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A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualising Process
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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of lifestyle migration from Britain to Spain to interrogate, empirically, the continued relevance of class in the era of individualising modernity (Beck 1994). Lifestyle migrants articulate an anti-materialist rhetoric and their experiences of retirement or self-employment diminish the significance of class divisions. However, as researchers who independently studied similar populations in the Eastern and Western Costa del Sol, we found these societies less ‘classless’ than espoused. Despite attempts to rewrite their own history and to mould a different life trajectory through geographical mobility, migrants were bound by the significance of class through both cultural process and the reproduction of (economic) position. Bourdieu’s methodological approach and sociological concepts proved useful for understanding these processes. Employing his concepts throughout, we consider the (limited) possibilities for reinventing habitus, despite claims of an apparently egalitarian social field.

Keywords
Bourdieu/ British/ Class/ Habitus/ Lifestyle/ Migration
Introduction

The centrality of class as the basis for understanding inequalities in Western capitalist societies has shifted over recent years (Savage 2000, Skeggs 2004). The influential works of contemporary social theorists, notably Giddens (1994) and Beck (1994), and arguably Bauman (2007; see Atkinson 2008) on reflexive modernity, have drawn attention to the fragmentation of class solidarity and questioned the relevance of both collective class action and division as core subjects for analyses. Their insights might be considered particularly acute in relation to the phenomenon of lifestyle migration, a process which seems to correspond to Beck and Giddens’ visions of individualising modernity (Benson and O’Reilly 2009). Migrants’ choice to relocate – often away from family and work commitments – is articulated as integral to the fulfilment of their self-realisation projects or ‘dreams’, as attempts to turn their backs on the rat-race and downsize for a more simple and worthwhile life.

This article arises out of some discomforts both authors had with reconciling such notions of a decline of class with evidence gained from our own independent empirical studies into the phenomenon of British migration in the Malaga province in Southern Spain (O’Reilly 2000a, Oliver 2007a). Both authors grappled with data which revealed the multiple ways class seems to be rearticulated under new conditions. The discussion we present here arises from our joint attempts to understand how and why cultural and economic aspects of class prevailed, despite express desires by individuals to leave class concerns behind and to reposition structurally in social space.
Bourdieu’s work offers a fresh perspective to migration studies, a domain where class is predominantly employed as an objective category of occupational status and income (Fog Olwig 2007). For Bourdieu (1984, 1990), the structure of social space cannot be understood through economic position or culture alone. His synthesis of both objective analyses of relative positions and the qualitative means of (re)creating divisions, including preferences in art, culture, taste, education, lifestyle and cuisine, helped us explain British lifestyle migrants’ practices in Spain. Some managed to alter their life trajectories and to realize their dreams through lifestyle migration, but on the whole their class positions were reproduced through habitus and the continued distinctiveness of economic and cultural capital. Class in this context is dynamic, circulating through symbolic and cultural forms as much as through economic inequalities (Lawler 2005).

**Class and Lifestyle**

In one sense, understanding lifestyle migration - an affluent form of migration in pursuit of the ‘good life’ (Benson and O’Reilly 2009) - through the lens of class seems a retrograde move. It is, after all, a process that seems to epitomise Giddens’ stress on the significance of lifestyle choices in individuals’ reflexive project of the self. For Giddens (1990), this orientation has been prompted by large scale structural change, wrought through the disembedding of social relations from local contexts and the reorganisation of the time and space of social life across non-local sites. The consequences for individuals living in high modernity are a loosening of the traditional forms of classification, identification and duties. Instead, confronted with a multiplicity of choices, individuals are forced to monitor reflexively their actions and to fashion their lifestyles as ‘routinised practices’. He argues:
Each of the small decisions a person makes each day – what to wear, what to eat, how to conduct himself [sic] at work, whom to meet with later in the evening – contributes to such routines. All such choices (as well as larger and more consequential ones) are decisions not only about how to act but who to be. (1991: 81)

Giddens (1991, 1994) acknowledges that choices are bounded by factors beyond the individual’s control; he agrees with Bourdieu, for example, that variations in lifestyle are ‘elementary structuring features of stratification’ (1991:82). Nevertheless, other theorists continue to intimate the precariousness of any containing structures, which, as Bauman contends, in liquid modernity ‘do not keep their shape for long’ (2007: 1; see Atkinson 2008).

Recent works in the new sociology of class have reignited debates about its relevance through applying the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Reay 1998; Skeggs 2004; Lawler 2005). Central to most of Bourdieu’s work is the attempt to overcome dualisms: of structure and action; materialism and idealism; objectivism and subjectivism (see Bourdieu 1985). For Bourdieu, material forms of power and culture are intertwined, and neither is reducible to the other. He provides a set of concepts which enables researchers to explore the interplay between both external constraints and internalised structures (or habits and dispositions).

We found Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, the game, habitus, and distinction helpful in attempting to understand the (re)production of class in the self-making migration project of British migrants in Spain. First, as we shall show, the migrant setting of the
Costa del Sol can be considered a social field, with its own sets of rules, resources, and stakes (Bourdieu 1993). A field is a social space with:

a 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)

One of the rules in this setting, as we shall see, is that one’s past is ostensibly irrelevant. The resources are the various forms of capital migrants bring with them, or they can achieve in the new settings. Migrants engage in the game, struggling over the game’s stakes, or rewards, which in this context is the very right to pronounce and define what all other migrants are hoping to achieve through migration: ‘the good life’. Making this more complex is the fact that these people are essentially placed within two social spaces - the British and the Spanish. This could foster a cosmopolitan perspective, but in practice, orientation is towards the British social space, with Spanish social space providing a backdrop for evaluations of authenticity and integration imagined in ‘the good life’.

Finally, the concept of habitus, those ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures’ (Bourdieu 1990: 53) is relevant for understanding migrants starting afresh in new domains. Habitus acknowledges a limited extent to which an individual’s actions can significantly vary from the usual activities of their social group. Although we may be unaware of the objective constraints inscribing the possibilities open to us (Bourdieu 1990), they mould what is considered achievable and worth aspiring to. Furthermore, even as times change and the objective probability of obtaining certain things also changes, the practical experience of
one’s early years remains formative. The habitus can change only slowly; being ‘yesterday’s man’ (sic) predominates, is unconscious and long-term (Bourdieu 1977: 79).

On the other hand, as Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) point out, Bourdieu (1990) stresses some possibilities of habitus for transforming and reinventing itself, particularly when an individual encounters an unfamiliar field. Exploring the experiences for working class students in the new field of an elite higher education institution, they show how students refashion elements of themselves, but still retain former important aspects of their working-class self. In a similar question, we consider to what extent it is possible for habitus to reinvent itself in migrants’ encounters with the social field of lifestyle migration, a field in which dominant systems of distinction based on occupational prestige and economic capital seem to be contestable. For Bourdieu (1984), however, fields are homologies of the wider system of distinction, so that ‘the general overall effect is the reproduction of common patterns of hierarchy and conflict from one field to another’ (Swartz 1997: 132). In this way, our analysis shows that although the field may appear to present opportunities for minimising class distinctions, there is much evidence that it continues to be structured by class.

The Field: Place and People

It has been estimated that approximately 750,000 British people live in Spain, rising to a million if those who live there for only part of the year are included (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006). This large immigrant minority is concentrated in and around tourist areas, especially the Costa del Sol and the Costa Blanca, and then in specific towns and villages. Both authors spent considerable periods studying the settlements of British migrants in
Malaga province, on the Costa del Sol. O’Reilly’s fieldwork spans more than ten years, including a 15 month period of ethnographic fieldwork in Fuengirola between 1993 and 1994, followed by a period combining ethnographic research, in-depth interviews and the collection of survey data in three rural areas to the west of Malaga, between 2003 and 2005 (O’Reilly 2000a and 2007). Oliver’s ethnographic research involved 15 months’ fieldwork in a coastal town and inland village in the eastern Costa del Sol, between 1998 and 2002, as well as a subsequent study in the same area in 2004 (Oliver 2007a).

In a Bourdiesusian perspective, class and lifestyle are related through the creation of conditions of existence according to capital possession, which produce habitus, or dispositions and tastes for certain foods, music and leisure pursuits. The two research sites are distinctive in these domains, revealing at a spatial level the reproduction of class. As Bourdieu notes, different groups have differential amounts of capital with which to appropriate (and retain for themselves) certain spaces, bringing ‘closer desirable persons and things’ (1993: 127). Social space translates, in a blurred sense, onto physical space, and so, to paraphrase Bourdieu, one has the Costa del Sol that goes with one’s economic, social and cultural capital. Thus the Western Costa del Sol is considered the epitome of mass tourism (Shaw and Williams 2002), and it is evident how the habitus of the visitor has shaped the habitat (O’Reilly 2000a: 30-38; see Andrews 2006 for similar processes in Magaluf, Mallorca). There is a plethora of British bars serving bangers and mash, shepherd’s pie, curry, English breakfast, and Sunday roast. These same bars broadcast British television programmes, especially soap operas and football matches; they have live 60s and 70s music shows; they put on karaoke nights and discos, advertising with neon lights and offers of cheap drinks. Dotted around the coastal towns are fish and chip shops, tea shops, and grocery stores selling low cost British foodstuffs such as baked beans, curry.
sauces, fruit squash, sliced bread, marmalade and marmite. Both tabloid and broadsheet British newspapers are available, but The Sun and The Mail are the biggest sellers.

The town in Oliver’s study, Tocina (a pseudonym), in the Eastern Costa del Sol, is also a popular tourist destination, but it is renowned for having retained its ‘traditional’ Spanish atmosphere. There are many foreign run establishments nestled alongside Spanish run cafes, fish restaurants and tapas bars. International products are a common sight in the Spanish hypermarkets, but grocery shops specifically dedicated only to British products are rare. The village of Freila (a pseudonym), 6 kms inland from the town, is marketed as a typical pueblo blanco (white village). There are a few foreign-owned establishments in the village, such as a small bar run by a German expatriate, who regularly hosts low-key live blues events. Early British settlers into the area in the 1960s and 1970s were from privileged, even aristocratic, backgrounds and were often viewed by local Spaniards as eccentric for their strange habits and tastes (Oliver 2007a). Due to its popularity as a quintessentially Spanish white village, however, over the last ten years the village has experienced enormous development and consequent growth in migrant numbers (in 2007, 28 per cent of the population were registered as foreigners). Migrants now share a discourse about protecting the area from ‘invasion’ or the encroachment of the development exhibited in the Western Costa del Sol (Oliver 2002).

The new rules: principles of the good life

The British in Spain are a heterogeneous group who, nevertheless, share in common an individualistic search for ‘the good life’. Regardless of background, their main reasons for moving are for the weather, quality of life, a slower pace of life, the cost of living, and
aspirations of a better life, especially for their children (King et al 2000, Casado-Díaz et al. 2004, Oliver 2007a, O’Reilly 2004). This is a consumption-led migration; the consumption of a better life often involving improved material conditions. However, we both found that migrants commonly employed an anti-materialist rhetoric, emphasising quality of life and the opportunity for self-realisation over more pecuniary interests (O’Reilly 2000a, Oliver 2007a, Benson and O’Reilly forthcoming). Essentially, it was contended that their new community in Spain had very different rules to the busy, stressful and capitalist orientation migrants felt characterised British society. Our interviews captured countless examples of individuals claiming to leave behind the ‘rat-race’ or ‘treadmill’ in the UK, which also implied leaving behind a superficial concern with the judgement of people through their material possessions. This is best encapsulated in the words of Annie and Brian (a couple in their seventies, who were struggling to make ends meet following divorces from former spouses), who said to Caroline at a social evening: ‘Your dinner service doesn’t matter a damn here’.

Such rhetoric supports Giddens’ propositions of the reflexive individual. Indeed, rather than feeling obligated by tradition or custom to stay within close proximity to family, work or nation, lifestyle migrants exploit the fluidity of the contemporary world in their aspirations for ‘the good life’. Moving to Spain creates the social space within which to begin again, change, and embark on creating a new self. As David, who runs a newsagent with Claire, in a small town said to Karen:

I think a lot of people come for the change, something different. There’s a lot of people here who are with partners. Not married, they’re partners. So I think they come here, it’s a new break, they wanna get away from it all. They are thinking
‘okay, that life’s over with, I’m gonna come here and start afresh’. You know, it’s a new initiative in life.

Spain is perceived and portrayed as a place of opportunity, in which people can leave behind the past and reinvent themselves; a place where ‘you can be who you want to’ (O’Reilly 2000a: 81-85). Consequently, therefore, economic and cultural capital are no longer supposed to be employed for social positioning. Members of the British community, for example, spurn the need for bureaucracy or for official recognition of credentials and qualifications; the most important thing is that people can do the job. As one man told Karen, while extolling the virtues of a regulation-free Spain: ‘Chris, for example, he has no papers, no qualifications, but he is a brilliant electrician, and here he has got loads of work’. Equally, others may start anew with downward economic mobility, as in the case of Sharon, a woman in her forties who formerly ran her own business and moved to Spain following the unexpected death of her partner. She bought a mule shed to renovate, which she funded by taking on cleaning work in bars and migrants’ houses. She explained to Caroline, ‘I downgraded my life’.

The fact that many people were retired or were ‘downsizing’ also contributed to the norm that status was no longer expected to be read through occupation. In particular, the fact that many migrants were older and out of the job market influenced the dynamics of social positioning, as Brian explained to Caroline:

People here are our own age...they're not showing off, not competing…they've already achieved. They're not selling anything...they're out of the rat race. True, some try to impress you with tales of grandeur.
This form of self-realisation rhetoric was one of the rules in the field, although, as Bourdieu suggests (1977), we often become aware of the rules only when we break them. Brian’s disapproval of those who ‘try to impress’ was reinforced by other examples demonstrating people’s concern to avoid ‘showing off’ former achievements. For instance, a man who was grumbled about for always reminding people he had been a major in the army, provoked the retort: ‘Who bloody cares?’ from a woman at a church coffee morning. The rhetorical idea that ‘it doesn’t matter what you were in the past’ provides the framework within which one might start again, but also prescribes that background is not (meant to be) legitimate in this situation.

However, in practice, there is more turmoil around the erasure of former capital than certainty, as cultural and economic aspects of dominance remain pervasive. This ambivalence is demonstrated by Sharon, when she complained to Caroline:

> It’s easy to think that being here will be an extension of your dream holiday. I’ve turned more black and white since being here...You soon realise that a lot of people are very two-faced, and that if I met them in a bar in England I’d think that they were very snotty people. These people have chosen to follow the way of life of Britain, bringing aspects of class and things here. But that doesn’t wash here, there’s no aspect of that here. It makes no odds to him sitting there [pointing out a Spanish man nearby].

Sharon’s complaint demonstrates how, despite the narrative of self-(re)invention in the social field of lifestyle migration, agents are shown to struggle over the stakes to be ‘won’
in the game: the right to define the dream lifestyle or ‘good life’. The remainder of the article shows how economic and cultural capital provide the resources and lines of fissure in this struggle.

**The significance of economic capital**

Although class position is difficult to establish as the majority of the British migrants are retired, self-employed or working casually, nevertheless, this new migration field remains economically differentiated. British people of all class backgrounds move to Spain and, post migration, there remain obvious differences in economic capital. For example, some people own homes in Spain and/or Britain, while others rent; and there are obvious differences in the size and condition of properties. The means by which people fund their lives also varies a great deal; some work, others do not; some get their income from pensions, part-time or full-time careers, holiday rental income, or investments; others work for cash on an ad-hoc basis. While many have lived abroad before as expatriates or armed forces personnel, others have made the break for the first time in their lives. Mobility patterns vary greatly also; while many British in Spain manage flexible life trajectories, living part of the year in one country, part in another and maintaining complex transnational ties, others are much more unidirectional, having left behind low-paid jobs, insecurity, and risk, in search of a dream (O’Reilly 2007).

In this setting, stratification is witnessed most starkly in the way that some migrants are able to buy labour from others. Some British are in the economic position to be able to retain regular gardeners and cleaners, to hire labourers for manual work around the home, or to employ staff for home improvement projects. In many cases, the hired staff are other
British people, which undoubtedly (re)positions people as dominant and dominated. The fact is, poorer migrants need to work in Spain, and many are doing what they can, drawing on skills acquired in the past. Recreating themselves as marketable products (Skeggs 2004: 73), and advertising in local English speaking press, they sell their labour as hairdressers, bricklayers, plumbers, and bar staff, as nail technicians, pool cleaners, and general cleaners. Others have enough money to establish independent businesses, but these are small-scale enterprises with few employees: hairdressing salons, restaurants, bars, estate agencies, car hire agencies, and similar services. Their clientele are mainly British and their income is therefore dependent on this fluid minority. They face a precarious market situation, while the limited governance leaves them insecure and vulnerable to exploitation. In reality, former working class people are most likely to abandon their aspirations for a new life and return to the UK permanently, while the former middle classes manage flexible, transnational lives (O’Reilly 2007, and see Savage 2000).²

Even for those who are not economically active, there are obvious implications of material differentiation for the type of lifestyle migrants can pursue. Absence of work roles does not mean the disappearance of class dimensions in leisure pursuits; the ability of retired migrants to participate in associative life - the various trips, luncheons and other social occasions - and to purchase care and legal services, is circumscribed by income (King et al 2000). For instance, Elizabeth suffered mobility problems, but was able to stay in her old Spanish house because she could pay for the long-term support of a Spanish housekeeper, who took on a caring role. However, Charlotte, who lived in a small flat, was mentally confused, unstable on her feet, and prone to falling. She relied on the care of her elderly husband, who could not drive and was disabled with cataracts. Ideally, Charlotte needed
the around the clock care that Elizabeth could afford, but instead she relied on the minimal social services offered under the Spanish welfare state and received extra help from volunteers at the Royal British Legion. This is not simply a straightforward matter of economic differentiation, but is also tied to habitus. Even when people can afford it, those with a working class habitus often retain what Bourdieu (1984: 374) refers to as the taste of necessity; in other words they will not readily pay for private health insurance, or the advice of a solicitor, translator or interpreter, when they are not used to spending money on such ‘luxuries’.

**Habitus, social capital and trust**

Like economic differentiation, habitus remains a discomforting spectre in the face of the rhetoric that former achievements and resources are irrelevant. Habitus describes those internalised structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits, ways of acting, that are both individualistic and yet typical of one’s social groups, communities, family, and historical position. It is the ‘individual trace of an entire collective history’ (Bourdieu 1990, cited in Reay 2004: 433). Regardless of aspirations to the contrary, then, there remain deep-seated and embodied tendencies both to behave and to see others in distinctive ways, and these dispositions are compatible with objective conditions.

This was most evident in the acquisition of social capital. Migrants deprived of their usual ways of ensuring they mix with ‘people like us’ often demonstrated how insecure they felt when trying to establish friendships in the migration setting. Though Bourdieu himself has little to say about it, the concept of trust has been developed in subsequent literature on social capital (e.g. Halpern 2004) and is relevant to our analyses here.³ The constant
reinventions (the ability to ‘be who you want’), while an admirable ideal, in practice results in struggles over how to trust or to value others, or indeed how to refuse misalliances (Bourdieu 1985: 730). Over and again, we both heard how difficult it was to make new friends in Spain because, as Peter told Karen: ‘you don’t know what people did in the past. You don’t know who to trust’. What this actually means in practice is people are unsure what class background others are from and have thus lost some of their sense of place, and distance (Bourdieu 1985: 728). As Doreen told Caroline:

A lot of people around here pretend to be something they're not. Of course they do....Who would know if they've got 1000 pesetas or a million? They come in dripping with gold.

In the new circumstances, where the backgrounds of others are unknown, information is deduced about others through observations of their habitus, seen in their tastes, dress, and behaviours (Bourdieu 1984). For example, Joy’s determination not to associate with the British alternativos (hippies), who lived nearby, revealed such judgements:

They live out here with no visible means of support. They don’t work, they’re spongers, Terrible! They have kids who are 4-5 years old, filthy, with their heads shaved. In the village, they have a fiesta where the swimming pool is opened and this lot get the bus down. They’re filthy dirty and they drink all the free booze, they come out of the woodwork. They’re not love and peace, they’re love and piss. They run around with their free-range children.
Joy’s complaint reveals the way that, despite the rhetoric of an undifferentiated community not concerned with status, middle-class individuals reinscribe certain divisions. Their way of thinking appears to the individual as no more than common sense; it is doxic (taken for granted) as people believe they naturally have certain tastes, interests, ideas and beliefs, and at the same time feel they can choose to be a certain way as individuals.

Social capital is especially relevant in its ability to be converted to symbolic capital. In the struggle to acquire symbolic capital in the migration setting, speculation about past social position became common; for instance, one woman complained to Karen of another woman who owned a small restaurant in Spain: ‘I don’t know why she is so up herself! Do you know what she did? She had a scabby little burger stall on the side of the road!’ The importance of habitus as history is also revealed by the story of Clive, who owned a large and successful estate agency in the UK and lived part of the year in Spain. Clive employed a Spanish gardener, a British cleaner, a British man to maintain his pool, and a British builder who had been working on his house intermittently for three years. The British workers accepted Clive’s demands, but complained bitterly about Clive’s partner, Jim, for not knowing how to treat staff. In fact, Jim was simply of the ‘wrong background’ to be deemed able to justify his new status. As Jack, a painter, told Karen: ‘Clive’s alright, he’s nice, shows respect for your work, trusts you. But Jim, he is nothing but a jumped up little rent boy. He was only a bloody barman, so what right has he to boss us around?’

In this way, denigration of others (or symbolic violence), which was at the base of decisions about who to mix with, was often based on speculations about what economic realities might underpin reinventions. British migrants accused other British of all sorts of
things, from refusing to integrate, to being crooks and ‘chancers’. They complained of those who do not work, ‘scrounge off the state’ and do not deserve to be there. Many spoke reproachfully about people who unjustifiably reinvent themselves, like the ‘easyjet builders’ (who ‘become’ builders during the flight over despite having no real experience). They attacked the ‘chancers’, who work cash in hand and on the black market. For example, Roger and Sue, a couple in their thirties who had sold their home and business to move to Spain, told Karen they were determined to avoid the ‘chancers’. When asked to clarify what they meant, they said:

Sue: huh, you know, you must have come across them, people who reinvent themselves here, say they are builders when all they really are is labourers, if that!
Roger: Yeah, and they’re always British. We had one here doing the electrics and I could see straight away he didn’t have a clue what he was doing, but that’s ’cos I know about these things, if you don’t know about stuff like that you can get ripped off, and it’s dangerous too, you know, but they come here and they just make up what they can do, I suppose they can make more money if they say they are electricians or something, rather than doing bar work, or whatever they can do. If anything!

This quote is revealing in two ways: it demonstrates the attempts by Roger and Sue to achieve respectability in contrast to those not deemed respectable (see Skeggs 1997); it also serves to (re)position the ‘chancers’, despite their acknowledged attempts to achieve respectability themselves. This denigration and avoidance of the ‘scroungers’ and ‘chancers’ are negative sanctions imposed on actions not grounded in the habitus; they are attempts to keep people in their place (Bourdieu 1977).
Cultural capital: the pursuit of distinctiveness

Finally, while the possibility for starting anew allows for flexibility in social position, the value put on certain types of past capital remains in play. Dominant groups tend, historically, to have the power to define the ‘right kind’ of culture, which they can use to distinguish themselves in relation to others. In this case, where economic status is disguised or ‘irrelevant’, people veer more towards (re)producing dominant cultural tastes, styles and habits: linguistic capital, education, knowledge and practice of works of art, music, theatre, aspirations, and, in this case, knowledge of and integration in Spanish culture.

This is shown, for instance, in the case of Joy, who consciously talked to close friends in her Scouse accent at home, but spoke with received pronunciation (RP) at public events and club meetings. Educational achievements were also a capital to be respected; there was an ‘Oxford and Cambridge club’ in the Eastern region, whose membership was arbitrary, including a couple who merely lived near Cambridge. However, another member, Judy, who had taught at an educational establishment in Oxford, was annoyed at their inclusion, employing the authenticity of educational capital to justify her indignation. Judy herself hosted a ‘surgery’ on a British-run radio show under the appellation ‘Dr Jude’, which referenced her PhD qualification.

In contra-distinction to the 'chancers', 'scroungers' and 'uncultured Brits' discussed above, others used enrichment activities, such as playing musical instruments and sharing knowledge of the arts, to display their refined tastes and values. Those with children paid
for them to go to private schools, as a step on the way to academic capital (see also Vincent and Ball 2007). People often talked of how they missed the more cultural elements of their former lives and their discomfort with living with a majority who were not ‘interesting’ or ‘educated’. As Janet said to Caroline, ‘I miss the cultural side of things…plays, cinema, books’; and Roger commented disparagingly on the town he lived in:

It’s a bland place, not much happens. It’s got a seasonal element here too. It’s supposed to be a town, but really it’s a large village. There's no cinema, no bookshops, no real concerts. The English people here aren't interesting...they come for the sun, the cheapness.

Likewise Jean, who had given over thirty-five lectures about culture and the arts in her urbanisation’s social lounge, complained, ‘here, most people are interested in drinking, bridge, golf and drinking...the general trend of people is not cultural’. Jean could not be sure whether her audience would be economically identifiable as working class or middle class, but she made claims on the basis of their imagined lower class habitus, taste and aspirations.

As discussed elsewhere (O’Reilly 2000a; King et al 2000), considerable effort was invested by British residents in creating and running social clubs to provide not only cultural activities, but also social spaces in which to obtain position and status. Groups such as the Fine Arts Society (with lectures on subjects such as the Etruscans and the architecture of Sir Edwin Lutgens), and theatre, dance and singing groups, used their cultural distinction as symbolic power; others bestowed this through leadership positions. Some, like the British Society, were proudly exclusive; other clubs and societies were able
to retain the importance of former class status. The Lux Mundi ecumenical society was established by Jesuit priests, for the benefit of all (especially North European) migrants, but the committee who ran it were mostly from middle class backgrounds. They all held firmly and jealously onto their positions, and were very exclusive, private and guarded in their behaviour (O’Reilly 2000a). They decided who would replace retiring members and would draw these from their own networks.

Another common practice was for people self-consciously to avoid mixing with other British migrants in favour of claiming a more cosmopolitan orientation (Oliver 2007a). Many felt they must use culture to distinguish themselves from the strong working class visual presence and associated stereotype of the British in Spain, who, in their reflections, spent their time drinking beer in British bars and did not speak any Spanish. Andrew, for example, said with upturned nose, ‘we never go in the British bars! Have you seen the sorts of people they get in those places?’ Another man described of other British people: ‘they want England in the sun, you know, and their fish and chips and everything’. The embodied nature of habitus, those ‘ways of walking or blowing one’s nose, ways of eating or talking’ (Bourdieu 1984: 466) are the most offensive or the most obvious markers from which people wish to disassociate themselves. There are obvious class connotations to ‘those sorts of people’ as this group discussion of people in British bars reveals:

Margaret: that’s right, and some of the people that come to live in Spain, I’m afraid
Liz: are awful
Margaret: they just leave a lot to be desired, I think.
Ann: Mmm, yes.
Margaret: there’s a lot of, I’m sorry but there are.
Liz: No, I agree with you...I mean if you wouldn’t mix with them back in England why would you wanna mix with them here?
Margaret: No.
Ann: That’s right.
Liz: we never, ever go into the British bars or the shops or anywhere.
Margaret: No, we don’t. We don’t.
Ann: No.
Karen: None of you?
Pat: No.
Alice: No.

Being integrated is thus seen as being cultured and is a means of accruing symbolic capital, irrespective of one’s position in Spanish social space. So, Mary and Charles were very proud to join the Romería with the Spanish man who looks after their horses (as Mary said proudly: ‘with my horse in full traje (dress)’), to chat in the street with their working class Spanish neighbours, and to invite their Spanish cleaner’s family round for tea. But they avoided British bars ‘like the plague’. Likewise, there is much credibility given to those studying Spanish culture, cuisine and history (Oliver 2007a), particularly in the East of the province, where it was seen that the more ‘Spanish’ nature of the area was more conducive to integration than the clustering by nationality evident in the West.

This reluctance to fraternise with people exhibiting common taste reduces certain ‘sorts’ to what Reay (2004 quoting Douglas) has called ‘a mass of common rubbish’. It also introduces, in the migrant context, another example of class contempt (Reay 1998), through the use of stereotypes that provoke feelings of moral repulsion at the behaviours
of a lower-class contingent of society (see for example Nayak 2003 on ‘charvers’). It was common, in both sites, to hear people complaining of the areas attracting ‘the ‘wrong’ sort of Brit. In Oliver’s study, people referred to the ‘new breed’ of Brit arriving as ‘the Lottery Winners’, referring, in a derogatory sense, to their *nouveau riche* status.

However, distinction is not a purely one-way process; agents employ classification systems to distinguish themselves from those seen as higher and lower, as more coarse and vulgar, or as ‘pretentious’. A habitus finds similar habitus; one is thus attracted to those of one’s own class, to avoid feeling like fish out of water. The British migrants defined as working class by their compatriots would often complain about the exclusivity, snobbery or pretentiousness of the others (see Skeggs 1997). For example, a group of people tried to set up a new amateur theatre group. It attracted lots of attention and huge membership, but before long people started to leave. One woman told Karen: ‘they are just so up themselves. Because they are theatre types they think they can order the rest of us around. And we are never good enough, of course’. Another man explained: ‘they have these garden parties, and they’re not open, you know, anyone can’t go. No, it is just invitation’. In denigrating those who aim to establish their higher status, these groups, in turn, assert their own worth and value, inverting exclusivity to instead represent small-mindedness and a lack of integration. Jane told Karen, for example, about the many clubs for English people:

I have heard there is a gardening club. I mean, how English can you get? That’s a really English thing isn’t it, a gardening club? These people seem to just want to create what they had back at home. It makes you wonder why they come really.
Then there is a tennis club, as well! For goodness sake! And they won’t let anyone in unless they choose! Then these people wonder why they are not integrated.

Equally, stereotypes were used to denigrate those identified, or identifying, as higher class, so that class is both invoked and rejected simultaneously. Joy, who in occupational classifications would be placed in the professional class, positions herself in the quote below, with the working class. She thus distinguishes herself from others in her urbanisation, telling Caroline:

They are old colonialism, ex-Army, and they’re horrendous. It’s [imitating an upper class voice] ‘Brigadier this, Colonel that…when we were in Africa!’…I’m against everything that these people stand for. I mean these were the lot that kept Thatcher in power by postal vote. I suppose I’m different because I’m working class. I used to be a teacher in an inner-city school.

Willy also revealed that he had a name for ‘these sort of people’, who he referred to as the ‘Rogers and the Daphnes’. Such ‘higher-class’ people are portrayed as having money, but ironically deemed to be lacking educational capital (and associated morals and manners). For instance, Joy complained about her neighbours’ rudeness but justified this, ‘because they’re only used to bossing servants around in Africa’. Richer people would thus be dismissed in terms of weakness of character, yet in a fascinating (if implicit) acknowledgement of the right of some to their exalted position, others seen to be in a more intermediate position were accused of being fake or false. Joy, who was leaving Spain, thus celebrated leaving behind what she called ‘the gold shoes and matching handbag brigade’, while Andrew, a builder, grumbled about the ‘false people’ in Marbella. As
Bourdieu (1984:176) notes, those of intermediate positions are deemed pretentious because of the ‘manifest discrepancy between ambition and possibilities’.

Conclusion

The research of both authors offers insights into the articulations of classed identities in the new social constellations arising from social and geographical mobility. Findings initially supported the thesis that class is less obviously important; wealth is not as discriminating as it was, and it is not supposed to matter what migrants were in the past. However, utilising the work of Bourdieu, we demonstrate the ways in which class nevertheless remains contested, and show, ultimately, how economic position is reinforced through cultural process (Skeggs 2004). There is a material reality which structures the extent to which people can live in Spain, the manner in which they live and whether they can stay there. On one hand, people seem in a good position to reinvent themselves, as occupational position lacks its discriminatory powers (because so many are retired or self-employed) while many people are economically better off. Yet in such circumstances, the symbolic becomes particularly important: taste, education and other expressions of cultural capital are redrawn as the basis of distinction. Class judgments are employed to militate against others, including the ‘wrong’ sort of Brit, the chancers, those who watch Sky TV rather than pursue fine arts and those who sit around drinking rather than learning about Spanish culture. However, as we have also shown, class can be used against those positioning themselves as higher, including, ‘the snobs’ and ‘the colonials’.

As such, we conclude that there is ample evidence of the reproduction of class among British lifestyle migrants in Spain. Class is mapped onto space in the two areas the
researchers have studied and persistent economic and material inequalities circumscribe the nature and extent of migrants’ self-realisation projects. Habitus reinscribes position and informs the denigration and positioning of others, while ongoing struggles for power and authority in the new field re-draw the ‘common mass’ (Reay 2004). The rhetoric supposedly informing this new way of life prescribes choice, freedom and new beginnings, while attempts to classify these migrants objectively falls foul of the fact that most of them have an unclear location in the labour market. Yet the analyses of lifestyle migration confirms, as Bourdieu (1984:110) has observed, the ‘field of the possibles’ is always limited by structures, dispositions (habitus) and capital. As Skeggs (1997) points out, class distinctions are important in social positioning, and even, or perhaps especially, when people are ‘starting again’.

Sayer (2005:171) dismissively declares that ‘egalitarian sentiments are common in unequal societies’, but we wish to avoid a conclusion that people are simply hiding their classed nature in an intentional pretence. Throughout our research in two different contexts which yet exhibited similar distinction practices, we felt that people genuinely held a subjective belief that past (class, status, culture) did not matter, despite the reaffirmation of class distinction, position and trajectory following migration. Our account is not intended as a deterministic expression of the means through which classes are simply and directly reproduced but an exploration of the limits of creative self-making projects and their outcomes in practice. Thus despite movement to a new field, there are ultimately limits to the possibilities of reinventing and transforming habitus.

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Notes

1. The article does not have a lead author; both authors have taken equal responsibility in its development.

2. We are using class labels in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) structuralist constructivism. Here middle, intermediate and working class refer to initial position of classes of agents, prior to migration, which of course also implies present position in social space.

3. The topic of social networks and trust is something both authors have addressed in depth in other publications (see O’Reilly 2000b and Oliver 2007b).

4. An urbanisation is a private housing development with its own community services.
References


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