

**IN THE OTHER PERSON'S SHOES:
BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRATION AMONGST SPANISH MIGRANTS
IN DUNDEE**

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‘It is not until I left home that I began to look at maps, learn other countries’ capital names, see others with a different eye’. For Pablo, one of my informants, leaving Spain for the first time meant becoming aware of those he paid little attention to back home: migrants. As Werbner maintains, migration sets in motion a process of change in the individual’s ‘consciousness, their intimate knowledge, and taken-for-granted-expectations’ (2013: 106), and may facilitate the consideration of issues never questioned before. This awareness-gaining process is closely related to what social anthropologists have defined as empathy: the capacity to emotionally, cognitively and experientially put oneself in the other person’s thoughts and feelings (Hollan and Throop 2011: 3). What this suggests is that preconceived notions of a particular social group are viewed from “within” by the empathetic-self, like the anthropologist who puts him or herself in the position of the observed subject. As an emotionally challenging experience, migration exposes individuals to the alterity of other worlds, to ambivalent attitudes of receiving societies, to a sense of displacement and belonging to multiple “homes” (Rapport and Dawson 1998), and as a result, it may also serve as the catalyst to re-thinking notions of migration. Therefore, this ethnographic project explores the reflective learning experiences of Spanish migrants in the Scottish city of Dundee, and examines how beliefs and attitudes towards migration are questioned and re-negotiated through the migrants’ own experience.

In its simplest meaning, ‘migration refers to movement from one place to another... temporary or permanent’ (Balaam 2011: 407), underlying complex and diverse reasons that range but are not limited to the ‘pull’ for a better quality of life to the ‘push’ of economic necessity (Watson 1977). However, due to its complexity and changing nature, social scientists have not agreed upon a clear-cut definition. Alternative definitions propose the concept of ‘transnational migration’ to describe the movements of people transgressing geographic, cultural and political boundaries, bringing host and home societies into a single social arena (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992). They maintain that, although the

concept of “immigration” has been traditionally used to describe the movement of individuals *into* a country, nowadays’ migration is less unidirectional, with migrants moving back and forth both physically and ideologically (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Based on this approach, I will refer to “migration” as the movement of people, commodities, information, as well as notions of citizenship, belonging and identity beyond geographical borders (Werbner 2013), and will describe “migrants” as the subjects in movement who create an ideological bridge between two or more societies (Brettell 2000).

As a migrant myself, moving back and forth between my country of origin, Spain, and my current residence, Scotland, I see myself being what Rapport and Dawson (1998) describe as ‘displaced between homes’, and subject to motivations such as the search for a better quality of life, which has led many other Spanish individuals to migrate. My familiarity with this issue has led the semi-structured encounters with my informants in a context of mutual sharing of what it means to be a migrant between “homes”.

Rapport and Dawson (1998) describe the modern consciousness of migration as displacement between cultural worlds in which, while simultaneously being rootless, notions of belonging and identity are constantly redefined. As a result, the narratives migrants recount in this new home in movement express a stimulated awareness of what it means to be ‘migrants of identities’. Moreover, the simultaneous experience of dislocation, alienation, loss of familiarity, and the sense of being split between two or more realities, Werbner (2013) maintains, is the catalyst for an increased acknowledgement of the individual’s preconceived notions of identity, belonging and cultural diversity. This movement-related transformation of the human subject, Svasek (2012) argues, is a process whereby the individual’s ‘situated and emotional subjectivities change, either temporarily or leading to a more permanent personal change’ (2012: 5). She uses the example of individuals who momentarily enact the identity of a “pilgrim” during a spiritual journey, and maintains that it is through this experience that they come closer to what “pilgrim-ness” means.

This example could be used as an analogy for first hand experience of migration. Hollan and Throop (2011) maintain that it is particularly the first-person perspective that enables the individual to understand the other person’s point of view. Consequently, it can

be argued that the experience of migration may facilitate a process of engagement with a previously unfamiliar social situation that enables the re-negotiation of notions like identity, status, belonging, and cultural diversity, which consecutively, places the individual “in the other’s shoes”, enabling the comprehension of what it means to be a migrant.

These changes in the awareness of migrant subjects are part of a larger process in which migration is seen as transforming most sending and receiving societies (Brettell 2000). Glick Schiller et al. (1992) maintain that nowadays’ cultural boundaries are more permeable, enabling large displacements of information, languages, imagery, customs and narratives, and consequently making different ways of living increasingly influence one another (Clifford 1986, in Rapport and Overing, 2000). The result of this fluidity is neither a complete integration nor segregation of different societies, but instead, a mosaic of cultural diversity (Rapport and Dawson 1998) that leads to multiple combinations of different ways of life. As a result, migrations today have created a space where different cultures meet and coexist but also collide in their incompatibilities, raising questions about cultural diversity, tolerance and social justice (Herzfeld 2007).

In the particular case of Europe, the twenty-first century is experiencing what has come to be called the ‘cultural-diversity sceptical turn’ (Grillo 2010). Grillo describes how political panel discussions in the United Kingdom are increasingly concerned with the governance of multiculturalism and difference. “*Why don’t they integrate?*” becomes a heated topic of debate, defending expectations that migrants should adapt to the host society, and in some cases discard certain of their cultural traditions. Herzfeld (2007) explains that this increasing fear and resentment with the migrant’s presence underlies implicit prejudices and rejections of “difference”. As a result, the lived experience of the migrant, regardless of his or her ability to move freely across territories, still entails the crossing of social and cultural boundaries and the likely encounter of the unfamiliar, sometimes welcoming, and other times shocking and unreceptive attitudes of a new environment (Kivisto and Faist 2010).

However, Glick Schiller et al. (1992) maintain that whilst these elements are part of many migrants’ experiences, it underestimates the active role migrant communities play in the process of adjusting and creating a sense of ‘home’ between two or more societies.

Thus we should avoid typologies that generalize the diverse and complex nature of migration (Brettel 2000) and instead, we should be concerned with what is happening on the ground (Grillo 2010), the lived experiences, beliefs and attitudes of both migrants and receiving societies in each particular social, cultural, economic and political context.

As for now, we place ourselves in the streets of Dundee, in the cafés and public squares where they often meet. The subjects in question are Spanish adults, who for different reasons have voluntarily migrated to the UK enjoying the legal status to move back and forth within the European Union (Kivisto and Faist 2010). *But what made them leave?* According to Watson (1977), the reasons to migrate should not be merely explained by ‘push-pull’ models, as this obscures the complexity of migratory movements. However, he maintains that the search for better economic and professional opportunities have been important motivations both historically and in the present. Accordingly, the reasons to leave for my informants ranged from better professional prospects in Scotland, the need to learn English to enhance their employability, and the increasing pressure of a home imbedded with pessimism, economic difficulties, and lack of opportunity. This is not a novelty considering that Spain is one of the European countries most affected by the current economic recession, with a 26.03% of unemployment in 2013 (La Vanguardia 2014). Newspapers and everyday public discourse often refer to concepts like ‘brain drain’ or ‘lost generation’ describing the masses of youth ‘forced’ to leave the country due to lack of professional opportunities (The Guardian 2013).

For example, Javier is a graduate student in finance who works as a waiter in a restaurant in Dundee. He came here two years ago with the excitement of having a very valuable opportunity in his hands: learn English while simultaneously earning sufficiently to live well. He knows that this experience will be the *trampolín* (springboard) to launch his career in finances, something he believes is quite unreachable in Spain at the moment. Although he emphasized that he migrated voluntarily, David talked about the narratives of some of his colleagues who feel ‘forced’ to leave due to the lack of career prospects in Spain.

Pablo, a friend of Javier, maintained that the decision to leave and the first few months of adaptation were particularly challenging. He graduated last year in industrial

engineering, but due to the high unemployment rates, he felt that the economic and political situation in Spain 'forced' him out of the country. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) maintain that the reasons to migrate are to an important extent induced by world capitalism, which has created economic dislocations and further economic vulnerability. However, they argue that modern-day migrants are also influenced by many other factors like transport and communication facilities, which have eased the movement of many more individuals. Consequently, although Javier and Pablo are part of a generation extensively affected by the economic and political crisis in Spain, the increased access to information, technology, and modes of transportation have to certain extent facilitated their decision to migrate.

To understand the current situation of migration in Spain one has to consider its historical context. The country has been a major receiving country for migrants both outside and within the EU, and as such, Spanish citizens have been hosts to many different migrant communities. However, despite a long history of contact with other cultures, this has in many cases exacerbated forms of implicit and explicit prejudice in different parts of Spain (Rogozen-Soltar 2012). Rogozen-Soltar describes how in the region of Andalusia, migrants are often socially, politically and economically marginalized on the basis of shared ideas of social belonging and ethnicity. Consequently, because preconceived notions about how migrants should behave, adapt, and live seem to influence how others interact with them, I asked my informants how *they* perceived their own and other individual's attitudes towards labour migrants in Spain, and how consequently they reflect on *their own* experience as migrants in Dundee.

Laura, a primary school teacher from Madrid, believes that being in contact with migrant communities does not necessarily foster attitudes of tolerance. Her experience in the Spanish capital is that, despite being a major destination for migrants from different parts of the globe, it is one of the most intolerant cities she has seen. She maintains that her own experience as a labour migrant in Dundee has been particularly ambivalent: while having a general feeling of being positively considered, Laura had a few setbacks that made her rethink her 'migrant' identity. She faced issues with her letting agency who forced her into four months of additional payment, justified by saying that: 'This is Scotland, you no longer are in Spain. Here we do things in this way'. Laura felt the frustration of being treated

differently due to her nationality, and this made her aware of the danger of categorizing others in terms of a social or ethnic sense of belonging.

Similarly, Carlos, who is working as a waiter while studying mechanic engineering at the University of Dundee, maintains that before leaving Madrid, he was not really aware of the very closed mentality of many of his acquaintances. Like Laura, he claims that residents in the Spanish capital hold generalized beliefs like 'migrants are only there to steal Spanish jobs and threaten national security'. However, his experience in Dundee has made him critically reconsider such beliefs and attitudes of discrimination towards migrant communities. For example, he told me how he has become more sensitive to the socially accepted *cachondeo* (teasing) that is particularly characteristic of daily Spanish discourse, and which often justifies these masked prejudices. Contrarily to Spain, he thinks Scotland is very open to other cultures and life-styles, and he has generally felt a welcoming attitude towards his origins and reasons to move to Dundee.

The ambivalent experiences of migrants with the natives of a particular society have been issue of extensive ethnographic enquiry. Buechler and Buechler (1975) describe how Galician labour migrants to Switzerland in the 60s and 70s encountered a setting of restrictions and neglect imposed by the Swiss residents, a response to the increasing fear of *Überfremdung* (overforeignization). Similarly, Pipyrou (2010) maintains that Grecanici migrants in the Italian city of Reggio Calabria were initially received by contemptuous locals, and still nowadays are perceived as a community of lower social status. These examples enhance awareness on the issue that discrimination and resentment towards migrants is not so much a factor of cultural, geographical or political boundaries, but that it also occurs within legally established territories of free movement, as it is the case of the European Union.

The claims my informants made about discriminatory attitudes towards migrants both in their home country and through their own experience in Dundee lead to the questioning of whether the personal experience of migration does really encourage or rather impedes the individual to re-think preconceived notions about migration. I therefore asked my informants: *what elements of your experience as a migrant in Dundee have*

assisted your understanding of migration? And as such, what are your beliefs and attitudes towards migration today?

'You go through very difficult moments', Sofía, an educational psychologist from Alicante, expresses her frustration over the challenges faced when others do not make an effort to understand her English, as well as the uncertainties of an increasingly unstable income. Once she faced unresponsiveness from the Dundee College when it came to providing financial support due to her lack of fluency in English, and this made her go through the emotional experience of what she believes many migrants must go through. However, she maintains that going through these difficulties and the demands of adapting to a very different life-style have made her become more mature, more open and aware that there are multiple ways of experiencing and seeing the world.

Similarly, Paula, a nurse from Barcelona, has become increasingly conscious of the difficulty to adapt to a new culture without a basic understanding of the native's language. Especially in the health system, she emphasizes the importance of tolerance and solidarity towards those who are unable to communicate their issues, and that once she goes back to her employment in Spain she will have learnt a lesson everyone should: to know how to interact with migrants regardless of where they come from, keeping in mind the challenges they might be going through.

Dundee locals are also aware of the challenges Spanish migrants have with the English language. Laura noted during our conversation that not so long, a shop attendant explained to her that it was uncommon to hear Spanish individuals speaking English. Laura maintains that consequently this is the image Dundee residents have of Spanish migrants: as 'lazy' and incapable of integrating. She consecutively criticised the attitude of other Spanish migrants who stay in large groups without making an effort to neither interact with others nor learn the local language. Nevertheless, her friend Itxaso, also a primary school teacher, noted throughout our conversation that different Sub-Saharan African and South American communities back in her hometown in the Basque Country also create enclosed groups that rarely interact with locals, eventually creating more social segregation. However, she acknowledges that since she is in a similar situation here in Dundee, she finds herself spending an important part of her time with other Spanish migrants and explains that: 'You

feel more at home, it is inevitable'. Pipyrou maintains that for migrants, a network of kinship, friendship and migrant counterparts, is essential to 'provide the newcomer with economic assistance, psychological and social solidarity' (2010: 26); and it is particularly in the context of displacement and unfamiliarity that this need for belonging and intimacy is particularly longed for (Werbner 2013).

Paula and her husband Juan also express their understanding of why migrant communities tend to cultivate their customs and create a sense of "home" abroad. Their recent settlement in Dundee has been significantly facilitated by the community of Spanish migrants that hold monthly events of potlucks, and who communicate their concerns through a private page in Facebook: *Españoles y Latinos en Fife-Dundee*. Anna is grateful to have access to such support, and maintains that it enables to overcome shared challenges, creates resilience, and ensures a better quality of life. As Buechler and Buechler, maintain, 'the migration process is associated with a complex network of ties among migrants' (1975: 21), in which they create a bounded space where they spend a lot of their time in each other's company, emphasizing aspects of their cultural identity.

Consequently, although there is an awareness that the tendency to cluster and cultivate social distance may be seen as disrespectful and threatening (Grillo 2010), several of my informants agree that they themselves are part of a circle of Spanish acquaintances that facilitates their adaptation to the new environment. As a result, Laura and Itxaso came to the conclusion that, in order to avoid conflicts and feelings of resentment due to their presence, efforts of comprehension have to come from both parts: the host and the migrant. Pablo also maintained that because *we* are coming for a better future, *we* have to make efforts to adapt to the culture, show respect, learn the language and contribute to the economy.

Finally, Carlos summarised his learning experience as the necessary 'ingredient' to understand that the world cannot be seen through a single lens, and that consequently everyone should experience moving outside one's culture to see what it means to be a 'foreigner', away from familiarity. He maintained that, if everyone went through such an experience, the feelings of 'superiority' some cultures have over others may be questioned

through the individual's first-hand experience of migration, and perhaps, this may help us strive towards a more thoughtful and inclusive society.

In conclusion, through a mutual sharing of individual experiences I have provided an exploration of the beliefs and attitudes Spanish subjects have about migration during their own experience of being migrants. As Rapport and Dawson (1998) describe, it is most likely in the stories we tell about our lives in movement that the themes of belonging and interaction with different cultures are brought up. Most importantly perhaps, these narratives provide an insight into how one's consciousness is formed through the personal experience of migration. Although my informants' narratives vary importantly, I suggest considering their shared experience of living abroad for the first time as the occasion in which the previously unfamiliar "migrant" became part of their everyday life. And it may be that such enactment facilitates what anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers as well as medical scientists describe as the human capacity *to imagine oneself in the other's shoes* (Hollan and Throop 2011), enabling the re-consideration of migration from a nearer point of view. Nevertheless, this encounter should only be conceived as an approximate approach to how movement between cultural worlds is lived and understood, leaving any further conclusions to future ethnographic interpretation.

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