is always ambivalence in the imagination of the Other within the colonial discourse as an object of desire and derision. This is reflected in the narrative of Angelika (33) who lives in Manchester: "*When it comes to black people (...) their way of being is different. Some are nice and friendly and others would rape you with their eyes (...) No, no, I am not racist, absolutely not. I could easily have a black* [used the term *Murzyn*] *or Pakistani mate*." Despite having little contact with black people, Angelika's stereotypical perceptions echo the construction of black men as "dangerous, violent, sex maniacs" (bell hooks 1992: 89). Even though Angelika reinforced a threatening image of black men and used racialised language, as many other research participants, she denied racism several times. Van Dijk (1992) argues that racist discourse is often accompanied by denials, the crucial characteristics of contemporary

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3 *Murzynka* is the feminine form, *Murzyni* is plural.

4   In the survey of social perception of verbal abuse and hate speech, 68% per cent of respondents considered the word inoffensive which illustrates a broader tendency within Polish society (CBOS 2007: 13).

5   Only 15% of all Poles come across Africans in their localities, and 7% are in personal touch with them as students of higher education institutions, sportsmen, doctors, bazaar vendors in large cities (Średziński 2010: 40).

racism which can be used as a strategy of positive self-presentation and face-keeping regarding general norms and values prohibiting ethnic prejudice and discrimination. Angelika possibly used denials to avoid being perceived as racist, to make a positive impression or perhaps she was unaware of using racialised discourse and language due to a normalisation of this language not only in Poland but also within the Polish environment in Britain.

Some interviewees living in Barcelona also constructed an ambivalent image of black people. Amelia, a 31-year-old hostel receptionist discussed black men in racialised, gendered and stereotyped ways in the context of street encounters. However, she defended those known in Barcelona as *los manteros* selling sunglasses, bags and other products often placed on a blanket:

> *In terms of black men, it irritates me when on the way to work someone whistles at me and the one that whistles is always a black man (...) These are two extremes, because sometimes they annoy me because they whistle, (...) They treat me, I don't know, like an animal, so this is a typical reaction (...) yet, I defend those blacks, who sell sunglasses and so on. This is their job, they earn the living in the right way (...), so somehow they earn their leaving and I will defend them here. So as you can see there is the dark colour of the skin, on the one hand, annoying because they whistle, and on the other, you know, they work. So you can't generalise. I don't know. I just wanted to point out that it never happened to me that a whity [białas] [laughter] (...) whistled at me. Even Moroccans have never done it.*

Amelia made a direct link between whistling as means of sexual objectification and blackness as a result of gendered encounters on the street and stereotypical perceptions of black masculinity (bell hooks 1992). She used the colour contrast of black and white to make her point that the behaviour she discussed is characteristic to black men. Several other women in both Manchester and Barcelona raised the issue of street harassment argued to represent the need to assert masculinity shaping uneven power dynamics and "spatial expression of patriarchy" (Valentine 1989: 389). Even though street harassment is very common and it often seems to be an inevitable part of life, having a profound effect on women's full participation in the public sphere, physical well-being and freedom (Bowman 1993); it is rarely discussed in literature on migrant encounters. My informants' narratives of street harassment by Asian and black men in both cities, discussed in more detail in my doctoral thesis, illustrate how these experiences influenced their views of a whole group and how they are used to reinforce the construction of these men as sexually deviant and dangerous to women.

Another narrative pattern that emerged in the narratives was fascination with the black Other in both cities. This is reflected in Aldona's and Nina's narratives:

> *I remember I got my first job in Pizza Hutt [in London] as a waitress and I remember that I commuted for forty minutes to work by bus and I remember my first journey. I was in seventh heaven, so many people, so different, colourful, and dressed differently. I really liked it, you know? It was so different of what was in Poland, right? And here you see someone in African clothing, colourful, great, right? But after two weeks of commuting by bus, I saw it differently, but I never*

had any issue with it and I quite enjoyed living there. This was my first impression. (Aldona, 34, Manchester)

I am from a village (...) I had my own small and closed world (...) When I went to Britain, everything changed (...) The whole surrounding was totally different, colourful people from different parts of the world (...) And it all became so obvious and not strange anymore. It became so natural and normal that there are other people. Thanks to being somewhere else we enrich our lives and by living in Poland I miss out (...) After we returned to Poland, I missed this colourfulness, different people and languages (...) We then came here [to Barcelona] and again everything is in the right place and again everything is so colourful and more interesting (...) Living abroad and seeing people on everyday basis makes a difference, because in Poland it is not as multicultural as here (...) There are stereotypes in people's head and they remain there, for example, that Murzyni are dirty and not nice but I met many who are really nice and you can't judge someone by their skin colour (...) This opens the doors and we hope that our children will be open to different cultures (...) I hope that it would not be like in my case that I didn't know the Other. The colourful world was only on TV. We didn't know it in the flesh but they do. (Nina, 33, Barcelona)

Their previous experiences of migration have been significant in shaping their attitude to difference. 'Colourfulness' in both narratives contrasts predominantly white Poland. This fascination with colourful Other echoes Bell's and Hartmann's (2007: 909) argument that "Others are welcomed, learned from, or accepted at a table, in a fabric, or in a pot that would otherwise be bland, plain, and basically colourless." Even though these narratives demonstrate an openness to and acceptance of difference, it can be argued that they illustrate a 'happy talk' about exoticised difference carrying a discourse idealising and partly racialising conceptions of cultural and ethnic diversity (Bell and Hartmann 2007). Based on the Roediger's (1994) idea of whiteness based on absence, Reay et al. (2007: 1052) discuss the process of "shading-in" and "adding colour" to the white middle-class self, which serves to mask its privilege. In other words, this process is principally about recognising a "more colourful self" in the ethnic Other (ibid: 1054). Bell hooks (1992: 21) suggests that:

Within current debates about race and difference, mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference. The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling.

However, in Aldona's case, this fascination faded in time as it became normalised and commonplace through habitual encounter. In fact, as Aldona said during the focus group discussion, she realised she became "one of them, a migrant travelling by bus". This convivial experience facilitated a certain sense of belonging to a wider migrant group across difference. Based on her study of diversity in the London Borough of Hackney, Wessendorf (2014) develops a concept of commonplace diversity, which refers to ethnic,

religious and linguistic diversity experienced as a normal part of life. On the contrary, Nina's narrative represents a paradox of desired conviviality and limited encounters with difference. Even though Nina wanted her children to be exposed to colourful Others, she sent them to a private school mostly populated by white children. This reflects Byrne's (2006a: 92) discussion about mothers' desire to obtain the 'right' social and racial 'mix' for their children in schooling; this 'mix' requires just enough, but not too much of the Other.

Nina's narrative demonstrates a critical approach to negative perceptions of difference in Poland. Nina most likely used the ambivalent term '*Murzyn*' referring to black people to illustrate negative attitudes to non-whites in Poland. Several other informants in both cities disapproved negative attitude towards black people amongst other Polish migrants, especially those from lower social class. The anti-racist stance of the participants results in a social distance between them and the Other Poles.

Imagining the Oriental other

As is well documented, twenty-first century Europe faces a crisis related to the growing resentment towards Muslims (Flesler 2008; Dietz 2004; Nalborczyk 2006). The historically rooted Orientalist representations reappear in the public debate on Islam, migration and integration policies in most of the European countries. These discourses have been repeatedly reproduced through the media politics and public debates constructing Muslims as a 'problem' in the hosting countries due to their numbers, assumptions about threat to identity, terrorism and security, and inability to integrate. Their religious and cultural traditions are often seen as incompatible with Western/European values, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States, train bombings in Madrid in March 2004, London underground bombing on 7 July 2005 and the recent threat of the so called Islamic State militant group members in different parts of the world.

The Eastern influence in Poland dates back to the medieval times and the presence of Polish Tatars for more than 600 years (Dziekan 2011). However, the perception of the East changed radically in Poland during the Enlightenment as a result of the influence of the Western discourse of Orientalism. The negative perceptions of Muslims persist in the Polish imagination despite their marginal numbers. Muslims in Poland are made up of Tatars, converts and Muslim migrants constituting 0.07-0.09% of the total population of the country (Nalborczyk 2006: 62). Nowaczek-Walczak's (2011: 120) research on Arabs and gastronomy in Warsaw reveals "Cruelty of Arabic husbands and Muslims pictured as terrorists are the two most common stereotypes highlighted by the interlocutors as the most harmful in Polish society". These powerful images of the Other reinforced by the media, politicians, academics, writers and other elites in the country of origin and in the host countries play an important role in reproduction of attitudes towards difference. This is reflected in several interviews in both Manchester and Barcelona.

Ciapaci – oppressive and threatening Others?

Through the course of many interviews both in Manchester and Barcelona, various representations of South Asians, Arabs, Muslims men and women emerged, often corresponding with the discourse of Orientalism (Said 1995). While the men were often constructed as violent and dangerous, the veiled women were frequently perceived as oppressed. Some informants used the ambivalent language of difference when referring to people Arabic and South Asian origin often in conjunction with Islam. One of the most popular terms used among the interviewees was the word '*ciapaty*'.[6] Many interviewees seemed not aware of the negative connotations of the word and why it was used. It is certain, that by the frequent and widespread use, the term becomes normalised and synonymous with the term 'Pakistani' not necessarily reflecting the actual ethnicity. This is how 27-year-old Paulina, defined the term *ciapaci*:

AR: You mentioned that in your neighbourhood there many people you called ciapaci, who were they?
P: They are a mixture of people from countries like Pakistan, Iran. I am not going to say that I am racist because many of them are at my courses and they are nice, but I have read so much about kidnappings and rapes of women and about their Muslim religion, totally different than mine, so I always have my concerns about these people.
AR: Why do you use the word ciapaci/ciapaty?
P: Honestly? I have no idea. Maybe they are mixed between dark, black-skinned people and us whites. This is just how we call them. I have no idea. I heard this word when my friend used it and I started using it.

Paulina's narrative demonstrates the process of how the racialised language is acquired from other Poles. The term is raced because the main indicator is the skin colour tied to fixed characteristics. While Paulina denied racism, she paradoxically associated the discussed group with kidnappings and rapes of women and with Islam. Paulina's narrative matches stereotypical portrayals of the sexually abusive Muslim men based on orientalist discourse (Said 1995).

Jagoda, a 25-year-old postgraduate student in Barcelona was aware of the negative connotations of the word *ciapak*, but she denied it was referring to a specific ethnicity (although she referred to Arabs) but rather to deviant activities and class:

They tried to mug me several times (...) It was always so called ciapak, someone from Arabic countries. Nobody from Asia tried to sell me hashish, it was always someone from there, or these famous cerveza-beer men, they are always people from there and I think that they have a big problem. They find it hard to assimilate (...) Ciapak is the one who tries to mug you on the street, stick something shining and noisy in your hand (...) even our Spanish flatmates picked it up and they knew straight away what it was about (...) If I saw an Arab but if he was dressed in a suit, for me, this term does not define a skin colour or nationality,

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6   *Ciapaty/ ciapak* – singular, masculine adjective; *ciapaci* or *ciapaki* – plural, masculine adj. ; *ciapata* – singular, feminine adj., ciapate – plural, feminine adj.

I would never refer to him as ciapak. For me ciapak is a city slicker who tries to pull a stroke.

Male migrants of South Asian origin in Barcelona were discussed by the research participants as often situated in a specific context of street selling activities and attributed with particular characteristics. Jagoda's construction of *ciapak* is not only racialised and gendered, but also classed and criminalised. She possibly denies the correlation of the term with the skin colour to avoid being seen as racist. Bodily difference of '*ciapaci*' is coded in terms both racial markers and a sense of threat. Regardless of their citizenship and identifications, they are often seen as homogenised male threatening racial Others. Jagoda was not sure when and where she first heard the word *ciapak* but she mentioned that it could have been from her Polish flatmate who had previously lived in England. Hence, Jagoda's narrative emphasises the circulation of racialised language (see Gawlewicz 2014) between Polish migrants and also Spanish flatmates.

The interviewees in Barcelona often referred to men of South Asian origin perceived as drag dealers or street beer vendors, also known as *lateros* or *cerveza-beer*, visible especially at night when other places stop selling alcohol after 22:00. There is a tension in these transitory street encounters with these vendors often perceived as persistent and irritating in trying to sell items. The informants were often unaware that certain groups already defined by dominant discourses as outsiders have been situated in marginal spaces of society and who might be subject to various restrictions, including residence and work permits, and therefore often forced to work in the black economy sector for a low wage to survive (Colectivo IOE 1998).

Several other research participants contested the racialised language of difference and homogenised ideas about people of South Asian origin through their everyday experiences. Inka, a 28-year-old student in Manchester, contested the use of the term *ciapaki* when she became aware of its negative connotations:

[W]e lived (...) above a Pakistani shop owned by ciapaki (...) I really don't like that this kind of word was used. In any case, I started using it because, as I said, everybody used it so it was the easiest way and I automatically adopted it without thinking what connotations it had and to whom it referred (...) Later, I started wondering and I asked the boys why they called him [the shop owner] like that and that it was not nice.

This account demonstrates the possibility of becoming more conscious about the language of diversity leading to some changes in stereotypical perceptions. During the focus group discussion in Manchester, Nikola, a 31-year-old office worker, reflected on convivial encounters with people of Pakistani origin which have the potential of breaking stereotypes:

Look at the influence of the media, massive; because when you are in Poland, what experiences do you have with this culture? None. Apart from what you read and see, it's logical, is shaped by the media (...) Pakistanis are like this. When you arrive here you have contact with this person. You go to a shop run by a Pakistani and you have a conversation and you think, blimey, they are not that bad (...) I realised that we know stereotypes and our knowledge is from newspapers,

books and television, but it doesn't mean that this knowledge is accurate and real but it is transferred to us.

Nikola's narrative echoes van Dijk's (2002: 152) argument that in countries less diverse culturally and religiously "the mass media are today the primary source of 'ethnic' knowledge and opinion in society" and "virtually all beliefs about the Others come from mass media discourse, literature, textbooks, studies, or other forms of elite discourse". Nikola's arrival in Britain and everyday encounters allowed her to reflect on this transmitted knowledge influenced by the Western discourses of colonialism and Orientalism, which can be challenged through convivial interaction. Nikola's narrative illustrates how the prejudiced perceptions may change through the experiences of migration and convivial encounters disrupting preconceived categories and boundaries (Leitner 2012).

The veiled Muslim Other

The issue of the veiled women has become one of the most enduring subjects of discussions in political, public and media debates in many European countries, including Spain. In their study about Muslim women in Southern Spain, Dietz and El Shouhami (2005: 11) illustrate the stereotypical perceptions of Muslim women as the "extreme other" – the antithesis of Western notions of religion and gender, despite an immense diversity of self-definitions. Drawing on my empirical data, the image of the veiled and oppressed women was particularly recurring in several interviews and during the focus group conducted in Barcelona. Veiled Muslim women fascinated some interviewees, while others reinforced the discourse of oppression. The rhetoric of the headscarf in the informants' narratives in Barcelona may have been influenced by the frequent media, political and public debates considering the veil as a symbol of Islam and sign of backwardness and oppression.

Emila, a 35-year-old mother of two, spoke at length about veiled women. She described the veil as a symbol of religious burden imposed on Muslim women. Emila contrasted the image of oppressed and suffering veiled women with the discursive self-representation of free and liberated European women:

> *Our life is like a fairy tale. We are from Europe (...) Think about being a mother. You come here, ok, you are prepared for all of it. They put a headscarf on you when you were 12. When you were 13 you had a baby and were already a wife and then you come here and you see women in your age, who look younger than you, and this is when they start their own life, have their own money. Their daughters have freedom without limits and I suppose that these women suffer terribly looking at their daughters. This is terrible.*

The model of the 'Oriental woman', perceived as someone oppressed and passive (Said 1995) is mirrored in Emila's narrative, which also echoes a clear distinction between the First and the Third World Women, the latter perceived as "a singular monolithic subject", according to Mohanty (1988: 333). This simplified binary reduces the complexities and social, geographical, political and historical differences of the women in question. This

is due to persistent stereotypical representations of submissiveness and subordination of Muslim women. Emila's narrative about veiled women also surfaced during the focus group discussion in Barcelona and she suggested that perhaps veiled women might learn "from our experiences and they observed us free women". Following Mohanty, Emila's idea of freedom is embedded in the Western humanist discourse according to which the veil is a symbol of oppression. Some participants' fascination about the veiled Muslim women and a desire to get to know them was contrasted by assumptions of ghettoization and cultural distance of these women.

There were some voices in the discussion that challenged the above perceptions. Amelia drew attention to the Western idea of clothing and suggested to see both sides of the argument.

> *But don't you all think that on the other hand, they can see us [pause] we are basically undressed in the summer, maybe they think that we don't dress appropriately. You have to look at it from both sides, you know? It is their culture and I respect it and I understand. It is what it is and we have to accept it, as they accept us (...) just accept it. If they want to wear a veil, let them wear it. If this is what they want and it is their religion and culture then great.*

Julia, another focus group participant, challenged the universalist idea of freedom raised by Emila and questioned the perception of the veil as a symbol of oppression:

> *The question of freedom may mean different things to different people. This is frustrating, really, because of our cultural and language differences this often leads to conflicts. What we do may be an attack on freedom of another person. We also judge, I judge too. For example, the headscarf, I try not to think negatively, but for me it is like a symbol, but I'm not sure if of oppression.*

Julia suggested that there are different types of oppression and she shifted focus to Polish society and her own example of coming from a small village in Poland with certain norms and rules she had to follow. Jagoda then reflected on a strong social pressure on women in Poland to get married and have children at a certain age. The focus group discussion about veiled Muslim women has demonstrated some tensions, ambivalence and, most of all, a certain disruption of stereotypical ideas.

Conclusions

In this article, I have discussed the most common perceptions of difference among the interviewees upon their arrival in Manchester and Barcelona. I have drawn upon an extensive empirical material that suggests various and often ambivalent perceptions of difference amongst my research participants pointing to the complexity of social and personal attitudes.

My exploration of the attitudes towards difference has considered not only categories of race and ethnicity but also gender and class and has examined how these different categories are often connected. I have discussed how some informants expected to find upper class and white British society and instead were surprised with class and ethnic diversity. The language used in some narratives of the classed Other was similar to

that in the elite debates about the people at the bottom of social hierarchies constructed as social inferiors. I have discussed that some interviewees were unaware how diverse British society was. While several found it difficult to grasp the reality of multicultural Britain, others quickly adjusted to the new reality by recognising ethnic and cultural difference as part of Britishness/Englishness. In the context of Spain, I have demonstrated that many participants arriving in Barcelona were often unaware about Catalan culture and language. They often perceived Catalans as closed, in contrast to open and friendly Spaniards and foreigners. Nevertheless, some interviewees stressed the historical and linguistic commonalities with Catalans, which may facilitate convivial possibilities.

I have also explored the perceptions of the non-European and non-Western Others. I have argued that perceptions of these groups are likely to be influenced by the socio-historical context in Poland, which has partly been shaped by colonialist and Orientalist discourses essentialising cultural differences. I have also argued that the interviewees' perceptions of difference may have been affected by racialising discourses not only in their countries of origin, but also in host societies. A common feature in many narratives was physical and visual difference seen as both fascinating and threatening. The dichotomous representations of otherness suggest the persistence of racialised perceptions in the imaginary, especially in relation to black, Asian and Arab men. Some research participants in Barcelona reinforced the discourses of veiled women perceived as an oppressed homogenous group in need of liberation. Some interviewees spoke about difference by using racialised language brought by the participants from Poland (*Murzyn*), but also adopted from other Poles living in Britain and Spain (*ciapaty/ciapak*). There was also a group of interviewees who were careful when discussing difference and who have demonstrated that attitudes to, as well as language of, diversity may change over time through everyday experiences of conviviality. Furthermore, I have also discussed the convivial possibilities disrupting stereotypical and racialised perceptions through habitual encounters across difference. In my doctoral thesis I discuss in detail encounters with difference in various spaces of the neighbourhoods and in the workplace in both cities, demonstrating various forms of conviviality and conflict.

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