

# Social identifications of sex-gender of British and Moroccan women in the south of Spain

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## Resumen

En este artículo pretendo aplicar el concepto de división social del Floya Anthias para revisar la literatura actual sobre la migración de las mujeres tomando como ejemplo los resultados de una investigación basada en el concepto de identificación de sexo-género de las mujeres inmigrantes procedentes de Marruecos y Gran Bretaña en el sur de España. Sostengo que es necesario formular tanto un concepto más amplio de 'orden de sexo-género' como un concepto más amplio de la sociedad para situar las relaciones entre hombres y mujeres. En cuanto a los resultados de mi investigación con dos grupos de mujeres migrantes, en el caso de los inmigrantes marroquíes en España, voy a argumentar que han sido socializados en una 'orden de sexo-género' que se centra en la familia y en el caso de las mujeres británicas que han sido socializadas en una 'orden de sexo-género' que se centra en el Estado. Como consecuencia, esas mujeres tienen un proyecto migratorio diferente, han experimentado y experimentan problemas diferentes como mujeres y, por tanto, varían sus identificaciones sociales de sexo-género.

**Palabras Clave:** Identificación sexo-género, mujeres migrantes, Gran Bretaña, Marruecos, Almería (España)

## Abstract

In this paper I want to discuss some topics about social identifications of migrant women. Particularly, I will apply the concept of social division from Floya Anthias (1998, 2001,2002) to review the current literature about the migration of women and I will provide one example of how have I organised an investigation based on the concept of identifications of sex-gender of migrant women from Morocco and Britain in the south of Spain. To do this, I will argue that we need both a broader concept of ‘order of sex-gender’ to make hypothesis, and a broader concept of society to situate relationships between men and women, and discourses. In the last part of the article I will offer some of the results of my research with both groups of migrant women. In the case of Moroccan migrants in Spain, I will argue that they have been socialised in an ‘order of sex-gender’ focussed on family and in the case of British women they have been socialised on an ‘order of sex-gender’ focussed on the state. As a consequence, they have a different migratory project and they have experienced –and experience currently-different problems as women.

**Keywords:** Identifications of sex-gender, migrant women, Britain, Morocco, Almería (Spain).

## 1.- Introduction

In the last decades public manifestation of women's heterogeneity has increased around the world. The youngest, lesbians, gypsies, transsexuals, other ethnic groups, migrants and women from the Third World, have changed the practices and views of migrations, social order and feminisms. Regarding migration, we realise definitively that women are not secondary migrants who always depend on the husband's decision, but they are social agents who can start and develop a migratory process for herself or in cooperation with men. Concerning social order, we have to recognize that problems faced by women are not focused exclusively in nuclear families. In fact, most of them live in other kinds of families (unmarried couples, single parent families, same sex couples, alones, open marriage, etc) with and without men. The social order that involves women's everyday lives is a complex interweaving of institution and domains where economic, political, organizational and individual interest exist together conflictive. As a consequence, we need to correct both the assumption of women as a unitary social category and that of women's organisation and 'feminist' agenda.

Woman have entered the public and international realm in a changing social space after the end of communist bureaucratic regimes and the loss of a sense of symbols, heroes and traditions of left-wing ideologies, in a context of economic globalisation and intensification of post-imperialist and neo-colonial capitalism. The postmodernist condition of the new times seems to be closely connected with a peculiar way of dealing with culture and knowledge that allows debates on 'identities'. In the arena of feminisms, new social actors question some common assumptions of western, white, heterosexual and middle class feminists. Women's Studies that have traditionally concerned to social division of sex-gender are today focussed on differences between women, and questions about feminism in science are now questions of science in feminism (Harding, 1996).

## 2.- Identifications of sex gender in the global context of social divisions

As a consequence, globalisation doesn't have the same impact on the lives of everybody and not all women are the hardest hit because women are not a homogeneous class or group as writers like Susan Hawthorne argue<sup>1</sup>. We have to differentiate between a social group and a *diversity matrix*. A social group refers to people who live in shared social conditions. Women are not a social group because they don't live their everyday lives exclusively between women. Between them, ethnic and class differences also imply differential access to resources, differences in the social inclusion/exclusion processes, oppression and domination. In fact, migrant women who come from the developing countries don't have the same opportunities as the European citizens. They are women, but they live with men in different groups and have different interests. As a result, we find conflicts between women from the upper class and women from the working class, white and black women and so on, and they fight for social resources not only as women but as members of a social class or an ethnic group. For example, domestic migrant workers don't consider that they belong to the same group as native middle class women when they refer to the work market. And they don't consider that they belong to the same group as native women regarding citizenship. Their interests as workers or immigrants determine priorities and necessities in some current social conditions. As a consequence, it is not easy to link gender with other social divisions like class and race (and ethnicity) (See Anthias, 1998)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, S. Hawthorne (2004: 245) "Because women are still the largest class of poor people in the world, as a social group they represent an important touchstone for the effects of globalization. Women are the invisible victims of so many of these new systems of structural violence".

<sup>2</sup> Class refers to production processes but never implies genetic or natural characteristics. Like race ( and ethnicity ), gender could appear as a categorical formation with work under three principles: the principle of relationality/dichotomy (or absolutism), the principle of naturalisation and the principle of collective attributions (Anthias, 1998:516). In those principles the categorical formations of gender – and race- appear as absolute, natural and unitary because we are considering the social construction of difference. Anthias's proposal is to focus on the commonalities in terms of the production of social outcomes of inequality or positionality, which have experiential, intersubjective, organisational and representational aspects. It involves three further principles: the principle of hierarchisation, the principle of unequal resource allocation and the principle of inferiorisation. Anthias's proposal is to focus on the intersections of categories in local contexts.

Each woman shares with other women her social position in relation to men of her own group in terms of a social order of sex-gender. But, are all migrant women socialised in the same social order of sex-gender? In my point of view, a social order of sex-gender is not a system nor a group but a logic or a matrix, inherited from the past and constantly modernised in everyday life. This order discriminates and constructs people in two categories –men and women- and allows men to retain some privileges over women in concrete situations. If we change the society and culture, the way to organise relationships between men and women must change. In addition, the social order of sex-gender is not the only social division we have to observe in our societies. Social divisions based on class or race –or ethnicity-, age, disability and others intersect and generate social privileges in term of more or less access to social and cultural resources and recognition.

Based on this idea of social order of sex-gender, I will attempt to suggest that to understand British and Morocco migrant women who live in Spain today we have to understand what the social order of sex-gender in their country of origin is and what the situations they experience after migration are. In this context, I will use the concept of ‘identifying sex-gender’ in terms of: 1. taking into account women’s agency, 2. thinking about the different ways to being, feeling as and dreaming as women, and 3. understanding under what conditions women accept/decide to defend a specific model of womanhood.

Years ago Laura Walby suggested that patriarchy differs through time from private to public domains (1990, 1994). Here I will suggest that today women who were socialised in Britain and now live in Spain have been socialised in a public patriarchy or an order of sex-gender based on public domain (the state) and women who were socialised in Morocco and now live in Spain have been socialised in a private patriarchy or an order of sex-gender based on private domain (family). So, the contemporary orders of sex-gender could differ not only with time. They also form part of concrete social structures.

Taking into account the work of Walby, I supposed that the order of sex-gender where British and Moroccan women were socialised could operate with two kinds of strategies: exclusionary and segregationist. The first strategy, focussed on family, is an

exclusionary one. Moroccan men impose themselves on women excluding them from the public arena and their methods to maintain power could be described as coercive. The second strategy, focussed on the state, is a segregationist one. In this case, inequalities between men and women are (in Britain) very subtle and men don't use a coercive method to maintain their privileges because it is the state and the public institutions (such as work and political and cultural values) who do the work to maintain the order of sex-gender, segregating women in the public arena and giving them the main responsibility to raise children by themselves.

In the fieldwork carried out in my research I tried to contrast the social identification of migrant women from Britain and Morocco in the social insertion process in the Spanish social structure. If women produce and reproduce the social order of sex-gender we could approach this process through their identification with role models when analysing their discourses. But public discourses not only concern relationships between men and women. They also concern relationships between groups. In this level of analysis I want to adopt the general idea and terms of Floya Anthias and Mira Yuval-Davis (1993:96-131): the idea of woman as symbols, like an 'ethnic resource'. Synthesising, relationships of sex-gender in contemporary Fortress Europe operates on two levels of analysis: within and between groups.

*Social relationships of sex-gender in Fortress Europe*

	<i>within the group</i>	<i>Between groups</i>
Sex-gender consideration	Relational variable	Ethnic resource
Social agents implicates	Women and men	Representative of group
Effects	sexism	Euro centrism

Within groups, I supposed that sex-gender works as a relational variable, between two kinds of social agents: men and women. The unequal social position based on the order of sex-gender should be described as sexist. In the second level of analysis, sex-gender should work as a symbolic element of differentiation between groups. Here, women from the other groups should be considered as symbols, and the relationships between sexes as representatives of the inferiority/superiority of the whole group in the social insertion process. In this case, the inequality of the symbolic recourses should be described in terms of Euro centrism.

### **3.- Method**

My fieldwork is based in 28 semi- structured interviews of migrant women in Almería, a town in the south of Spain. The criteria to select women were: age, marital status, number of children, educational level, and occupation in Spain. Each of those interviews with migrant women (14 from Britain and 14 from Morocco) had duration of 90 minutes or more. We contact women indirectly, through migrant organisations or personal friendships. Each woman chose the place to conduct the interview. When we had recorded the discourses we transcribed them and we analysed them using a software package for qualitative analysis: Nudist-N-Vivo.

### **4.- Result. The case of migrant women from Morocco and Britain in the south of Spain**

If we compare the social groups of belonging in their country of origin we have to recognise that women from Morocco and women from Britain differ enormously. All of them say that they come from the middle class, but the meaning of 'middle class' is quite different. For British women it means that their family had the possibility to consume, to have a car and to go on holidays. For Morocco women 'middle class' mean to have a place for life, to have food enough and to have the possibility to go to the school and pay for books. So, British women grew up in a context of welfare state and Morocco women grew up in families with economic difficulties. As a consequence, reasons to migrate differ enormously. British women explain they are in Spain because they searched a better quality of life, an individual style of life, and more possibilities to develop themselves in the broad sense of the word. Certainly, they had peccary or very hard jobs, sometime they were stressed and they look for news opportunities. After a holiday in Spain, they decided to look for a new live in a sunny country: Spain.



Table 1. *First level of analysis: relationships within the group in the country of origin*

	Consented Order of sex-gender based on public domain	Coactive Order of sex-gender (based on private domain )
A/ Country of reference	United Kingdom	Morocco
B/ Familial institution of origin	Small and based on consent	Extensive and based on coactions
C/ Authority of reference	Constitution	Code of family statute
D/ Couple relationship preferred	Marriage. Distribution of responsibilities	Marriage based on love
E/ Central key of sex-gender identity	Children	Family
F/ Consideration of children	Chosen	Natural result of marriage
G/ Concept of politics	Disenchantment of politic parties	Interest on equality laws

If we observe the relationship within the father and mater, within our interviewer and them, the relationship with other members of the family, we can conclude that British women have grew up in small families, with member are individualistic and conflicts of sex-gender are noiseless. These kinds of families are based on consent. In the case of Morocco women, they grew up in small families, with a lot of relationship with other member of the family, in with the father exercises the power over the mater and children, in an explicit and coactive way.

Constitution is, for British women, the authority of reference that articulates relationships between men and woman. This Constitution support equality between men and women, but it is a formal equality that women can rich only if they take the initiative to claim to observe public rights. For Morocco women, the authority of reference is the Mudawana, the Muslim code of family they criticise, meanly young and urban women. This question is revealed when we ask women for the way of going about re-

solve conflicts in everyday life, for example, sexual harassment. Although British women can demand help from the welfare state and NGO, they don't find any help from other family members. In the interviews they say that the most important thing you need is to be a brave woman to claim for rights. Moroccan women are conscious they can't find any help from the public institution. Family, for them, is the only place to find some help, but this is the same institutions that oppress them.

As a consequence, Moroccan and British women consider that there are differences and inequalities between men and women, but they don't consider that the causes are the same. British women have difficulties to identify causes for inequalities because inequalities are out of laws. They offer some biological lines of arguments. Moroccan women are very critical with traditions and specifically, with the *Mudawana*.

All women prefer the marriage based on love. British women emphasise that they want to live with partner who share care and domestic responsibilities. For Moroccan women, the most important thing now is to have the possibility to choose their partner for themselves.

Maternity is the central key of womanhood for Moroccan and British women, but they have a different sense of this. For British the key question of maternity is focalised on children and for Moroccan women the focalisation is on the family. As a consequence, British women combine to be a mother and to have a job. Moroccan women dream with the idea to be a good housewife. In this case, the project of marriage includes a man who works out and brings monetary resources. In this case, the job is seen as a necessity. Children are considered, in the case of British, as chosen. They like to have children with men, but they know that there are some possibilities to finish relationships. For Moroccan women this question is quite different. Children are the natural result of marriage.

Either British or Moroccan women are interested on politics. In the case of British we find a disenchantment of politics parties. For Moroccan women politics is only important for them if we speak about equality laws.

Table 2. *Second level of analysis. Relationships between groups*

Morocco women in the discourse of British women	British women in the discourse of Morocco women
A/ High knowledge of others	A/ Low knowledge of others
B/ 'They ' are victims of their culture	B/ They are independent women
C/ Their religion is the cause of their problems	C/ They don't have a religion
D/ each of them is representative of the group	D/ Each of them take part of their own group
E/ They must change	E/ We have to change, they don't

Certainly, when we speak in this level of analysis, relationships of sex gender between groups can be seen as an resource, a line of argument to give or take away prestige between groups. In practice, we find enormous distortions between the image that British and Morocco women have of the other group and the image that each group maintain of them. British women say that they have some information about Morocco women because they have seen some television programs or they have listen to somebody speaking about them. But they have a very precise image of Morocco women. One part of British women expresses some disinterestedness, rejection or compassion for these (Morocco) women that come from a traditional culture where they can't imagine how to survive. Another part of British believe that Morocco women are a kind of heroines because they confront very difficult situations. Morocco women say they don't know any British women. In their discourses British women appear as belonging to a more developed culture in witch women are very participative because their work outside home. British are more independent women, more educated and more intelligent. But they are not happier.

Concerning religion of other, British women don't discriminate between the Coram and the interpretation of the sacred text. Because of this, they forgive men and praise Muslim believes, including the idea that women have to obey men and have to be submissive. But this is not the opinion of Morocco women who defend equality in lows

without lost their religious believes. Certainly, for Morocco women are essential to distinguish between the sacred and the profane.

British women analyse the Muslim culture as a very symbolic compact hole. As a consequence they can't discriminate between that we can consider as machismo and that we can't consider. Symbolic relationships between men and women appear as representatives of the group characterised by their machismo. In the other part, Morocco women think that British women don't have religious believes.

## **5. Conclusions**

As a general conclusion we can say that social identifications of sex-gender of women from Britain and Morocco in Almeria differ according to their socialisation process in an order of sex-gender baser on consent or on coercion. The social order of sex-gender based on coercion relate to a social context with low economic resources and a lack of a welfare state, where family is the social institution of reference. In this case families oppress women but at the same time is a space of solidarity. The order of sex-gender based on consent take the state as the mean institution of reference. In this case, women are not compelled in the familial space but they are alones to resolve their problems as women. As a consequence, they develop a biological discourse about inequality between sexes.

Differences in socialisation process give us as a result original identification of sex-gender that in Spain have to develop in a context of lack of resources and a situation of illegality in some cases, especially between Morocco women. In this context, British model of womanhood appear as the best.

In the second level of analysis we found that the perception of relationships of sex-gender between groups differs according to their position related to Europe Fortress. British women belong to the dominant group and they have the possibility to be seen as individual. Morocco women appear as symbol a sub developed culture. Because British women translate western social division between public and private to analyse the situation of Morocco women, they conclude that they are victims of culture and religion. From this Eurocentric logic we hope simply that Morocco women change by

themselves, and we forget that in western countries there is not equality in relationships between men and women.

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