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This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the author.


Additional Information:


Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/15695

Version: Accepted for publication

Publisher: Berghahn Books © Jackie Waldren and Ignacy-Marek Kaminski

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Children’s moving stories: how the children of British lifestyle migrants cope with super-diversity

Karen O’Reilly

Introduction: the day to day realities of super-diversity

In 1993 as a novice ethnographer and PhD student I moved out to Spain with my family for 15 months to research the British community living on the Costa del Sol. My children were then 9 and 11 years old and I enrolled them in Spanish school for a year, telling myself I would be happy if all they managed was to learn the language. Since then they have both lived in Spain for some time as young adults. One has also lived in Ecuador and Peru and is now married to a Peruvian; the other has helped produce training materials for import clerks in South America. I like to think of this as a success story, but it should also cause me to stop and think about what we can learn from our children as ethnographers. Telling that story in more depth would involve me confessing there was an occasion when, in order to resist handing over my informants as examples for the mass media to use in articles about the Brits abroad, I persuaded my daughter to volunteer her personal story. She got herself into a terrible tangle by pretending to the journalist to be married to her sister’s husband (because her own husband was still in Peru!) and then agreeing to photographs for a national newspaper! But, as I say, that is another story.
The focus in this chapter is on the children of those British migrants we lived amongst and how they cope with, and impact on, the day to day realities of life as migrants in conditions of what Steve Vertovec (2007) has called super-diversity. Vertovec contends that contemporary societies can often no longer be characterized in terms of multiculturalism, or even diversity; terms which attempted to capture the relationship between a few large ethnic minority, immigrant groups and homogenous groups of ‘locals’. Because the ethnic and mobility mix has become so complex, a new term is required:

Britain can now be characterized by ‘super-diversity’, a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. (2007: 1024)

There are so many different kinds of migrant, with such different migration trajectories, experiences and expectations, subject to such variant policy and practice responses, constituted of such an array of class, gender and ethnic backgrounds, that we are confronted with an array of challenges not seen before. I think this is also true of Spain, especially in regions such as the Costa del Sol and the Costa Blanca, which are home to and visited by tourists and migrants from diverse parts of the globe, including Morocco, Romania, Colombia, Ecuador, Germany, Britain, and Russia (see www.ine.es). The social scientific challenges posed by such diversity, Vertovec argues, include: the
demand for more multivariate analyses, that explore the interaction of country of origin, language, immigration status, age, and so on; better qualitative studies of super-diversity, that include some analysis of the role of the state; and thorough investigation of the conditions and challenges of super-diversity. This chapter responds to his specific call for a better understanding of new experiences of space and ‘contact’, and of new patterns of segregation, transnationalism and integration. Vertovec also notes the need for analysis to work outward, to take account of the meanings participants ascribe to actions, but also to explore the structures which impact upon these perceptions and practices. I am attempting to respond to Vertovec’s call, by exploring children’s experiences and the various factors which help shape their perceptions and their actions, and which in turn impact on the migration experience for the parents.

**Strong structuration theory.**

The chapter also draws on strong structuration theory, as advanced by Rob Stones (2005). Strong structuration attempts to advance Giddens’ (e.g. 1979 and 1984) and respond to criticisms of his work. The key strength of strong structuration, for my purposes, is that it provides concepts to apply to empirical work. Crucially structuration does not give primacy to either structure or agency but sees them as related through the agents’ perceptions, practices, meanings and understandings. In other words, structural constraints can be included in qualitative analysis through awareness of the ways in which they impinge on actors’ ways of thinking and feeling. It is seen as crucial to understand practices in order to understand structures and structures to understand practices. The key concepts this chapter relies on are habitus (or general dispositional) and conjuncturally-specific internal structures.
Habitus, as used by Stones, is almost interchangeable with habitus as used by Bourdieu. It refers to taken-for-granted ways of acting and thinking, habits of speech, chains of association, a generalised knowledge, embedded in corporeal schemas, and memory traces (see Stones 2005: 88, and Bourdieu 1977 and 1998, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The main difference is that Stones wishes to make it clear his use of the concept is non-deterministic, and relates to a general set of transposable dispositions which can be distinguished from the more conjuncturally-specific structures. The latter is the agents’ understanding and interpretation of the various rules, norms and expectations associated with given roles and positions, and their relation to other roles/positions. Conjuncturally-specific internalised structures also involve an awareness of the wider context of action, which will be acted on to some extent on the basis of habitus. In other words, how a person acts in a given situation at a given time is to some extent a result of their habitus, which has been built slowly over time in relation to their class, gender, experience and so on, and depends to some extent on how they interpret the given set of external (structural) circumstances they are currently faced with, and negotiate the rules and norms associated with their current role or position.

I also rely on Stones’ concepts of hard and more malleable external structures. Structuration accepts a duality (interaction) of structure and agency, in which structure is both medium and outcome of practices. But Stones wants to retain the sense of a more firm dualism (separateness) between agents and external structures in which some structures appear to the agent as intractable at least at the point of action. Children are more likely than powerful adults to be faced on a daily basis with intractable or apparently intractable structures in the form of rules, expectations, laws, and financial constraints.
Background

Between 2003 and 2005 I returned to Malaga province, in the south of Spain, to do more ethnographic work and conduct a survey of 340 migrants. The phenomenon in this area had grown, spread inland to more rural areas, and now included several younger migrants with families. The British are now possibly the largest minority group in Spain with a recorded 250,000 residents and estimates trebling that (O’Reilly 2007a). Increasing numbers of young families with children are joining the earlier wave of retirement migrants. There are 30,000 children from the UK now living in Spain. Two thirds of these (at a rough estimate) attend private international schools. And while these figures already appear substantial it is worth noting the clustering effect of migration. Migrants do not tend to spread themselves evenly across a country but for historical or geographical, social or cultural reasons, cluster with other migrants. The local effects of British and North European migration to Spain’s coastal zones, especially certain towns and villages in Mallorca, the Costa del Sol and the Costa Blanca, are therefore substantial and profound (Aledo 2005, Waldren 1996).

I returned to the west of Malaga because British migration here could now be conceptualised as rural rather than coastal, and I had explained the lack of integration of British in Spain using the theoretical lens of tourism (O’Reilly 2003, 2007b). I returned because ten years had passed and I wondered if children who had grown up in the area might be more settled; if I might find some sort of (even segmented) assimilation, or some of that symbiosis between insider and outsider once witnessed in Mallorca (Waldren 1996). What I found was a few migrants had learned the language sufficiently to call themselves fluent, some had crossed the imaginary, ethnic boundary and become assimilated or integrated, and several were working at the symbolic border (see Barth...
1969), translating and interpreting (usually in low paid, low skill jobs). But, in general, the same old patterns were emerging (see O’Reilly 2000, King et al 2000, Rodriguez et al 1998). There was, and still is, very little interaction between British and Spanish in the areas where they settle in large numbers. If anything had changed it was the growing feeling of sadness and regret on the part of many migrants, that their move had been so unsuccessful in those terms. Because, counter to many assumptions made about these migrants, many of them do actually hope and endeavour to integrate more fully.

As I have argued elsewhere, lack of integration is not necessarily a problem (Huber and O’Reilly 2004, and of course, integration is a contested and contentious term (Eriksen 2007). Many North European migrants in Spain are able to creatively play with the borders to their own ultimate advantage. For others, however, lack of integration equals social exclusion: lack of access to pensions, health care, housing, schooling, and the vote (O’Reilly 2007a). These are some of the unintentional structural outcomes. My interest has thus turned to trying to explain the continuing marginalisation of some groups, and the contradictions between apparent lack of effort to integrate and sincere regret and disappointment at not being able to. The more I spoke to people about these interests and concerns the more I was told: you should talk to the children. Migrants seem to invest their hopes and dreams in their kids; these migrants felt their own marginalisation and frustration were vindicated by the feelings and experiences of theirs.

During 2003 and 2004 I took the opportunity to spend some time in an International School in the Costa del Sol. The school follows the English curriculum and takes children from reception to A level. The intake includes a mix of nationalities, including Spanish, but has a majority of British children\(^1\). Over the space of a year and a half I spent time in the school, in the playground chatting to pupils, in the classrooms, in
the staffroom and the secretary’s office, and after school talking to parents about their own lives and those of their children. I conducted several group interviews in the classroom, individual and small group interviews outside of the classroom, and got two groups of 11 - 13 year-olds to write short essays about ‘living in Spain’. In this chapter I share with readers the children’s stories, experiences, feelings, the choices they make and what they are based on. The children’s stories reveal the habitus, or dispositions, and the conjuncturally-specific internal structures that shape their perceptions and practices.

Why Spain?

It is important to note that children do not choose to go to Spain; the parents make the choices and then persuade the children. These are hard structures, confronted by the child as barely malleable. One boy did not want to go to Spain until his parents offered to buy him a new bike; another was persuaded by the promise of a trip to the beach every day. The parents moved to Spain, as they explain it, in search of a whole new way of life. They are attracted by the sun, the warm weather, health benefits, food, and their perception of Spanish culture. They are also attracted by cheap property prices, cheap food, drink and cigarettes. But what parents expect from Spain heavily relies on the country’s associations with tourism, with leisure and pleasure, and even authenticity (MacCannell 1999). They are seeking a ‘real’ Spain, which is a bit quaint and backward, slow, relaxed, has a strong sense of community, and a robust morality: ‘an idealised setting that satisfies personal needs’ (Waldren 1996: xv). They are escaping, on the other hand, the ‘rat race’, high crime rates, high unemployment, greyness, cold and misery. The children put this all so succinctly:²
I moved here because of my dad's family; they were always stealing (stealing) and doing bad things, and my mum and dad wanted to make a new start by moving to Spain. (Daniel, Year 7, essay)

Me and my family moved here because my dad had just sold his business and we were either going to move to America or here. Then we chose Spain because we thought that America was too far away. (Justin, Year 8, essay.)

We moved to Spain because in England you can’t do anything because it’s always raining, but over here there is mostly always sun. (Fran, Year 7)

I moved out here because my dad turned ill; he previously had three heart attacks (heart attacks) and he suffered another one last Christmas. The doctor said to move out here so we did. Spain is so much better than England for example if you were to watch English news it would just be about people getting killed, raped, and kidnapped whereas out here all they say is where the next fiesta is. (Joshua, Year 8, essay)

My mum and Dad wanted to move here because of the sun. (Sharon, age 15)

Mixed messages of Spain

The children are clear why they moved but they get very mixed messages from their parents about life in Spain once they are there. British migrants to Spain generally love their new host country and are happy to have moved (Casado-Díaz 2006). However, once settled they remain politically, economically, socially, culturally and linguistically marginal (O’Reilly 2007a). Almost a third of respondents to my survey never meet Spanish friends, family or neighbours to talk to. Only 2 per cent can hold a conversation
in Spanish and even fewer call themselves fluent. Half never read a Spanish newspaper, most have never voted in an election in Spain, and over a third are not registered as resident in Spain. These facts are also revealed through the children.

- I don’t speak fluent Spanish, but I know enough to get by, but my Mum and Dad don’t speak a word and I have to translate all the time. (Ellie, Year 8)
- I have to translate for them when we go to restaurants and things. It’s like, ‘oh Scott, what did he say then?’ ‘ask them for this and that’. You get a bit sick of it after a while. (Scott, age 14)

Many of the working age migrants are working in the informal economy or are early-retired. Several children had parents who were still working in the UK, or elsewhere in the world. Their roots therefore are not in Spain. James’ father, for example, goes home three weeks each month for work. Susie and Jennifer (aged 15) both have fathers who live in Spain but run estate agencies in the UK. Charlie’s father is an entertainer who travels back to the UK for a week whenever he needs to earn some money.

Several parents have lived abroad for most of their lives, chose Spain from a list of options and make it clear they may move elsewhere in the future. Others are more committed to a new life in Spain, but continue to miss home and family in the UK. In many ways these are transnational migrants, retaining strong links across borders. Ties with home are firmly upheld, with visits for work or shopping, to see family, or for weddings and funerals. They keep in touch via email, internet chat, and telephone; they have a constant stream of friends and relatives visiting from the UK (Williams and Hall 2002). Scott’s father, for example, has an air-conditioning company in the UK which he visits for a week each month. His Mum stays behind; she likes to go for lunch with her
English friends. Neither speaks much Spanish. But, regardless of these strong ties to home, very few ever admit they would go back home permanently. They denigrate Britain as dull, grey, crime-ridden, hectic, pressured, and ruined (O’Reilly 2000 and 2002). Christine, a 16 year old who had been sent to Spain to live with her Aunt because she had been expelled from Boarding school in the UK told me:

- I mean they all say they’ll never go back to England (laughs). Most people who live here say they’ll never go back to England. But I still… I think they still feel like England is home.

The parents of Louise, age 16, still have a business and their main property in the UK. Louise knows her Mum misses her family back home but she says she will never leave Spain. Louise, on the other hand, does want to go home, but her Mum doesn’t want her to. She feels very torn between loyalties, to her Mother and to her friend back home who, at the time of the interview, had been having an affair with her teacher! Louise says,

- It’s like I’ve got a life here and a life in England and there’s lots of stuff going on in England that I feel like I should be there for, like now.

There are also a lot of tourists coming from the UK to these same areas where the migrants live; they share social and living spaces, and so life in Spain for British migrants is always a bit like a holiday. Reminders of home are continuous. Louise says because there are so many visitors from the UK, when you make friends locally you tend to make friends with people from home.
Why International School?

British children know they live in a tourist place and enjoy the lifestyle that provides; they know that few parents ever want to go home; but they are also aware they live on the margins of society. Their conjuncturally-specific internal structures therefore include an awareness that neither they nor their parents are fully settled or integrated. They are also in a school system that is separate from the mainstream. I asked them why they had chosen to go to International school. The responses fall into two categories which reflect the difference between traditional and non-traditional private school intake. The traditional international/private school intake includes the children of middle class parents and those we might otherwise call expatriates (see Fechter 2007). Middle class parents want their children to learn the English curriculum because they believe it is better and that it broadens their children’s opportunities. Privately funded education is also usually better funded than state education, and has better resources. Children in international school acquire social and cultural capital as well as human (or educational) capital. Middle class parents expect their children to be able to compete in a global market and therefore to need to be fluent in written and spoken English. International school is seen to offer an exclusive education. Traditional private school children are there for reasons of their parents’ aspirations; it is part and parcel of their class habitus. The children express this thus:

- Well, we meet nicer kids here (Girl, age 14).
- People are more friendly here than in Spanish school. The Spanish kids here are different, if you know what I mean (Girl, age 15)
• My parents want me to learn English because they want me to be a lawyer (Spanish boy, age 16)
• I came here because I will go to Uni in America or maybe England, I don’t know, but I’m going to need English anyway (Boy, age 14)

The non-traditional international school intake includes those who in their home country would not normally aspire to private schooling. Working class children go to international school because they want to continue with the same curriculum or because they failed to settle in Spanish school. Their parents seem to make this rather expensive choice quite readily, accepting their own marginality. This is just another expression of their own deep ambivalence about Spanish society. Note that it is cheaper than in the UK to go to international school in Spain. Laura (aged 17) started in Spanish school, then went to international school, and is now going back to the UK to go to university. I asked her why she went to Spanish school first.

I wanted to mix. I didn’t want to be like these people who don’t learn the language and don’t have nothing to do with the Spanish. Ha!

Interviewer: So, what happened?
To be honest they weren’t very nice to me. They were at first. At first I was the new little English girl and they were, like ‘oh, she’s English, we can practice with her’, our English, you know. They were like all over me, but that wore off, and, after a time there more English there and, well, they weren’t really very nice to me. I was having trouble coping cos I had only had a few lessons of Spanish before I came and I thought I would just pick it up, really, but you don’t.
Experiencing marginalisation

One thing the entire group shares is that some had really tough experiences of intimidation and abuse in Spanish school and some get what they called ‘racial abuse’ out of school. When one child mentioned any of this in a group the rest would join in and the entire conversation would become very animated and heated, as children rushed to tell me about their own experiences or those of someone they know. As an internalised structure it is becoming part of the new set of dispositions the group shares. Several children described being treated unfairly when they went to Spanish school. They also described being bullied or teased, picked on, or simply treated as different, either in school or in the street when they are out playing. Children are aware they are in a minority.

- (In Spanish school) they wouldn’t even give me a chance to communicate so I was forced to hang around with the English (Sean, age 14)
- They would shout racial abuse you know, bloody foreigners and this and that, get lost, and that. (Boy, age 17)
- In Spanish school, I did like it but I got bullied I had a fight every day (Ben, Year 8)
- On Sunday I got chased by loads of them and they just don’t like the English, I don’t think. (Girl, FG 5)
- I see a boy once and they just hit him there and then. They didn’t do anything to me. I just walked away, but he got his hat tooken (sic) off him and they kicked him in the face twice, and broke his tooth. (Boy, age 15)
• if you’re German or English they want to pick on you. (Girl, FG5)
• the Spanish people they always look aggressive and they’re always like watching, like they want to kill you (two boys agree) and if you cross, like you attempt to walk around them, but they just come over and they say, give me your money, or … (Boy in FG3).

Some described the way they have to hide or play-down their nationality at times. One told me he is not allowed to wear his football t-shirt when he goes out to play now because it is seen as antagonistic. Some talk about trying to make Spanish friends and failing. They are aware they are seen as tourists who live there, and that if tourists get into trouble they will be tarred with the same brush (see Waldren 1996). They described being picked on, shouted at, and called names. They particularly do not like being called guiri, an ambivalent colloquialism for foreigner sometimes used as a term of abuse and sometimes as endearment. One boy told me he had received death threats on his mobile phone; others had received threatening notes. Several had things stolen (hats, bikes), were chased, or got into fights. These experiences are not reserved for the English. Nic is Danish but speaks good Spanish and English. He is finishing school soon and taking some time out to plan his future. All he knows is he doesn’t want to stay in Spain.

Last year I was attacked by a few Spanish, for absolutely no reason. They just jumped at me from behind and beat me up quite badly. And a few weeks later one of my friends was beaten up by exactly the same bunch of people. For no reason. They just beat you up because you’re not Spanish.
A Spanish boy told me when he is with English and Spanish boys go by he doesn’t want them to know he is Spanish or they will pick on him for being with the English. These various sets of experiences, feelings, shared emotions, and influences gradually become part of the internal structures children draw on when making their own decisions about who to make friends with and what to do in the future.

**Experiencing International School**

In International school, children feel safer because they are not confronted with their minority status on a daily basis. They experience the security and solidarity of being in a mixed group, yet in some ways they share the status of the excluded, sharing (and consolidating) their experiences of bullying.

- When I moved to St Mary’s I found out it was so much easier and I am friends with people who are different nationality. I think its good that I have made friends with people of different nationality, (Sean, Year 8)
- (In St Mary’s) I felt more comfortable with my environment and the people here even if they are not all English they still speak it fluently so now I don’t feel so different from everybody else, (Georgina, Year 8)

However, they also mix in their own nationality groups there more easily and find this comforting. This is the pull of the habitus, the affirmation of their own set of dispositions, habits, tastes and preferences. They find interesting ways to express their sense of who they are in their own groups, through dress and music for example. As Christine and Nic told me:
• If you come here on Mufty day you would be able to tell straight away where everyone came from….like the punks shall we call them, where they all dress in black, so it is music as well, but all the punks are English, so (laughs). The Danish are all in the fashion of Denmark, and it’s Danish brands, and um, like here they all wear like baggy clothes, whereas the Danish are much more brand conscious. (Nic age 17)

• Yeah, and all the English boys have the same hair cut (laughs) (Christine, age 16)

National identity becomes very important in both positive and negative ways, as they identify with and against each other. But nationality is also confronted by them on a daily basis as a hard external structure. They find themselves living in communities constituted of given nationalities; they can converse linguistically with some groups and not others; they share cultural interests with some groups; they meet children of their own nationality through their parents’ friends; and those in Spanish school were often placed together with others of their own nationality.

• When you’re outside school you hang around with everyone who’s English, it makes you feel like why do you need Spanish? If you, like, hang around with everyone who’s English, and you speak English here you wonder, why do you need Spanish? Well, you really do still need it, but… (Boy, year 8)
Though the above is all as much true of class and gender as nationality, in this super-diverse setting nationality takes on a special relevance. As a particular minority group, the northern Europeans also share an identity that incorporates some social distance, some sense of superiority, a sense of economic wealth and cultural distance. We might think of this as a post-colonial trace, an attitude that has seeped into the habitus over generations. It is revealed in the children’s discourses in subtle ways. The non-European migrants are nothing to them, not worthy of any mention. The Spanish on the other hand are often treated interchangeably with Gypsies, and portrayed at times as envious, and a little backward.

- When they see you have got more than them they just want to steal it
  (Boy, FG5)

- because all the rich people have come here and to buy houses and to stay here and then they know that, and they see that, and that everyone has .... And then they just get aggressive and jealous (Boy, FG3)

- all the Spanish, well typical Spanish girls I call them, they all go around in tight(...) trousers and tight (...) tops and all the English girls go around in sports tops (Girl, FG5)

- and the Spanish girls wear them massive shoes as well. You know them really clumpy spice girl shoes (Several girls laugh at once). (Girl, FG5)
• they all dress like their mothers don’t they? and they wear them earrings.

(Girl, FG5)

One boy said

• basically the Spanish are just Gypsies aren’t they?

This last was a quite extreme comment, not representative, but important in that it highlights a common theme where Spanish children and Gypsies were sometimes talked about as if they are the same thing. One group would start talking about Spanish picking on them or attacking them and then drift into a discussion about Gypsies without distinguishing one from another.

Learning about prejudice

On the other hand the British children I spoke to tend to deny their own prejudices. Children are learning from each other, from the school, and perhaps from home, that bullying is bad, that to mix in your own nationality is not so good, that you should have a good attitude to language, and should try to integrate. So, in interviews children would say things like ‘I’m not being racist but’ or would modify a statement with ‘not all the Spanish are like that.’ They would also enjoy describing the few Spanish friends they have managed to make. But they cannot deny their own comfort at being together. They also learn about each other’s nationality in school and see this as a good thing, they learn tolerance and some of each others’ language. Lots of essays stressed how they have friends of different languages and learn about each other’s language and culture.
- I think it’s quite bad when you move to a different country and you don’t speak the language. (Ellie, Year 8)
- that’s ignorant if you’re gonna live in Spain and not bother learning the language (Girl, FG2)
- I have got friends of different nationalities, for example Spanish, English, Irish, Norwegian, etc. I love having friends who can speak different languages because you can learn them yourself and you get to blend in with them and they also learn to speak English. (Jade, Year 8)

**Futures in Spain**

Most children I spoke to did not see a future for themselves in Spain. International school is a structural postcolonial trace, an institution established to preserve the continuity of the western lifestyle and to raise and teach children uncontaminated by local cultures. Here, of course, it is not the western lifestyle but the class habitus that is being preserved. The school does not have the contacts to enable them to stay in Spain. This is not how that kind of system, established for colonials and expatriates, works. The school curriculum and culture and its wider networks, and therefore the children’s role expectations, all assume a return to the UK or elsewhere in what they see as the ‘modern Western’ (usually English-speaking) world, so that even those who do want to stay know they are not supposed to feel that way. Traditional private school pupils see the world as their oyster and believe that, at least this part of, Spain is rather backward and lacking in opportunities. This is not so much about Spain *per se* as it is about
denigrating the local and parochial and celebrating an elite marginality and international travel.

- I don’t know. I may go to America, or England perhaps, or maybe Denmark for a while (Nick, 6th form)
- Yeah, well I think that most people who go to private colleges feel they are going to leave sooner or later. This is my last year, and I think I am going to take a gap year and maybe travel for a bit, but then I am going to go to university either in England or I’m going to go to the states. (Peter, age 17)
- I’ve got a feeling I am going to live in lots of different countries. First I will start in America because there they speak English (Alex, age 15)
- (talking about staying in Spain) Um, most of the Spanish boys that I know do building. I know loads of Spanish boys who, you know, that’s their goal, that ‘I’m gonna go and work on a building site’. I think that’s what you do when you leave school early as well.
  Karen: *What about the girls?*
  Girls? Work in a shop. (Sharon, 15)

Working class children want to take part in the UK opportunity society and believe they can only do that if they go back. Because of their own limited linguistic abilities, they believe that locally they would only obtain work in bars or estate agencies. On the other hand they know their parents are staying behind and they will miss each other. It is a wrench for them and one this class is not used to; it is not part of the habitus. But their own habitus is changing based on their experiences and networks in international school. They do not learn enough about modern, advanced Spain to
envisage themselves working in the mainstream economy. Their experience is marginal like their parents. And why would they want to stay somewhere they feel so excluded, and where the parents are not really integrated? The school enables them to feel cocooned and to share the status of the excluded and superior.

- Some do leave school at 16. One of my friends stayed here and did her A levels then stayed here and she is just working in a bar. When they stay here it is just because you haven’t really thought about what you want to do. (Girl, age 17)
- I’ll go back to University and I think I’ll stay over there cos, like, here, I don’t see any like job opportunities (Girl, age 15)
- I wanna stay here but there’s no jobs, unless you wanna work in Tivoli world. (Girl, age 16)
- Every English person that lives here is like a waiter or an estate agent and I don’t wanna be a waiter or an estate agent. (Sean, age 14)

To make such choices can be very difficult for those not normally going to private school, who are going back against their parents’ wishes, or where the parents are ambivalent. Several I spoke to were going to live with grand parents or aunts and uncles. Everything leads to them leaving Spain except the parents who have not thought this through and do not want them to leave, but by putting them in international school they almost made their leaving a certainty. The parents are torn between letting go and thinking of their children’s future, and this is even worse when they are going back to a place they said was so awful.
- My Mum is not happy about me going back, my Dad’s a bit disappointed too (Girl, age 16)
- My parents wanted to mix with the Spanish and sort of have a Spanish way of life, but that’s not gonna happen is it? It was a bit of a dream. (Girl, age 17)
- My parents are sad, but it’s just something I felt I had to do (girl age 16)
- I’m going back now and now Mum and Dad think they might go back as well (Steven, age 17)
- 'It's really hard going back to England to study. My parents make me feel guilty every day' (Girl, age 16)

**Conclusion**

To summarise, British children in Spain are living with and internalising the contradictions that mark their parents’ lives. They are aware the parents love Spain and that most never want to go home, but that they are not really integrated or even settled. They must share some of this pull towards their host country and antipathy towards their home since it is now part of their migrant habitus. They have had some negative experiences of being members of a marginal minority, and they share and exaggerate these between themselves. In international school they share the status of the excluded and, since some of the children have been to Spanish school and left, they can all claim to have vicariously stepped into Spanish culture and life in more depth than they have. Their north-European postcolonial habitus demonstrates some antipathy towards the local Spanish but this is mediated by a class habitus that perceives the Spanish in the school as ‘different’ and better. They are acquiring a taken-for-granted dislike of prejudice but find this directed towards their experiences of it rather than their own
attitudes. For middle class children, who see the world as their oyster, Spain is one experience amongst many, a rather backward and quaint if rather pleasant temporary phase in their lives. For working class children who experience what they see as racism and marginalisation, who receive mixed messages about what Spain is and means, who enjoy the comfort of international school and a liminal space, but who are pushed into a middle class trajectory, without all the various forms of capital, choices are limited and the implications profound. Choosing to remain in Spain is denigrated by their peers, but returning to the UK often involves having to live with grandparents or aunts, and is sometimes seen as breaking up the family.
Notes

1. I do not identify the school because although my research was overt it is difficult to obtain informed consent from every participant in a public setting. The school, like its surrounding area, is a setting of super-diversity. There are children of many nationalities in the school, but the vast majority are North European or wealthy, middle class Spanish. Outside the school, as well as the North Europeans who are very much in evidence in affluent areas, the area has numerically important Moroccan, Romanian, Russian, Colombian, and Gypsy minorities. The British, the largest migrant group, consists of retirees, seasonal visitors, second home owners, small business owners, self-employed of all class backgrounds, and peripatetic migrants who own homes in two or more countries and move regularly between them. The Spanish in the area are, for the main part, Andalusian, but even here there are vast differences, in economic, social and cultural terms. There is both a lot of poverty and a lot of wealth. Finally, the area hosts internal migrants from various autonomous regions in Spain, and second-home owning Spanish who visit the area for long periods. None of these, then (though I treat them as such for the purposes of brevity) are homogenous groupings.

2. I have not corrected the spelling where I have quoted from children’s written essays, but have added the correct word in brackets where I think this helps. FG = focus group.

3. Several children of British and other North European migrants do, of course, go to Spanish school, which leads to a whole different set of trajectories, which demand whole new research projects.

References


