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CHAPTER SEVEN

The children of the hunters: Self-realisation projects and class reproduction

Karen O’Reilly

For Zygmunt Bauman the search for utopia in contemporary, liquid life takes the form of an individualised hunt, a self-realisation project rather than an attempt to improve wider society. While lifestyle migration, a mobility motivated by dreams and facilitated by at least comparative wealth, can generally be viewed in this light, does this also hold true for the children? This chapter presents material from interviews and conversations with children of lifestyle migrants in Southern Spain and examines the validity of Bauman’s perspective. It concludes that while his theories appear to work well in explaining the motivations behind lifestyle migration, he lacks emphasis on the continuing salience of traditional categories and the reproduction of structures of inequality, which remain profoundly relevant even for these very young actors in liquid life. To fully understand the choices children make, the trajectories they weave, and the identities they create, we need to invoke the work of Bourdieu and his concepts of habitus, field and capital.

Liquid modernity and the hunt for the good life

Zygmunt Bauman distinguishes three phases of history characterised as traditional society, solid modernity, and liquid modernity. Liquid modernity is a later stage of solid modernity, which arose as a result of attempts to ‘melt the solids’ of traditional society, to shed irrelevant obligations, rigid hierarchies, traditional loyalties, and customary rights (Bauman 2000:3). However, according to Bauman, the new order was to be even more solid. People freed from their old ties and obligations were simply expected to locate themselves in new patterns - in classes - to conform to new sets of rules, and to
orient themselves to new but clearly defined positions or ideologies; solid modernity thus still sought organisation and stability (Jacobsen and Marshman 2008). Liquid modernity extends the impulse of solid modernity but directs its ‘melting powers’ at extant institutions; it is the new reference points, the classes and the newly created patterns of dependency and interaction, that are now subject to liquefaction. Liquid modernity is thus ‘an individualized, privatized version of modernity’ (Bauman 2000: 8). In liquid life (Bauman 2005) we are liberated from lifelong commitments, both in jobs and relationships, free to carve out our own future trajectories without consideration to closeness of family, consistency in work and so on. We can do this where we like, and as we wish. Solid modernity was in effect a search for a better order, a utopian dream. Like a gardener, solid modernity thus attempted to ‘cultivate’ an improved society, weeding out undesirables in the process (Bauman 2004; Jacobsen and Marshman 2008). In liquid modernity utopian dreams are privatised, a personal matter. But liquid modernity is marked by insecurities and fear for the future; we now seek to satisfy our dreams through instant gratification rather than attempt long-term plans. Contemporary utopias, then, are hunted for by individuals rather than socially created (Bauman 2007). Indeed, in liquid modernity we are ‘individuals by decree’, and have no choice but to seek out, or hunt, our own personal, privatised ‘good life’, perhaps through migration to spaces which offer the ‘goods’ we seek.

**The reproduction of inequalities through the practice of social life**

Pierre Bourdieu’s body of work is best understood as providing a series of concepts to aid the interpretation of the *practice* of the social world, in the context of external constraints and internalised structures. Key concepts for this paper are habitus, capital and field. A habitus describes those internalised structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits, ways of acting, that are to some extent individualistic and to some extent also
typical of one’s social groups, communities, family and historical position (Bourdieu 1990: 60). Though Bourdieu does not intend his concepts to be applied deterministically, the extent to which an individual’s actions can significantly vary from the usual activities of their social group are limited, even when apparently freed from traditional ties. A habitus is also ‘inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions’ (Bourdieu 1990: 54). In other words, what cannot be reasonably expected to happen will not be attempted by even the most avid hunter. Furthermore, even though, as times change, the objective probability of obtaining certain things also changes, the practical experience of one’s early years remains formative (Bourdieu 1977: 79).

Generally speaking one is not aware of one’s habitus. The group’s way of thinking appears to the individual as no more than common sense; it is doxic (taken for granted) and therefore somewhat disguised. Though they may be aware that there are ‘people like us’ with similar tastes and styles, individuals believe they naturally have certain predilections, interests, ideas and beliefs, while also believing they can choose to be a certain way as individuals (see Inglis and Hughson 2003).

For Bourdieu (1984), however much we believe what we achieve is due to our individual attributes, there remain dominant and subordinate groups, each with their own sets of dispositions and varying degrees of capital. Cultural capital is the prestige associated with practices and the knowledge of respected cultural facts. It includes educational qualifications, the ability to play an instrument, and even linguistic capital. Dominant groups do not only possess more cultural capital but also have the power to define what is the ‘right kind’ of culture, or the goods that are sought by the hunters, in Bauman’s terminology. They are also likely to possess more economic and social capital. However, as we shall see below, the relevant capitals depend on the relevant
social field: that ‘set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct *interactions* among the agents’ (Bourdieu 1985: 724). In lifestyle migration there are those fields created by the migration, marked by national difference, and those fields that persist in spite of migration, marked by social class.

**The Research**

Over the past fifteen years I have been a peripatetic migrant to Spain, visiting a second home there for several months at a time. This has included three periods of intensive, long-term ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with hundreds of British nationals, and a survey of 340 North Europeans living in Spain, and has culminated in a number of publications (e.g. O’Reilly 2000, 2007; Huber and O’Reilly 2004). As part of this research I also spoke with a lot of children. Most of the stories in this paper are from children in one international school and so are not representative of all European children in Spain, yet the experiences resonate with children and parents in Spain more broadly. 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. The majority of the research with children was carried out between May and June in both 2003 and 2004, collecting ten recorded individual interviews, seven group interviews, 48 topical essays, and many more informal, unrecorded interviews while sitting and chatting with school pupils in the playground, the school café and the classrooms. In total the study has included over 90 children, most of them British.

**Escaping the insecurities and risks of contemporary life**

The children’s stories about moving to Spain, like those of their parents (O’Reilly 2000; King et al. 2000; Casado-Díaz 2006), reveal a sense of escape from what they perceive
as the insecurities, risks, and unpredictability of their lives in the UK, and of a fairly Baumanesque, personalised search for new beginnings and a better way of life elsewhere. Afraid or despondent about what the future holds for them, the British moving to Spain have focused on what they believe they can change; and as Bauman (2007) suggests, the physical act of moving to a new home in a new environment offers the opportunity for instant gratification, a living in utopia not living towards it. Spain, however, remains something of an empty signifier, waiting to be filled with their personal dreams and expectations. It is in many ways an unreal place, an imagined space. One boy explained why his family moved to Spain:

*I moved here because my family all love it, it’s a much better way of life. I hate England, its very dangerous, it always rains and its so dirty. I got mugged at least twice a week, here I’ve only been mugged once.* (Boy, Year 8)

Another wrote:

*Spain is so much better than England for example if you was 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.* (Boy, Year 8)

Several of the children’s stories compared the danger in their home country with the safety of Spain:

*I like living in Spain, because the laws are different and it’s a differance to England. Because in england you have to be indoors by about half seven, well the part of England that I grew up in was not a perticulary nice area, which was Birmingham. People were usually kidnapped from there, a coupld of weeks ago two girls were shot coming out of a club, one was killed and the other was severely injured. That’s why we moved out to spain.* (Boy, Year 8)
The reason why we moved here was because it seems much safer and there’s more possibility that you’re going to get kidnapped than what you are in Spain. I didn’t like my home country because it was dangerous and there was lots of gangs. (Boy, Year 8)

Some spoke of how they feared they themselves would end up involved in crime. A father of three told me he moved his family to Spain because it was only a matter of time before his son ‘got into trouble just like all the other lads in that town’ and a boy said his family moved because they themselves were into ‘bad things’:

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. (Boy, Year 7)

For the children, the move to Spain is an act of consumption of fun, freedom, and nice weather. However, Spain also signifies safety and security, and freedom for the parents from the things that worried them.

I find it better living over here because I can stay out longer with my friends, because it’s safer than England. (Girl, Year 8)

Living in Spain is very fun and the weather is also very nice because in the summer you can go swimming and go to the beach. (Boy, Year 7)

I find it fun living in Spain because I feel safer, as in England I had to be in early because of all the children being kidnapped. In Spain though, I can go out till any time and feel safe ... we moved here because of all the trouble in England like mortgages, tax and of course the news about Iraq. So my parents decided to move out here as soon as possible. I think Spain is great as it has hot weather, even at Christmas, and there are not many restrictions in Spain, like paying to go to the beach. In Spain you just go to the beach whenever you want. (Girl, Year 8)

The children spoke so often about freedom that I began asking them to explain the term. Even a Spanish boy told me that Spain is more easy-going, accepting, and relaxed than
other countries. ‘The Spanish are more free’ another British boy said; ‘it’s more relaxed here’ a girl told me. For many, freedom is inherent in the escape from insecurity.

I like to live in Spain because there is so much freedom over here. We can play out every day and it is safe because in my community there is special switches behind the gate and only grown ups and people my age can reach it as well. So all the little babys are very safe. I have many friends on my community and I go into town with them. (Girl, Year 7)

Back in England, where I lived there used to be a curfew where you used to have to be in by half past eight, cos, like, all the kidnaps and everything, so you couldn’t do much after you got home from school. But over here you can walk round and play out and you feel safe and that. (Girl, Year 11)

For others, freedom is about being able to do or have things previously unavailable; it is instant gratification, like being allowed to have a quad bike when you are only 14. As one girl in Year 11 told me, ‘Well, people are allowed in pubs earlier and they can drink earlier, and like all that kind of stuff’, while another explained, ‘You can go, like, clubbing and stuff. You can’t do that in England (laughs)…You are meant to be 18, but they just seem to let you in…They just don’t care’.

It seems clear that these migrant children share their parents’ enjoyment of freedom from constraint. Like many of the parents, Spain signifies holiday, escape, freedom, and security – in contrast to the risks and insecurities of the home society. However, this desire for both freedom and security is somewhat paradoxical, as we shall see.

The community aspired to as imagined rather than real

For Bauman (2000, 2007), the insecurities inherent in contemporary liquid life lead us to seek community; but while communities promise security they also restrict freedoms, and so community is something sought rather than lived in. It becomes an ideal rather
than a reality. Living in communities would mean acknowledging all its ties and responsibilities - its non-negotiable obligations. In liquid modernity the dream of a community, like utopia, has been privatised; it is a personal matter. Individuals therefore wage daily battles against insecurity and risk, yet continue to struggle to retain freedom. Most British people I met in Spain would on the one hand declare a desire to integrate with the host community yet, paradoxically, make little effort to actually achieve this in practice (O’Reilly 2002, 2007). As an expression of their desire to integrate several parents (of all classes) initially sent their children to Spanish school, perhaps hoping they would integrate on their parents’ behalf. But many children found this experience difficult and ended up transferring to international schools.iii The children described their everyday experiences within the Spanish mainstream schools, complaining that English and Spanish children would play in separate groups, even at opposite ends of the playground, and describing their experiences of bullying or exclusion, from teachers and students alike. ‘I hate Spanish school, you always get picked on if you’re English’ one boy said, and a girl told me ‘Spanish schools are so bad. They stick you in the corner and tell you to go back to your own country and that’. Of course, not all had bad experiences and two children I met were going back to Spanish school so they could improve on their language and mix more, but the following stories were more typical.

I have been in Spanish school it was a nightmare I had to be dragged into the school every day because I was so scared to go into school because I was too afraid to go in because I was to scared of being beat up. (Boy, Year 7)

When I was in a Spanish school I found the Spanish very racist to me and my English friends. It wasn’t very pleasant. We had the Spanish students picking on us and calling us and our family horrible names. Espesilly on the days we had football matches. They used to throw (?) and bread crusts at us if we missed a goal or let in a goal. The teaches
were horrible because they just tell you to copy loads and loads of lines and my friend could speak Spanish and when the teacher told you to do something and you didn’t know what they were saying I asked my friend what was she saying and she had a go at me. In the class there was about five Spanish students and about 12 English students. (Boy, Year 7)

When I moved to Spain I went to a Spanish school and I hated it! Most of the Spanish people were mean to me and my other English friends because we were foreign and couldn’t speak a word of Spanish. My parents moved me and my brothers to an English school because all of our work was suffering and my older brother had to choose his options and get ready to take his GCSEs. (Girl, Year 8)

What these quotes reveal, as well as the awful experiences of some of these children, is the rather weak effort to mix with Spanish children and to learn their language. The last girl admits she could not speak a word of Spanish, and the second quote was from a boy who played football for an all-English team. In practice, the children use these stories to generate a sense of identity among themselves in international school, to justify their lack of integration in Spanish society and their failure to succeed in Spanish school. These children expressed their relief at being moved to an international school. As for their parents, the point of the hunt for utopia is really to escape, or to continue hunting, not to arrive (Bauman 2007). International school, physically located in Spain (with its symbolic freedom) is socially located outwith Spain, and its community obligations. It continues to promise further hunting trips in the future, to other lands, whereas to settle would put an end to such excitement.

**The strange outside**

Similar stories were told of bullying, teasing and taunting experienced in the streets. Some children believe the Spanish bully them or pick on them because they are blonde,
or they look different, or because they are speaking English. Many children called it ‘racism’. I asked one boy, ‘have you had anyone be racist towards you?’ and he replied, Yes, well it happens all the time when you are out with a group of boys and they know you are English. They shout at you, or chase you, or steal your hat. I had my hat nicked. Or they steal your money or beat you up if you don’t give them it. If you go past a group of Spanish boys you’ve just got to not speak English so they don’t pick on you - mostly we just keep out of the way. All my friends are English. We wanted to make friends with Spanish, but they don’t want to know. You just give up in the end. (Boy, aged 16)

Some have been more directly and physically attacked, like this boy,

In Mijas, where we live, we were out and these guys started following us, about our age, so we didn’t want to fight so we carried on biking away, and we biked right into, like, a busload of their brothers, coming off the bus from school, and one of them held, like, a knife to my tire and my neck and stuff. So, that was scary! (Boy, Year 9)

While these are distressing stories describing very real experiences, they also serve to unite the international school students against the threat of the wider Spanish society. It enables the construction of a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, with ‘us’ being the community of children who are in Spain but on its margins, though not in any minority sense. The children believe it is not the Spanish in their school that are the problem but the Spanish in the streets. The Spanish outside the school, represent the continuing insecurity and risk of contemporary life. It is therefore a Spain of the imagination that is the safe one discussed above; a Spain imagined and created within their own, marginal and temporary communities (see O’Reilly 2000, Waldren 1996). The wider society is deemed just as dangerous as the one they left.

Home as a third space
These children of lifestyle migrants enjoy the freedom Spain offers as well as the safety in contrast to home, but they do not enjoy the strangeness of being in a foreign place (see also Gustafson this volume). However, though the international school is of course mixed in terms of nationalities, the children generally view this mix of nationalities in a very positive light and are happy to be in such an international community. Having abandoned the half-hearted attempt to integrate, the option to occupy a ‘third space’ (Pollock and Van Reken 2001) is all too easily available. One girl summed it up very well:

If you are in Spanish school you feel strange because they are all Spanish and you are different, if you are in this school you know they are all different, so it’s not, you know, you all mix. (Girl, Year 10)

Several children stressed, often with a sense of relief, how happy they were in international school and how friendly it was. English is by no means the only language spoken, yet most students consider being exposed to other languages a very positive thing. They say, rather than feeling excluded if they hear people speaking in a language they don’t understand, they gradually start to learn a few words themselves in that language. As you listen to other people, ‘you can learn parts of their language’, one boy said; and a girl suggested, ‘it teaches you respect for other people’. Many students said they had learnt more Spanish in the international school than when they attended Spanish school. Students also talk of the mix of cultures as a very positive thing. Year Seven students in a geography class were especially positive about how being with students from around the world makes their studies more lively and interesting. One boy said, ‘Like, if we have to find out about one country and someone is from there we can just ask them to tell us’.

This international community of children shares in common a sense of community and belonging that is able to balance both freedom and security. Of course,
the international nature of this community has a very special flavour. International schools are fee-paying and traditionally attract wealthy, middle-class pupils. In this case the pupils are mostly north-European (with a minority of wealthier Spanish children and a smattering of other nationalities). In international school children share the identity of (elite) foreigner, and of temporary migrant belonging to a third space outwith nations. They know their sojourn in Spain is a temporary blip in their trajectory as tourists of life (Franklin 2003). They thus wear this community as a light cloak (Bauman 2000), able to put it on and cast it off (apparently) at will.

**Tourists of life**

I spoke to several children who were finishing school shortly about their plans for the future and they responded as individuals making difficult choices in a variety of contexts. ‘Individualisation by decree’ means these children were being compelled, quite early in their lives, to make decisions which would affect their families quite profoundly as well as their own long-term futures. Would they go back to the UK to study and then stay there to work? Would they stay on in Spain and find work or even study? Would they stay a little longer in Spain in international school, knowing that was only delaying the inevitable move to the UK or elsewhere? As Blackshaw (2005) says, of Bauman’s thesis, the individual is ‘burdened with choice’, faced at every turn with the need to make decisions. The children were often quite negative about the prospect of staying in Spain beyond schooling, as seen in this discussion of Year 10 students:

I’ll go back to go to University and I think I’ll stay over there cos, like, here, I don’t see any, like, job opportunities and, like, I’ve been learning Spanish, like, 8 years and I can’t speak it (laughs) and um. I don’t see anything interesting here. (Girl)

I wanna stay here but there’s no jobs, not if you can’t talk Spanish. (Girl)

What stay in Spain and work in McDonald’s? (Boy)
Every English person that’s here is either a waiter or an estate agent. I don’t wanna be a waiter or an estate agent (Boy)

It seems like there’s no opportunity to study and not so good education here, and you can’t make money over here if you don’t already have a job. (Boy)

Some children appear truly international in outlook and culture. It almost does not matter to them where they live; they feel they can choose from the whole world and there is no hurry to decide. These children live in a society of networks not structures and have no need for long-term planning (Bauman 2007).

I don’t know. I may go to America, or England perhaps, or maybe Denmark for a while (Boy, aged 17)

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. (Boy, aged 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 (Boy, aged 15)

Other children, as we shall see below, do not have such freedom of choice.

Tourists and vagabonds: the reproduction of the elite

Bauman distinguishes contemporary, nomadic lifestyles in terms of the ‘tourists’ and the ‘vagabonds’; these are stratifying features of liquid life. The tourists (a metaphor for a style of moving, not to be taken literally) have the freedom to decide where and when to move: ‘Those “high up” are satisfied that they travel through life by their heart’s desire and pick and choose their destinations according to the joys they offer.’ (Bauman 1998: 86) The vagabonds, alternatively, move because there is nowhere they can stay. Where solid modernity involved nation-state building, settlement, and the
sedentarisation of nomadic styles of life, in liquid modernity the powerful elites are those who can travel light, and the settled majority are ruled by the nomadic.

This, of course, is a serious contradiction in Bauman’s work. If, on the one hand, in liquid modernity identities are fluid, boundaries are broken down, and categories no longer fixed, how does one begin to explain the stratification of liquid life? Where do the tourists and the vagabonds come from? In fact, an international school is a field of power, with a postcolonial trace: ‘an institution established to preserve the continuity of the western lifestyle and to raise … children uncontaminated by local cultures’ to be the future global elite (O’Reilly forthcoming: page unknown). In this context it is of course not the western lifestyle that is being preserved, but a class-based one.

If children who go to international school are destined to be the future global elite, in international school they are in training for their future touristic lifestyles: they are mixing with other future elites, picking up bits of other languages, making friends from all over the world, and preparing for their atomised lifestyles which will not settle anywhere for long. This is why they accept they should learn some Spanish but it need not be in-depth. Listen to this group explaining to me how they communicate with each other. Some of them spoke good Spanish and good English, some spoke one language with more ease than the other. The following is paraphrased from a complicated explanation:

So when we are speaking to Jose and Antonio (Spanish boys) we speak Spanish, but if Scott comes along (who doesn’t speak such good Spanish) then we speak English. But, see Paco can’t speak much English at all so if he is there we have to speak Spanish but we have to help Scott a bit too. (Boy, aged 13)

However, as we shall see below, they also denigrate the local community, not wanting to stay there when school is finished, and certainly not wanting to identify with this common mass (Reay 2004).
The continuing salience of categories, and classes

Despite Bauman’s emphasis on fluidity, change and liquid styles of life, it is clear that the categorisations and fixed identities associated with solid modernity retain a strong influence over actions. Many of the quotes above reflect an appeal to national difference to justify choices and prejudices. Age and gender also remained relevant. Several children told me, for example, it is better to go to Spanish school when you are younger; ‘you have an easier time of it then’ one boy suggested. And younger children are much more likely to have Spanish friends than older ones. A 14 year old girl explained the bullying in terms of nationality but also age: ‘in some age groups, they just don’t want to make friends with you ‘cause you’re a different nationality’. And gender matters too: children told me girls seem to have a better time in Spanish school than boys and to suffer less hostility. However, the most pertinent category is social class, revealed in the children’s stories through subtle forms of distinction and as expressions of economic and cultural capital. Identifying together as a global elite, some of the children interpreted the bullying they received as expressions of jealousy on the part of those ‘less well off’:

I think perhaps they (the Spanish) are jealous or something, we’ve got better clothes or something. (Boy, aged 17)

Yeah, for example Marbella’s different than Fuengirola, because if you walk around in Puerto Banus you get more trouble than if you walk around here, because they know that the people in Marbella own all the big houses and are worth money. (Girl, age unknown)

One older boy told me:

Oh yes, there is a lot of racism…it’s just the younger generation. Perhaps they see that we have more money than them and they want to steal our stuff. (Boy, aged 18)
I asked a few of the groups why Spanish children bully foreigners: ‘how do they know they are foreigners for a start?’ I asked. One Year 10 group said it comes down to clothes, but their denigrations were class-based, drawing on cultural expressions of taste:

They can tell by what you’re wearing. I know it sounds stupid but, different countries wear different clothes. (Girl)

Yeah, they can tell straight away where someone’s from. (Girl)

Can you give an example of that? What sorts of clothes? Cos I don’t know! I’ve never noticed that. (Teacher)

You can just tell. (Girl)

You can tell the difference between them (Girl)

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)

And the Spanish girls wear them massive shoes as well. You know them really clumpy spice girl shoes (laughs). (Boy) (Several girls laugh at once)

They all dress like their mothers don’t they? and they wear them earrings. (Girl)

You look on Mufty day, you can tell straight away. (Boy)

They look different as well, Spanish people look aggressive, they always look as if they want to kill you. (Boy)

Mufty day is ‘wear what you like to school’ day and is the chance for students to display their own identity through clothes instead of wearing uniform. Clothes seem to be very important for identity for these children. Students from several countries told me they buy their clothes when they go back home. One girl said,

Well obviously I buy clothes here as well, but I’ve got a lot of clothes from England. And it’s like if I go back to England you just wanna go shopping straight away, because they have the most disgusting shoes out here as well.
I asked a Year 10 group: ‘do you try to look more Spanish in order to fit in?’ and a girl laughed, ‘No way, they dress like their mothers!’ Other girls appeared shocked at my suggestion and agreed with her, ‘Spanish girls are fat’, ‘Yeah, or if they’re thin they’re really, really skinny’.

Despite the self-realisation projects that one can identify in the stories of the children (and their parents), and despite their search for communities to wear as light cloaks, nevertheless the overwhelming significance of these stories is the way categories remain important; and cultural and economic differences especially continue to matter (see also Casado-Diaz this volume). These children’s experiences and identities draw on nation, age, gender and class in order to justify and reproduce their elite status as third-culture kids (Pollock and Van Reken 2001). Bauman’s work spends far too little time considering such structures and the actions which serve to reproduce them. The entire story above could now be retold, if I had the word space, as one of the reproduction of inequality; and what is really interesting is that we can even see global class and national class being reproduced. For, although many of these children are destined to be the elite ‘tourist’ class, others are not (because of their background, resources, and habitus).

The continuing salience of constraints

The particular international school where my research was centred is rather unusual. The head teacher feels that fees have to be kept low as a small percentage of their intake comes from backgrounds that would not normally send their children to private school; ‘but if I charged too much they would not go to school at all’ she told me. In this part of Spain, many working class British families send their children to international school because they are failing to integrate in Spanish school, failing to learn the language or make friends, are not sure how long they will stay in Spain, have moved during a
crucial phase of the child’s education, or want to send their children to the same school as other (foreign) children in their neighbourhood. But these children do not suddenly join the elite, tourist class as a result. Their habitus and capital remain relevant in this new field of power.

Rather than seeing the world as their oyster, children of working class backgrounds have two choices when they leave school: they can return to the UK and live on their own or with extended family, or they can stay in Spain and work in what they see as a dead-end job. Their choices are much more constrained by past experiences and resources, by risk, than the children discussed earlier. Many feel the pressure from their peer group to go back to the UK to attend university but the parents are not sure this is the right decision. If they did not go to university themselves they may not have the same aspirations their children have acquired in international school. They often do not have the economic and social resources to support such a decision. I asked one girl who was returning to the UK to take her A Levels how her parents feel, and she said:

They are alright. They don’t really like it all that much but they do understand. I mean, Dad is fed up with the school a bit anyway, so he knows I have to go back really, if I want to get on. Mum is not looking forward to it, but she is going to get me a mobile on a contract so I can ring her when I want to. (Girl, aged 17)

A boy told me that his mother doesn’t want him to go back to do his A Levels like lots of kids do because his older brothers are already back in the UK and she misses them dreadfully. A girl who is going to live with her grandparents told me:

It’s hard. My parents make me feel guilty every day. Cos they don’t want me to go back. But it’s just something I felt that I had to do. To get what I wanted to do later on - 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 - my uncle’s not well, and my
granddad hasn’t been well, and it’s all just been like that. (Girl, aged 16)

These children are forced to make uncomfortable choices about their futures, since the
‘responsibilities for resolving the quandaries generated by vexingly volatile and
constantly changing circumstances’ has been individualised (Bauman 2007: 3). But this
is more easily understood with reference to Bourdieu, to class and to habitus. For all
that they have moved to realise their dreams the parents (the hunters of utopia) take
their habitus with them and socialise their children into a class habitus that is cross-cut
by nationality. Children are therefore predisposed to act according to their group
habitus. After migration they will make friends, and acquire habits, tastes, and ways of
acting and thinking, that are in tune with their parents’ habitus but they will begin to
acquire some of the tastes and dispositions of the other children in school. But, even
where a habitus is being slowly developed over time and in an entirely new and
different set of circumstances from which the habitus of the parents were developed,
external conditions will constrain one’s choices and the tendency is to revert to type.
Working class children do not have the freedom to choose where to go next in the
world, they are constrained by the amount of economic capital available, and their
imaginations are curtailed by their habitus. They have few resources to cover the costs
of a return home, of return visits to Spain, or of accommodation in the UK. They have
little family history of fluid lifestyles and little knowledge of the world beyond their
daily experience.

Conclusion

This chapter is based on conversations with, and essays from, over 90 children living in
Spain most of whom were British and many of whom attended an international school
(following an English curriculum). Overwhelmingly these children’s explanations for
moving to Spain describe the fear, risk, and uncertainty of the lives they left behind and the freedom, warmth, fun, and safety that Spain provides. However, their location in Spanish society is somewhat marginal: they attend international school, make friends within their own, foreign, communities, and are fully aware they are not likely to stay in Spain beyond school life. Spain remains an unreal space they can fill with their imaginings so long as they are uncontaminated though little contact with it. The Spanish society of working class children remains for them a dangerous mass, full of its own insecurities and fears; while their international community provides a safe haven in a third space of networks and flows. These children are individuals by decree, apparently free to hunt out their own, privatised version of the good life. They share an identity as global elite, as ‘tourist’ to the Spanish ‘vagabond’, but they wear this community as a light cloak, ready to cast it off and move on when necessary.

However, closer inspection demonstrates the continuing salience of former categories and the reproduction of certain stratifying features of social life. Even vagabonds and tourists must come from somewhere, yet Bauman is unable (or unwilling) to explain where. Here, Bourdieu’s theories are much more explanatory. International school children tend to have certain amounts of capital not available elsewhere; they attend school with the habitus (the dispositions, habits and tastes) of those destined to be the global elite; and the school continues to contribute to these internalised structures both through the formal and the informal curriculum. Yet, in a final test of the promise of the self-realisation project, this peculiar situation reveals something more. In this particular school, although it is fee-paying and elite, there are working class children who would not normally mix with this stratum. But this does not mean that their class habitus is erased, and their capital becomes irrelevant. Indeed,
individualism by decree turns them into the vagabonds, who move because they cannot stay.

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Notes

i The vast majority of my respondents were British and so analysis has centred around this group, and on migration from the UK.

ii I often did not know the children’s ages but knew what year they were in at school, so have indicated that, and gender. All interviews and essays were with children in the secondary school, which is organised into school Years 7 to 11. Those in Year 7 are likely to be 11 to 12 years old, Year 8 will be 12 to 13, and so on. Where the quote is taken from a student essay I have used italics, and have not corrected spelling mistakes.

iii Two thirds of parents in my survey had placed their children in international schools. Many had tried Spanish school first.

iv Non-school attendance is a growing problem among migrant children in this area (Interview with social worker in Mijas, 2005).

References


