

## Immigrants and Body Modifications in the Consumer Society

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### Abstract

This article presents the results of the research project “Identity process, immigration and plastic surgeries”. The investigation took place from 2013 to 2014 in Portugal and Spain. The general objective was to search for clues to think more consistently of the interest and the practice of body modifications in the context of immigration. In-depth interviews were carried out with Latin American, Asian and African immigrants. To analyze the interviews, we used the literature about consumer society, social production of body and ethnic plastic surgeries. We propose in this article that immigrants are included in the context of consumer society and the fact that most immigrants live in precarious conditions but this is not an obstacle to think and to practice body modifications makes the issue even more interesting. This does not mean that in the consumer society there are not social and economic inequalities. Instead, we propose that there are new and more subtle forms of domination and of power relations.

**Key words:** Immigration; Body modifications; Consumer society; Identities

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### INTRODUCTION

The central object of the research<sup>1</sup> that was the source for this article was the practice of body modifications by immigrants in Portugal and Spain. The issue from which we started consisted in the effective modification or the desire to modify the body, especially physical traits that refer to the immigrants’ national/ethnic features in the context of the consumer society. Our main goal is to advance the understanding of the interface between immigration and body in the consumer society and to produce an analytical background to new studies about this theme. The article is the results of an exploratory research and was developed based on a literature review on immigrants, consumer society and the social body production and body modifications, more specifically aesthetic surgeries considered to be ethnic. This literature will be confronted with qualitative data obtained through interviews with immigrants.

As a result, we found that body modifications, whether through plastic surgery or other procedures, do not lead to a homogenization or rupture with an original sense of belonging, but, actually, reflect subtle forms of social coercion that are mediated by aesthetic patterns and feelings such as beauty, seduction and happiness whose meaning must be found, fundamentally, in the consumer society.

This article is divided into four parts. 1) In the first part we sought to situate the research problem and, also, to explain the research techniques, including how we choose the immigrants interviewed, and presented notes on the methodology. 2) Next, we present why we choose Portugal and Spain as research fields, some information about immigration in the contemporary world and the

<sup>1</sup> Research developed from a postdoctoral internship at the CEMRI between 2013 and 2014, with financial support from the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Tecnológico e Científico – CNPq/Brasil.

migration trajectory of the people interviewed. 3) In the third section, we discussed the relations of belongingness and alterity. Like in the previous part, we did it both theoretically and empirically. That is, first we sought to explain what we understand as belongingness and alterity and, then, we discussed this problem from the perspective of those interviewed. 4) Finally, we come to the central discussion in this article, that is, the body and body modification. Like in the two previous parts, first we situated the subject theoretically and conceptually and then we analyzed the immigrants' reports.

## 1. SITUATING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND NOTES ON THE METHODOLOGY

The article was developed from the intersection of four traditional study fields in Sociology: a) Identities, b) immigrations, c) Body and body modifications and d) consumer society, whose assumption we will present in this topic. For the first one, we share the understanding according to which the system of belonging is translated into the dynamics of identity fragmentation and multiple fidelity (Woodward, 2000; Featherstone, 1997; Hall, 2009; Bauman, 1998, 1999; 1999b, 2005, 2005bm2008), change and production of hybrid expressions (Canclini, 2008) of food, clothing, music, body, cultural and religious values. Secondly, we are in agreement with approaches that understand the immigrant as a "stranger" (Shutz, 1999; Simmel, 2005; Bauman, 2005, Elias, 2000, Stolke, S/D.). Thirdly, we consider consumerism beyond the immediate and literal act of acquiring things (Bauman, 2008; Canclini, 2008). Still within the scope, we are working with the idea according to which in the context of consumer society, the makeover culture (Jones, 2008) and the aesthetic citizen become central (Jarrin, 2017). Lastly, from Le Breton (2009, 2014), Featherstone (2005), Ortega (2008) and Csordas (1990), we think the body not only as a social construction but as an existential territory. The intersection between consumer society and makeover culture has been materialized, for instance, by television programs and by editorial markets focused on aesthetic surgeries (Jones, 2008)

The article will answer the following questions: Can aesthetic surgeries among immigrants mean a desire of annulment of phenotype traces and, with them, ethnic differences? Can they mean a desire for homogenization? In this case, how to think this desire in the consumer society context? Finally, based on the bibliography and interviews, what can be said about the relationship between immigrants and body?

Based on a semi-structured script, we tried to understand the socioeconomic profile of the participants, their migratory trajectory, their relations of belonging and alterity and their opinions and experiences about

body modifications. We got to know the immigrants using the "snowball" technique (Biernacki, Waldorf, 1981) and limited our non-probabilistic sample with a criterion called "saturation point" (Lang, Campos, Demartini, 2010). Twelve interviews were used in this article, distributed equally in both countries. We sought to contemplate immigrants from different continents, with the goal of interviewing people from different cultural backgrounds and regions of the world. Thus, in Portugal we interviewed two women who, although they were born in Mozambique, were self-professed Goan; two Brazilian women; one Angolan man; and one Mozambican man. The age of the participants in Portugal ranged from 30 to 50 years old. The time the immigrants interviewed had been in the country varied greatly: the Angolan had been there for fourteen years, the Goans and Mozambican had been for over 35 years and the Brazilian women, on average, for seven years. Regarding the reasons for migration, the fact that they were born in Mozambique brought the Goan people closer to the Mozambican and the Angolan, since the reason that led the families to migrate was the instability and insecurity observed in those countries. The Brazilians had different reasons. In one case, it results from being married to a Portuguese citizen and, in the other case, the search for more opportunities for study and work.

We decided to interview immigrants from South America, Africa and Asia. The biggest reason for this has to do with the important presence of immigrants from those regions in Portugal and Spain. The study is exploratory and does not intend to be representative of the whole universe of immigrants in these two countries.

Immigrants from three different continents were interviewed in Spain. Originally from Africa, a young Senegalese man of about 25 years old, and an Angolan woman, 30 years old. From Asia, two young Chinese, one female from southern China and one male from the northwestern region of the country. From Latin America, two immigrants from Ecuador were interviewed, a 20-year-old girl and a 40-year-old man.

The Chinese differed from the other immigrants interviewed about how long they had been living in Spain. Both had been in the country for about two years. In addition, their interviews made it clear that they saw their stay in the country as temporary. They migrated to take a postgraduate course and after that they will return to their country. The immigrant from Angola had also been in Madrid for about two years, but the interview does not suggest a project or desire to return to her country. The other participants, two Ecuadorians and the Senegalese, had been in Spain for about 15 years. For the Latin Americans, the main migratory motive was economic, since Ecuador went through a severe economic crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

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## 2. MIGRATORY TRAJECTORIES OF THE IMMIGRANTS INTERVIEWED

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This article interfaces with studies on international migration, cultural diversity, consumerism and body. With regard to international migration, the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century were marked by intense migratory flows. The choice of Portugal and Spain as countries to be studied is due to casualty and an opportunity. Causality, because we found a newspaper report in 2008 in the newspaper *El País* about aesthetic surgeries among immigrants who lived in Spain. The article was centered on an Ecuadorian immigrant who had a rhinoplasty. This article had a big impact on us, since we have been studying the identity problematic over the last 20 years, especially the problematic of the immigrant identities.

Opportunity because of the interest of the Center of Study of Immigration and Intercultural Relations (CEMRI) in hosting and supporting the research. In addition, it seemed good for us to research the Iberian capitals, even though we had not opted for a compared approach. Anyway, despite not being the countries with the highest numbers of immigrants in Europe, Portugal and Spain have a long tradition as emigrant countries and, since the 1990s have been become important immigrating countries too.

According to data from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations, 2013), in 2013 there were 231,522,215 immigrants. These immigrants were concentrated in Europe (31.29%), Asia (30.06%) and North America (22.93%). According to the same source, Portugal gathered around 1.23% of the immigrant population and 8.4% of the Portuguese population and 13.8% of the Spanish population. This made Spain the 4th largest European country, considering the immigrant population and the national population, and Portugal the 14th.

The migratory trajectory of the participants is not always linear. Sandra's case is particularly interesting. Her family migrated from Goa to Mozambique and then to Portugal. The same happened to Jaina. As for the motives, the Goan women have trajectories marked by ruptures and insecurities. First, by Goa's invasion by India and then by the process of independence of Mozambique. The same happened to the Mozambican. However, the Angolan immigrant's trajectory is more akin to the Goan women's, that is, the family moved in search of better life conditions and work.

Sandra and Jaina grew up and still live very close to the Goan community in Lisbon. In addition, they claim to have more links with Goa through travel and contact with family members via telephone and the internet than with Mozambique. In the Brazilians' case, there is constant contact with family and friends. One of them even says she makes daily contact through social media. Both travel annually to their home cities.

Tirso is the president of an association of immigrants and immigrant descendants. This establishes political ties with Angola, and he even has a brother linked to the country's government. Manuel did not make it clear if he has regular relations with people from his country. His interview indicates that he recreated ties with his countrymen and the idea of national belonging in Portugal.

Regarding Spain, the migratory trajectory of the participants is very similar. Except for the immigrant from Angola, who before migrating to Madrid lived for two years in Lisbon, all the others came directly from their home countries. In general, the interviews show that all immigrants have ties to their home countries. These ties are mainly with family and friends, through telephone, internet and social media. The Chinese

even use applications like “Whatsapp”. Like Manuel, a Mozambican immigrant in Portugal, the links with their countries are reinvented at their place of destination with new circles of friendships and networks linked to work. In the case of immigrants from Senegal and Angola, there are links that go beyond the bonds of friendship and family. The Senegalese immigrant plays a political part through his participation in an association of immigrants, which affected his contact with his home country. Solange, from Angola, migrated to study, which leads her to travel often to her home country, which is, at the same time, her research object.

### 3. RELATIONS OF BELONGINGNESS AND ALTERITY

Reflecting about the phenotypic traits and body changes among immigrants led us to ask our research participants about their relations of belongingness and alterity, from which they built their migratory trajectories. The production of ethnic identities, from an intercultural perspective, (Canclini, 2008; Ramos, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014) stems from social configurations marked by the asymmetry of power between, on one side, the groups involved, and, on the other, the need for a clear definition of the symbolic boundaries between groups, in this case, between immigrants and the natives. The shape of the nose, eyes, ears, and hair color and type are powerful markers activated for the production of these frontiers through processes of belongingness and alterity.

The idea of the other as strange is reinforced by the estrangement of the other’s body. This dynamic is for Gilman (1999) trans-historic and transcultural and produces hierarchies from the opposition between the ideas of permanent, immutable, natural and what “comes to stay” (1999, p. 49). This power-play builds beauty (Jarrin, 2017) patterns inseparably from the characteristics considered to be ethnic. So, if at the end of the 20th century the Irish corrected “stick-out ears” because they were seen as ugly and “non-American”, and the Jews altered their noses so as not to denounce their origin and their ugliness; today, the combination between beautiful and ethnic occurs through off-center markers. That is, they should be understood as an expression of processes of hybridization between aesthetic references and the consumer society (Ennes, Ramos, 2017).

As we saw in the previous section, the immigrants, in general, stated that they kept in touch with people from their countries. There are differences in the forms and intensity of contact, but we did not observe ruptures and discontinuities. We have also seen that the fact that these relationships are maintained, does not exclude the establishment of new circles of friendships with Portuguese and Spanish people, and also with immigrants of other nationalities. Let us now see how the participants narrated their relations with people in their new countries.

The immigrants interviewed in Portugal, regardless of nationality, gender or immigration time, feel integrated. It is noteworthy that, even if this feeling was expressed by all, among the immigrants from Mozambique and Angola there were even fewer references to situations of estrangement. This feeling of integration does not imply, as already mentioned, ruptures with people and places from their home countries. They experience a dynamic of changes in social practices and customs that adapt to local standards. These changes result not only from coercive pressures experienced in Portugal, but also as a result of the loosening or mitigation of these same forces in relation to their countries. That is, clothing, hairstyles, attitudes that would be recriminated in their countries are most freely practiced in this new place.

Integration also seems to be linked to the immigrants’ insertion in Portuguese society. All the participants had close ties with the Portuguese. Whether at work, in schools, in institutional relations such as those involving immigrant associations and Portuguese governmental bodies, or even through affective relationships such as marriage and courtship of the Brazilian women interviewed.

However, these ties produce senses of belonging and alterity, at the same time, especially among the Brazilian women. Paula, for example, mentions the fact that she is engaged to a Portuguese man as part of her integration process, but complains about her mother-in-law, who criticizes her for “speaking Brazilian, not Portuguese”. The issue of language and accent – as we shall see – is a clear and strong marker of identity for the immigrants in Spain as well.

For the two Brazilian women interviewed in Portugal, professional and educational activities are also part of the circuits of belongingness and otherness in the Portuguese society. In this sense, Cíntia highlighted the tension she experienced with her Master’s adviser, who insisted that she write using the “Portuguese from Portugal”. But, as with her mother-in-law, she kept her “style”, to express her identity, that is, Brazilian. In Marcia’s case, in addition to having a doctorate, she worked in a Portuguese higher education institution. But she did not mention tensions produced by differences in accent or writing form, but to the work conditions that, for her, made this activity unattractive.

This process also involves continuities, such as Marcia’s taste for pork, since she was born and lived for a large part of her life in the countryside of Minas Gerais, which brings her closer to the Portuguese habits. On the contrary, in the case of Tirso, eating foods considered typical of Angola, usually in special situations, gathering Angolan friends, functions as a mechanism of reproduction of the feelings of belonging to their culture of origin.

The Goan women, in turn, claim to be strongly integrated into Portuguese society, mainly through their

insertion into the workplace. Jaina is a businesswoman, and her narrative demonstrates her success in the real estate business. She says she does not feel discriminated against and she thinks that when there is prejudice, part of the blame must be attributed to the immigrants, because they are refusing to be integrated. Sandra, in turn, is a nurse and also says she does not feel discriminated against because of her ethnicity. She actually believes in the opposite. She thinks that her links to the Goan community and the fact that she carries characteristics of this culture helps in her work. This situation is similar to Cíntia's, who attributes her experience as a promoter for cosmetic products in a large chain of Spanish stores in Portugal to some characteristics of her home culture. In the case of the Goan women, this can be explained by the fact that they work in segments that put them in direct contact with people from different ethnic and national origins, which turns their belonging into a capital (Bourdieu, 1989) of great value. In the case of the Brazilian woman, her valorization as a promoter is more related to the demands of her occupation, such as enthusiastic and nice.

Manuel believes that discrimination is decreasing. For the Mozambican, integration happened gradually; it was more difficult at the beginning of the immigration process because of the outcome of the Carnation Revolution and the process of Independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. The successive generations of immigrants, the communication channels (letters in the past, and internet and mobile phones now), and the temporary or permanent return movement have transferred the formulation strategies for integration in the Portuguese society to their home countries. They perceive integration as coming from the immigrant.

Although they did not mention situations in which they felt discriminated against, the participants stated that there was discrimination against immigrants in Portugal. Paula was the bluntest in this remark. For her, the biggest discrimination is against Brazilian women because they are stereotyped and hypersexualized. In this case, it is important to consider the overlapping of gender and ethnic/national markers. Marcia, too, believes that there is discrimination against immigrants in Portugal and that this has grown proportionately with the increase in the number of immigrants.

Sandra believes that, in the case of Hindus, there are "disparaging remarks" made about their trade, comments about the low quality of products, which would resemble the Chinese. As for their customs, such as clothing – in this case, the use of Sari, which still causes embarrassment among the Portuguese because it shows the belly –, Sandra believes that the prejudice has diminished thanks to people from other nationalities who wear other types of clothes that also show the women's abdomen. This can be understood as part of a process in which diversity is produced by migration and by the consumer culture and its expressions in entertainment and fashion.

For the participants interviewed in Spain, the beginning of their lives as immigrants was difficult. This difficulty is due to several factors that go from replacing the affective relations of the Senegalese boy – who was adopted by a Spanish family – to cultural differences in language, accent, commemorative dates and differences in behaviors (as experienced by Chinese immigrants), and legal problems, like of one of the Ecuadorian immigrants. For all of them, the difficulties tend to decrease with time, once these initial problems are overcome.

This feeling of being in a better situation now than at the beginning of their life in Spain as an immigrant does not mean, however, that they are fully integrated. Aby, for example, even though he has Spanish friends, still feels discriminated against, especially by the police who, according to him, who is Senegalese, address him in a discriminatory manner.

Solange views Spanish people as kinder and more solicitous than the Portuguese. She thinks the Portuguese are less receptive and more suspicious because of the colonial relations involving her country and Portugal. Zhou says that his relationship with the Spanish has improved, but still complains of the prejudices he suffers due to being a foreigner. He feels the Spanish have a stereotyped view and think that all Chinese own restaurants or stores selling low-quality products<sup>2</sup>.

Among the participants, Gabriela is the one who seems to be the most integrated to Spanish society. Firstly, because she migrated as a child; secondly, because she has fewer ties to her home country, and says she shares more "Spanish" values, tastes and styles than her compatriots living in Madrid. Daniel, another participant from Ecuador, because of his immigration trajectory and form of insertion in Spanish society, thinks differently. Although he has Spanish friends, his innermost circle of relationship is still within the "Ecuadorian colony".

The different perceptions about integration in Spanish society are, in part, as in the case of the immigrants interviewed in Portugal, related to the forms of insertion in Spanish society. Of the six immigrants interviewed in Spain, four migrated to study. The two Ecuadorians claimed economic reasons, in Solange's case, her parents'. The trajectories define, at least in part, the relations with the Spanish after their arrival. Aby migrated as a teenager and is now president of an immigrant association. His socialization during basic education resulted in friendships with Spanish people, but, unlike Gabriela, he sees himself as an immigrant. In turn, this does not prevent Gabriela from reporting situations of conflict with her Spanish employers. She recalls her experience as a nanny and difficulties with the children's grandparents.

Daniel is the one who most resembles the ideal type

<sup>2</sup>The subject of "opacity of the other" appears directly and indirectly in several authors of different theories such as Bauman (1999) and Elias (2005).

of working immigrant. An economic crisis motivated the beginning of his trajectory, which made him experience the difficulties of an undocumented immigrant. However, even when facing this situation, he sees his relations with Spanish employers as positive, because he always received his salary as agreed. Zhou, even though he migrated to study, did some temporary work, such as teaching Chinese language and culture to a Spanish gentleman, which also made him have a positive assessment of his only working relationship in Spain.

All the immigrants interviewed in Spain stated that they interact not only with Spanish people, but also with immigrants of other nationalities. Again, it is important to understand these relationships from the insertion of participants in Spanish society. Presiding an association, studying at the university, living since childhood in the country, and, therefore, having studied in Spanish schools, are elements that explain the relationship circles that maintain them. These relations, like those observed in Portugal, are more like the continuous movement of approaching and distancing extremes, which would be isolation and complete integration. Among the Chinese, it is clear that the relations that demand the most confidence occur within the group, which, as we have seen, is diverse due to the fact that they came from different regions.

Solange reveals a very interesting situation from the point of view of relations of belonging and otherness. Because she has relationships with immigrants of different origins, including several African countries, she chose the Spanish language to communicate. Thus, the language of the host country becomes the link between immigrants of various origins, an expression that Canclini (2008) denominates inter-culturalism and cultural hybridism.

The answers given to the previous questions anticipate the ambivalent character of the sense of belonging (Canclini, 2008) in relation to the Spanish society, like the immigrants in Portugal. The tension between a sense of belonging and of otherness becomes more evident when the participants are asked more directly about the subject of self-identification. Three of them – Aby, Gabriela and Daniel – had Spanish passports at the time of the interviews, and the other three – Solange, Meng and Zhouh – lived in the country with a temporary visa as university students. This variations in documents does not seem to interfere much with their perception of living in Spain as immigrants. Except for Daniel, who, in his narrative, recognized his daily life became easier after getting his documents.

Not even the number of years living in Spain seems to interfere univocally in the sense of belonging experienced by the participants, since both Aby and Gabriela migrated when they were very young, and Aby's relation with the Spanish is of greater alterity, while Gabriela says she feels more Spanish than Ecuadorian. The biggest difference comes from ethnicity. Latin Americans are seen by other immigrants as the group with the easiest integration,

which, to a certain extent, is confirmed in the interviews with Gabriela and Daniel. In turn, Chinese and Africans are the most strongly identified as strangers. Africans are more approached by police, and Chinese often feel observed. This shows how physical traces impact the relations immigrants experience in their countries of destination. It should be noted, however, that in addition to the fact that some Latin Americans have physical traits that are considered western – which do not visually distinguish them as immigrants –, others have indigenous traits, which are considered to be better because of the colonial past and the preexisting idea of a Hispanic-American world, especially with regard to work.

Whether it is due to selective approaches by police officers or to the treatment given to immigrants in the streets daily, in subway stations or in the dispute over public resources for social assistance; or to the habits and customs of the Spanish, who discriminate against those who do not share the places and spaces claimed as exclusive to the Spanish, as stated by Gabriela. The narratives indicate the existence of multiple forms and mechanisms of discrimination against immigrants, triggered by the recognition of the immigrant as a stranger, due to their features, their accent or language, their religion and customs (Ramos, 2014). This prejudice may result in some benefits, as Daniel points out regarding the preference for immigrant workers in construction. Of course, this valorization only reinforces the hierarchy between the natives and the immigrants.

As we can see, with regard to the dynamics of belongingness and alterity the migratory trajectory does not imply, in the case of the participants, neither a complete rupture with their culture of origin nor a complete adherence to the culture of destination.

#### 4. BODIES AND BODY MODIFICATIONS

In the previous sections, we sought to establish the link of meaning between immigration, belongingness and alterity. Now, we will introduce the variables “body and body modifications” whereby we will think our problem of research. The human history is, also, a history of the human body. It is the history of how we change it, as well as how we give it our most desired form. Whether due to aesthetic or religion reasons, it is possible to find examples of this practice among original peoples in the Americas and Africa. In some continents, there are records of the practice of flattening skulls and widening lips and earlobes due to religion or aesthetic reasons. Also, in Africa, America and Asia, there are records of peoples whose women elongate their necks for aesthetics causes, both in the past (Poirier, 1998) and nowadays (Hunter, 2011). As we can see, the body belongs to a space and to a time. Over it act forces to give it form, weight, smell and different proportions of muscles and fat.

According to Ortega (2008), since modifying the body has costs, like money and/or pain, we cannot understand them as expression of “empty identities” or “floating signifiers” or, even, “supermarket of fantasies”. Instead, body modifications may mean a way for the individual to reposition himself within a social connection in a fragmentary world.

From the point of view of “Embodiment” (Csordas, 1990), the body is delocated from the condition of object to a cultural subject. Similarly to Le Breton, Csordas (1990) understands it as an existential territory (p. 05). This conception better synthesizes the notion of body that is used in this article. This idea is in accordance with ORTEGA (2008), who adds that, “The body becomes a creation space and an Utopia, a virgin continent to be conquered.” (Ortega, 2008, p. 13).

According to Le Breton (2014), we may say that in the contemporary society the body has ceased being only a support for identities. In the postmodern world the relationship between the individual and his body is one in which the individual becomes autonomous in relation to his body. The body becomes a field of actuation of the individual, a territory over which he fights with himself and with the “other”.

There are many possible body modifications. These modifications go from simpler practices such as hair straightening and curling, until radical forms of changing the body, like body mutilation and plastic surgeries, passing, of course, by body art (tattoos and piercings) and bodybuilding (Silva, 2011; Le Breton, 2009 e 2014; Featherstone, 2005). These various forms of changing the body question the borders between “me” and the “other”, as well as the borders between culture and nature.

Despite the many types of body modifications, in consequence of the exploratory character of our research, we have concentrated our literature review in aesthetic surgeries considered to be ethnic, which, as we will see, refer frequently to immigrants. In that sense, regarding plastic<sup>3</sup> surgery in the more general meaning, the literature review shows that since the Ancient Egypt, there are records of people who sought to “correct” wound sequels and noses that did not meet the aesthetic standards of the time (Haiken, 2000). The development of this type of surgery was, therefore, associated, on the one hand, with the need for changes, whether due to disease scarring, such as syphilis, or war injuries. On the other hand, its development is closely linked to the development of drugs, instruments and techniques for surgery and prophylaxis.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding plastic surgeries, it can be said that they are divided, basically, into two groups: a) reparative surgeries and b) aesthetic surgeries. Reparative surgeries are performed in burn victims, for example; aesthetic surgeries are performed with beautifying or aesthetic purposes, in the more general sense (Ennes, Ramos, 2016, p.192/193). See also (Jones, 2008, p. 15 and 16).

Thus, aesthetic surgeries are not a recent phenomenon. According to Gilman (2005, 2010), they were already observed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the number of these surgical procedures increased significantly with the development of new techniques and drugs for sedation and hygiene in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author shows that ethnic plastic surgeries have always been associated with the social, economic, technical and cultural characteristics of the contexts in which they are performed. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for example, ethnic plastic surgeries referred to Western beauty patterns that excluded and diminished blacks and Asians, but also whites with physical features (nose, ears, and mouth) regarded as marks of degeneration or inferiority, like the Irish and the Jews. Ethnic plastic surgeries were practiced, above all, in immigrants, Afro-descendants and in people considered to be outsiders.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the emergence of the consumer society further “shuffled” the identity markers that associate ethnicity with a country or a region of the planet. Thus, while ethnic surgeries continue to be practiced by immigrants, they are also carried out in non-migratory contexts. It is important to emphasize that it is the same context of the aesthetic citizen, transnational beauty and the makeover culture where the attitude of changing yourself is as important as the change itself. (Jarrin, 2017, Jones, 2008).

Still about ethnic surgeries, authors like Niechajev & Haraldsson (1997), Ouellette (2009), Tam *et al.* (2012), and Swami & Hendrikse (2013) reveal aspects of great interest on this subject. Niechajev & Haraldsson (1997, p. 140) show that plastic surgeries can be situated at the intersection between hegemonic notions of beauty and ethnic origin. For Swami & Hendrikse (2013), plastic surgeries are associated with a number of factors, such as individual psychological differences, negative body image, greater investment in appearance, and a greater influence of celebrities as parameters for aesthetic beauty. Regarding ethnic plastic surgeries, the authors found the existence of negative attitudes towards plastic surgery due to a “cultural mistrust” to the society of destination and a strong adherence to the cultural values and strong ethnic identity of origin. Although they may be criticized, these contributions represent an important parameter for research and analysis of a topic that is still not very much explored in the field of Sociology.

Alterity results from a set of factors, all of them socially constructed. Even the apparently obvious and objective phenotypic traits are the result of a process of cultural re-denomination (Silva, 2000). Because we share this perspective, we seek to reflect on the cultural-political context in which immigration occurs in Portugal and Spain, analyzing its origins, migratory trajectory and forms of insertion in receiving societies, as well as to know how the participants see their situation. These are essential elements for thinking about representations and

practices of body modifications. It is necessary to situate immigrants socially, culturally and institutionally in order to better understand their narratives regarding the central theme of this article.

In Portugal, the Goan women who participated in the interviews can be easily identified. Their hair color and type, skin color and clothes worn on special occasions such as wedding or other celebrations, are the more obvious markers. Because they had been living in Portugal for a long time, they did not have a foreign accent. According to Sandra, the distinction between Goan and Indian women also includes their vanity, care for clothes, make-up and the use of skin and hair moisturizing products.

Paula, from Brazil, says she has undergone some changes in the way she dresses, cuts her hair and does her make-up. To begin with, she started wearing fewer low-cut clothes, that is, she adopted a posture to avoid characteristics defined in Portugal as typical of Brazilians. On the other hand, she cut her hair in a way that she was not comfortable with in her country. About this, she said that she sees many immigrants who, because they are away from their home country or city, make changes like wearing different hairstyles and getting tattoos. Paula attributes these practices to a migratory trajectory marked by a sense of freedom and autonomy when compared to life in their home country. However, since she does not have physical characteristics associated to Brazil, after changing her clothing and make-up style, she was identified as Brazilian by her writing – as was mentioned earlier, in the case of her relationship with her adviser at the university –, and by her accent, which immediately identified her when she started talking.

Like Paula, Marcia does not have physical traits considered typical of Brazilians. More than that, when she lived in Brazil her clothing and make up style did not differ significantly from those practiced by the Portuguese. In addition, she has been married to a Portuguese for several years, which has inserted her into a circle with Portuguese families, which enabled her to learn the “Portuguese” ways of speaking, gesturing and behaving. It is clear, therefore, that the “Brazilian way”, “Portuguese way”, “Goan way” of being, speaking and acting are, in reality, constructions, and express hegemonic forms of self-identification (Cuchê, 2002).

As previously mentioned, Tirso and Manuel, both black men, were not willing – or did not find it important – to talk about immigrants’ phenotypic traits, and instead talked about minimizing the existence of racial discrimination against immigrants in Portugal. Tirso, when questioned about modifying ethnic features, recalls Michel Jackson’s story, to demonstrate that this case is distant and exceptional, soon stating that he did not know of any cases of Africans changing their appearance in Portugal.

Sandra believes the Goan and Indian make some changes to their body, especially the hair. If before they were dark, now they are brownish. On the other hand, she notes that some aesthetic practices from her culture, such as the technique of shaping the eyebrows using a thread, have been incorporated into beauty salons in Lisbon. However, the introduction of new beauty styles and techniques cannot be understood without considering the weight and power of the cosmetic industry and the influences that the world of entertainment and the media have in the consumer society (Fortuna, 2002, Bauman, 2008).

Sandra also revealed that the traditional practice by Indian grandparents of massaging babies includes the use of exfoliants in the baby’s body, which makes the skin softer, but also clearer; they also massage the newborn’s nose. This information should be investigated further, but it suggests a certain amount of attention is given to the skin and perhaps the shape of the nose, which is quite typical among Indians.

We sought to get to know the participants’ views about this kind of modifications, even if hypothetically. In Portugal, the participants were more reluctant to talk about it and, when they spoke, they seemed embarrassed. In general, for them, body modifications are associated with personal options, with the objective of improving their self-esteem and well-being. Since they do not recognize (particularly Tirso, Manuel and Jaina) the existence of prejudice, or they believe prejudice is the immigrants’ fault, questioning body modifications did not make much sense. The centrality of beauty in what Jarrin (2017) called aesthetic citizen can help us understand this dislocation of body concerns from the political field (discrimination, prejudice) to the terrain of personal choices.

Several issues that emerged during the interviews in Portugal reappeared among immigrants in Spain, although different aspects were more emphasized in Spain. For example, Aby believes that there is what he calls a “labeling” of immigrants according to their origins and their physical traits to classify them into types of occupations (civil construction, domestic work). For her part, Solange says she finds it difficult to have a hairstyle that she likes for lack of professionals and products suitable for her hair type. Meng and Zhou, who are from different regions of China, emphasize the diversity of appearance and of food preferences. However, the Chinese immigrants recognize their culture presents more homogeneous behavior and values when compared to Spanish people, who lead many different lifestyles. As has been mentioned, the Chinese feel permanently observed because of their physical traits, which can be seen as a process of continuous estrangement and production of alterity from their phenotypic traits.

For Gabriela, having physical traits and an accent that indicate ethnic/national otherness can result in prejudices



and marginalization. To illustrate, she recalls the case of a friend who was prevented from entering a nightclub in Madrid. The reason given by security guards was that the club did not play music that Latin American people liked. On the other hand, according to Gabriela, when physical traits and different accents are seen as “exotic”, this can favor people regarding job opportunities, for example in the fashion industry, where phenotypic traits are valued. However, as Silva (2000) points out, the more distant it is, the more accepted and recognized the exotic will be. Therefore, it is not only a matter of recognizing the right to difference, but also of ensuring a necessary distance from the different.

As already mentioned, Daniel believes the Ecuadorian people are very physically diverse. Some have indigenous or mixed features, and some look more Spanish or western. This distinction is the result of a combination of characteristics, and depends on the level of relationship and proximity of the immigrants with the natives. Like Gabriela, Daniel sees the possibility of some physical aspects associated with immigrants being used as an advantage. According to him, “[...] some jobs are given more easily to immigrants, like in construction [...] because immigrants work harder, some are stronger”. In this case, we can see how aesthetic questions make up the hybridization process in which discrimination expressions can be converted into insertion strategies by discriminated people (Canclini, 2008).

In Spain, the subject of body modifications was talked about more broadly by the interviewees. Aby did not know of any cases involving plastic surgery, but he mentioned cases of hair-type and hairstyle changes, as well as the use of more western-like clothing. Solange thinks that the changes happen because when people migrate, the bonds and forces of coercion experienced at their countries of origin are reduced. This would allow immigrants to make changes that would be unlikely in their city and/or country. Thus, like Solange, who in fact thinks like Cynthia in Portugal, the Chinese experience modifications like letting their beards grow out or changing their hairstyle and wearing western clothes, which would not be approved of in their country. The interviews constantly referred to social relations and the cultural and behavioral patterns of their countries of origin. This makes it clear how the immigration dynamic changes identity links and how this materializes on the body and through body modifications.

The research also demonstrates a lack of disapproval of this type of practice on the part of the people who were interviewed. For them, these practices are not linked to their ethnic origins and, therefore, they are not forms of rupture with their culture and ethnicity, nor of adherence to the culture and ethnicity of their new home. If they thought they were linked, their opinion would be different. All of them, including those who said they did not know

anyone who had had plastic surgeries, would not approve if the motivation was related to a need for integration.

Nonetheless, for the interviewees, there are many types of body modifications and they are practiced frequently. At the same time, the idea of integration or adaptation appears in a nuanced manner. Solange and Aby understand that it is natural for immigrants to follow some aesthetic standards of the place where they live. In that sense, changing the haircut or the way of dressing works as a process that they deem to be natural. Many of these changes go beyond local standards and many refer to trends and more global patterns, produced and disseminated by and in the consumer society, makeover culture and aesthetic citizen as parameters for beauty, happiness and well-being (Bauman, 2008, Jones, 2008, Hunter, 2011, Jarrin, 2017)

On the other hand, the people who were interviewed in Spain differentiate the changes considered to be superficial from deeper changes. Solange, for example, sees no problem in cutting her hair in a way that she says is more European, but she would not like it if parents from her culture started treating their children as Spanish parents treat theirs. This would be a deeper and more distinctive value from her culture and her belonging, more important than a change in appearance.

Chinese immigrants think similarly. Life in a different country and a culture causes immigrants to change patterns in their bodies. However, they believe it is negative to “delete” their distinctive phenotypic traits. This argument, in fact, exposes how enormously complex these practices actually are. First, as we have already seen, immigrants were already different, culturally and physically, in their country of origin, which relativizes the parameter of an authentic and original pattern. The same applies to the culture of the recipient country. In this case, there is not a single Spanish pattern, neither in values and behavior, nor in physical appearance. This, likewise, relativizes this supposed single reference that would stimulate immigrants to change their bodies.

This does not, however, prevent the existence of distinctive feelings, attitudes and phenotypic traits between, for example, the Chinese and the Spanish. Although relative, diffuse and ambivalent, these elements serve to create parameters, largely subjective, around which the interviewees build their narratives about belongingness and otherness. Thus, they feel uncomfortable with the idea of losing their bonds of belonging with their culture and country of origin by changing their characteristics, whether physical or not.

This relativity is activated by Zouh when he gives an opinion about the eye surgery one of his friends had. He thinks his friend’s motive was personal, or even related to character, since, as he explains, his eyes are even smaller than his friend’s. The young Chinese man contradicts himself when he admits that he would like to make some

changes to his appearance, because he feels discriminated against in Spain. He told us about how it bothers him to be constantly noticed. He feels discriminated against and humiliated by the fact that, according to him, Spanish people do not trust foreigners.

Gabriela also wishes to change her body so as not to be so easily identified as Ecuadorian. She says she is easily recognized due to her stature, which is perceived as typical of women from her country. Even if this association is not real, like in the case of the size of Colombian women breasts and buttocks, which Gabriela also mentioned, it ends up being used as an identity marker which, in this case, results in stigma and depreciation.

Meng offered us another possibility for comprehending body modifications. The Chinese girl told us that some changes, like, for example, cutting her hair, might be a way to value her country of origin. When she posts pictures on social networks, her friends would see her positively as more European-like, as someone who is cosmopolitan, capable of going beyond the physical and symbolic boundaries of the place she is from.

Just like Zouh, Meng wants to take advantage of the fact she is living in Spain to change her looks in ways that would not be accepted in their country. Cutting and dyeing one's hair, or letting one's hair and beard grow out might be seen as self-expressions and processes of change in the relations of belongingness, without meaning complete ruptures or complete adhesions. This takes us to the debate about multiple identities or multiple belongings (Bauman, 1999; Hall, 2009).

The field work in Spain also gave us the opportunity to get back to a discussion about the limits of plastic surgeries and reconstructive plastic surgeries<sup>4</sup>, as we have tried to differentiate them. This ambiguity was mentioned during the interview with Daniel. Using Michael Jackson as an example, he said his would be a case of "complete alienation", if the intent of the surgeries was to simply alter ethnic features. However, he also hopes to gather up courage to have plastic surgery on his nose, which was defined as therapeutic, that is, not purely aesthetic. To demonstrate how complex and ambivalent the situation actually is, Daniel has what are considered indigenous features and his nose is different from what is socially seen as European. This narrative demonstrates how the aesthetic can be hiding under health, even in the consumer society and in the makeover culture where boundaries between health and aesthetic are more porous.

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## CONCLUSIONS

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In this article, we sought to argue that the immigrant

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<sup>4</sup> About the differences between plastic surgeries and reconstructive plastic surgeries, see: JONES, Meredith. **Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery**. Oxford, UK; New York, USA: Berge, 2008.

condition is, also, a body condition. During the changes lived by immigrants when they experience the process of geographic social and cultural (re)territorialization, there are also processes of (re)territorialization of her body. This process is physical and/or symbolic. This results from the fact that immigration is a dynamic producer of alterity and of the stranger.

In the context of consumer society, makeover culture and aesthetic citizen, attitudes regarding the body and body modifications are as important as effectively carrying out the body modifications. This is a track to construct a new hypothesis according to which the peoples who get body modifications become part of a new group, the group of people that act upon their bodies. In this group racial, social, gender, nationality and sexuality. In the case, the differences continue existing, but are reassigned by this new marker of identities, the marker of embellishment. These dynamics are according to the identities regime characterized by ephemerality, decentralization and multi-belongingness.

More specifically, the practice of ethnic plastic surgeries is not exclusive to the contemporary world. In fact, as this study sought to demonstrate, this practice is as old as plastic surgeries. In the same way, ethnic plastic surgeries among immigrants and foreigners are not recent, and are not exclusive to the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The sociocultural dynamics of belongingness and otherness no longer function only as the two poles – the immigrant and the nation – among which immigrants, foreigners, ethnic and cultural minorities circulated and traveled. The emergence of a consumer life, among other factors, expanded the repertoire of identities.

The interviews allowed us to get to know a little more about those that involve power, consumerism, culture and body modifications. The narratives by Brazilians living in Portugal and Chinese living in Spain put into question the idea of an ethnic belonging related to a pattern of ethnic features among people from the same origin. Both groups that were interviewed made it clear that there are significant physical differences among immigrants from the same origin.

One unexpected aspect found by the study is the significance of the immigrant trajectory in the game of coercions between the place of origin and the place of destination. That is, some body modifications have more to do with distancing oneself from a sense of belonging to the relationships from the place where they lived (without breaking them), than to increasing the proximity to the place and the relationships that they are living now, which reveals interaction and coexistence dynamics that are characteristic of an intercultural society. Life in a different

and distant country enables people to experience body practices and social relationships that were not accepted by relatives and friends with whom they lived before migrating, such as changing their hair, getting a tattoo, and adopting consumption patterns and different lifestyles. This shows that the meanings given to body representations and modifications are diverse and complex and go far beyond a single ideal of assimilation and/or integration into a new society.

The study indicates that the intersections between immigration, representations and body modifications are multiple and polysemic, and not only express trajectories of continuity, but also trajectories of rupture. Thus, they express the logic of the dynamics characterized by the fragmentation and decentralization of identities, and regimes of multiple belongings. Processes that require prior removal of markers that strongly link immigrants to their origin (or any other unique belonging) in order to mitigate, but not eliminate, physical references to ethnic/national affiliation. These dynamics ensure fluidity to their relations both with their country of origin and their country of destination, and are characteristic of a context where the right to difference is tensed by the needs of the consumer society.

Finally, we propose in this article that immigrants are included in the context of consumer society and makeover culture, and the fact that most immigrants live in precarious conditions but this is not an obstacle to think and to practice body modifications makes the issue even more interesting. Of course, we are not saying that in the consumer society and makeover culture there are not social and economic inequalities. Instead, we propose that there are new and more subtle forms of domination and of power relations.

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