

## **The Mobility of the Best: Migration Policies and State Knowledge in the Spanish Context**

### **La movilidad de los mejores: Políticas migratorias para jóvenes y nuevos saberes de estado en el contexto español**

Débora Betrisey Nadali<sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on current migration policies of the Spanish State aimed at promoting the so-called international mobility of young Spanish citizens over the last decade. From a socio-anthropological perspective, it analyses these policies as part of government techniques embodied in an institutional and moral knowledge that helps shape new categories and subjectivities of immigrants by combining historical figures (adventurers, conquerors) and values of global economic elites (talent, ability to succeed, etcetera). Moreover, it is argued that, through these devices, a model for action emerges that turns so-called youth mobility into an emancipation force while denying the conditions of domination on which it is sustained. This paper attempts to contribute a greater understanding of the cultural and socio-political logics that justifies the present migration policies in the Spanish context.

*Keywords:* 1. Spanish emigration, 2. migration policies, 3. international mobility, 4. neoliberalism, 5. Spain.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en las políticas migratorias del estado español destinadas a fomentar la denominada movilidad de jóvenes españoles durante la última década. Desde una perspectiva socioantropológica, analizamos dichas políticas como parte de técnicas de gobierno encarnadas en un saber institucional y moral que ayuda a conformar nuevas categorías y subjetividades de emigrantes que conjugan figuras históricas (aventureros, conquistadores) y valores de las élites económicas globales (talento, capacidad de triunfo, etcétera). Además, sostenemos que, a través de estos dispositivos, se extrae un modelo para la acción que convierte la denominada movilidad de jóvenes en una fuerza emancipadora, al mismo tiempo que niega las condiciones de dominación sobre la que se sustenta. Con este trabajo procuramos contribuir a una mayor comprensión de las lógicas culturales y sociopolíticas en la que se insertan algunas de las actuales políticas migratorias en el contexto español.

*Palabras clave:* 1. emigración española, 2. políticas migratorias, 3. movilidad internacional, 4. neoliberalismo, 5. España.

Date received: December 17, 2018

Date accepted: April 29, 2020

Published online: November 15, 2020

---

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain, [dbetrisey@cps.ucm.es](mailto:dbetrisey@cps.ucm.es), <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2706-8393>



## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, fostering and planning the so-called international mobility of young Spaniards is part of the main migration policies of the Spanish State.<sup>3</sup> These policies are presented as part of a temporary exchange of population under 35 years of age for work, study, or leisure travel purposes in different countries (Germany, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, or Japan), in the spirit of perfect balance (giving-taking-receiving) between the countries sending and receiving these populations and the very subjects of these mobilities. It should be noted that the references to mobility are not only reflected in migration policies but also in the various labor reforms linked to neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2007)<sup>4</sup> as part of greater autonomy and flexibility that may benefit both the workers, through what has been termed internal mobility towards higher or lower positions, and employers, who can now move their companies to other territories.

In its turn, higher education, following after the logic of a flexible working market, has become on the permanent places where skills can be acquired and student mobility can be encouraged, so they can study or carry out external practices in other countries and thus increase their personal knowledge and enrichment. It is in this context, the drive for mobility among workers, the unemployed, young people, and businessmen takes place as a part of the State rationale invested of an almost-mystical capacity to create an emancipated population that can better adapt to new world order.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze one of the migration policies sanctioning the mobility of young Spaniards to other countries as a natural and acceptable way of being in the world, in a permanent state of personal self-construction. In order to carry out such analysis, we studied public policies with a socio-anthropological approach (Franzé, 2013). This approach allowed us to reflect on that which has been called mobility of young people

---

<sup>2</sup>This paper was elaborated within the framework of the research project titled “La nueva emigración desde España: perfiles, estrategias de movilidad y activismo político transnacional” and funded by the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad. Plan Estatal de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación Orientada a los retos de la Sociedad. I+D+I CSO2016-80158-R (2015-2019).

<sup>3</sup>I decided to write State with a capital “S” as part of an analytic approach derived from anthropology that tries to distance itself from the reified nature of the object described by the term, which presupposes a homogeneous unity and a relation of externality with social and economic forces.

<sup>4</sup>We are referring to the labor reforms enacted in 2010 by the socialist government (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) and that of 2012 by the conservative government (Partido Popular). These policies were enforced by these governments as part of what was called austerity policies, imposed by international organizations (European Union, FMI) over the past few years, causing high levels of precariousness, poverty, and extreme conditions of social vulnerability.

encouraged from the State Secretariat of Migration (Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones) as one of the governmental techniques rooted in institutional knowledge and based on a social discourse that combines past historical figures such as conquistadors and adventurers with values of today's global economic elites, from which a model for action and cultural meaning markers are extracted (Corrigan & Sayer, 2007; Bourdieu, 2014; Shore & Wright, 1997; Ong, 2006).

In accordance with Bourdieu and Wacquant (2005), we perceive the State Secretariat of Migration<sup>5</sup> as part of a bureaucratic arena constituted by different hierarchical bodies, the General Secretariat of Immigration and Emigration (*Secretaría General de Inmigración y Emigración*), the General Directorate of Migration (*Dirección General de Migraciones*) and the General Directorate of Integration and Humanitarian Care (*Dirección General de Integración y Atención Humanitaria*), and other legal-administrative support agencies. It is in this bureaucratic arena that government and non-government agents keep different relationships that revolve around a new object of intervention: the mobility of young people of Spanish origin across territorial borders. As already stated, we understand this intervention not in normative terms but as knowing-power devices (Foucault, 2006) aimed at developing and normalizing in young people certain behaviors based on the construction of themselves through a permanent learning or virtuous work (volunteering) that would provide them with personal growth or benefit relevant others (marginalized and excluded people, those affected by wars or catastrophes). This can be traced back to a corpus made by laws, programs, documents, bulletins, or website entries, reflected in the State Secretariat of Migration as pertaining to what they call the mobility of young Spaniards. This corpus has been made use of in this paper not only as a source of secondary references from where to extract objective data and retrieve the characteristics of a said public policy, but also to carry out an ethnographic reading of it, paying special attention to its nature as a source of knowledge in the State, political and historical context from which it has sprung, and whose markers are not exclusively comprehended within the framework of one single institution (Stoler, 1995; Gupta, 1995). In this sense, the contributions of a critical cultural history on the substance of said corpus, the forms, structures, devices, and conventions constricting the creation of meanings, become particularly relevant for this paper, as they allow for us to pay attention to the cultural markers and the representations that inform the texts, based on production contexts, and appropriation relationships and forms (Chartier, 2000).

Most intervention policies on immigration and emigration driven by the State Secretariat of Migration in the last decade have been analyzed from sociology as part of the integration

---

<sup>5</sup>The State Secretariat of Migration is part of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Social Security (Ministerio de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social) of the current socialist government (previously the Ministry of Employment and Social Security under the government of the Populist Party, 2011-2018) and is responsible for developing and directing the policies dealing with immigration and emigration.

devices for immigrants in the national community (Fernández, 2018). The programs for the return of immigrants to their home countries (Perella & Petrof, 2014) have also been examined, as well as the mechanisms of abroad assistance (subsidies) for the elderly of Spanish origin who decide to return to the country (López de Lera, 2010). The cultural and sociopolitical logics of the mobility programs for young Spaniards implemented from 2010 on in the aforementioned bureaucratic institution have attracted less interest from academia; in those programs, the technical and moral repertoires of finance and business professionals have acquired a role of relevance. These nongovernmental agents, legitimized by the State to have a voice and act on said international mobility, are important for this analysis. These agents function as the main drivers in a set of online projects, showcased in the websites of the State Secretariat of Migration, aimed at releasing or attracting the so-called creative energies of young people interested in safely transiting through the different working and geographical spaces under principles that provide structure to a large part of the current social, political and economic system (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002).

This paper begins with a section that will allow us to properly identify the emergence of the mobility programs for young people within the frame of the current capitalist state of things. This section highlights the classifying power of European geopolitical and cultural borders, which organizes the groups hierarchically, producing and symbolically recreating marked distinctions (such as race, gender, nationality, class, and age). Our opening premise is that these borders function as differential filters (Kearney, 1996; Heyman, 2011; Stephen, 2018) for different populations, both to segregate them and for their integration in national territory to accomplish certain economic and political goals (Turner, 2003).

In the second section, we focus on the cultural knowledge and logics that sustain these migration policies, resulting from a fabric of relationships among governmental and nongovernmental agents (officers, experts, economic elites, businessmen) out of which certain logics of inequality and differentiation are reproduced. In the last section, we analyze how a series of interpretive tensions and disputes emerge in the arena of national and transnational political power (political parties, organizations of Spanish people abroad, etcetera) as a reaction to this new state knowledge and intervention, questioning the hegemonic discourse framework on international mobilities from where new social and political subjectivities can be redefined.

## DISCOURSE ASSEMBLIES ON MOBILITY IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Within the framework of the contemporary transformation processes of the social networks of production wherein certain forms of political and economic organization converge, authors such as Smith (2010) or Harvey (2007) posit that neoliberal states find support in hegemonic projects in which no great efforts are made to prevent that the surplus population turns dysfunctional for the social order. As posited by Smith (2010), the aim is to establish

a selection process under certain power relationships, always that this population can continue contributing to a formal or informal production project, in a specific economic space or mobilizing to create new labor markets, or supply said project according to its dynamic or expansion.

Taking into account that the current dynamics of capitalistic accumulation not only create de-nationalization spaces ripe for the development of the global capital and financial market but also new ways of production, circulation, and employment of workforce (Sassen, 2004; Ong, 2006; Harvey, 2007), our interest is to display the ambiguous and contradictory character that national states keep when selecting groups that are particularly valuable to keep in constant circulation through different geographic, working and social spaces. In this sense, the mediation of the current European national states that attempt to stand out among their competition in the global market (Harvey, 2007) is relevant to us, as it favors the redistribution of populations towards certain productive sectors through political-legal mechanisms, observing distinction and hierarchical principles that characterize the processes of workforce organization for a global working market. We understand the mediation of national states through the power of their geographic and cultural borders (Kearny, 1996) not as a mere intermediate element but as an essential factor that with its bureaucratic systems, intervention spaces, border controls, disposition, and knowledge help configuring and granting meaning (in the material and symbolic sense) to certain population sectors, all within the framework of the current social relationships of production.

In the last few years, European often adhere to a series of common discourse matrixes around the organization and redistribution of foreign populations that are not free of hierarchical elements. The population alien to the political-national community tends to be portrayed as a source of prestige due to its components of productivity, skills, and risk-tolerance, thus favoring its international mobility (businessmen, investors, skilled workers) or of discrimination (refugees, the displaced, illegals, etcetera), inspired in what Fassin (2016) termed policies of compassion and/or repression.

The devices intended to favor what has been termed international mobility of foreigners deemed qualified and useful, reflected in committees, meetings, and reports from international organizations (OECD, European Union), exert influence into making it a priority for national states not only the mere entry of entrepreneurs and investors but also the departure of (national) citizens in search of education or employment to foster their abilities and the so-called entrepreneurial spirit, thus contributing to European economy (European Commission, 2013).

The common trope of flexibility becomes the key element of the current migration policies of the Spanish government, intended to potentiate on one side the agile and prompt arrival of entrepreneurs, investors and workers deemed qualified from other countries (State Secretariat of Migration, 2015), and the other side, the departure of the Spanish population.

Particularly that of the so-called “qualified young emigrants” (Santos, 2013; Alaminos & Santacreu, 2010; Alcalde, Petroff, Cavalti, & Alarcón, 2014; Ermólieva & Kudeyárova, 2014) who are unemployed and that according to institutional agents lack the necessary guarantees to develop their creative or self-invention capabilities. This aspect is reflected in the report elaborated by the Spanish representation of the International Organization for Migration, titled *Emigration of Qualified Professionals: reflecting on the possibilities for development. Setting migration guidelines for the benefit of all* (IOM, 2012), which mainly appeals to officers of the Spanish government.

The object of said report is to exemplify through figures from other European countries the actions deemed correct when it comes to the current emigration of professionals, and encouraging government officers to propel a “change in mentality,” to stop looking at the exiting abroad of qualified Spaniards as a “mobilization out of need,” and begin to understand it as a “mobilization from opportunity” in a “globalized and integrated world”:

The goal of public action should be the strengthening of the national conditions and of the productive fabric, so that migration is not a need arising from the lack of demand for the quality of these professional in their own country (understanding quality demand as a demand in conditions of international competitiveness), but rather and above all else as a choice of professional opportunity and advantage in a globalized and integrated world, wherein the workforce and all other factors of production can move internationally and are not the attribute of a single country (IOM, 2012, p. 4).

This report is an example allowing us to link financial and economic aspects with extant ethics of responsibility that permeates the indicators of a new world order based on audits (Shore & Wright, 2015). This way, through data the main differential value of these youngsters is reaffirmed: the possibility of mobilizing as a workforce to achieve true self-realization, even if in doing so they must abandon a national community wherein they can belong as fully-fledged members.

At the same time that international regulations appeal to the responsibility of government officers to release part of the population, specifically those referred to as qualified young people, the central government is encouraged so that “if the ideal level of development is not achieved, required to provide for a quality return” of the “better ones displaced,” to then set in motion “development projects” in the country based on private capital initiatives by means of its consulate members and “dialogue representatives” defined by their professional “success,” or by means of “business angels” (IOM, 2012, p. 5).

Taking into account the implementation of said policies in the Spanish context and the ideological and cultural expressions that come with them, the justifications of global agents for creating these new management devices around the concept of the *mobility of the best*<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>This term refers to the use that some officials, technicians, and politicians make to describe and intervene in certain population movements, not as a legal-administrative category but as

will serve as the supporting idea for Spanish government officers to rationalize and explain the reasons of the population group that has left the national territory in the last decade (Ferrer, 2013; Alba & Fernández, 2015; Domingo & Blanes, 2015, Ródenas & Martí, 2016; Romero-Valiente, 2016; Ortega-Rivera et al., 2016; Pérez-Caramés et al., 2018). Within the framework of the public presentation in Spain of the previously mentioned report, on November 30, 2012, General Secretary of Immigration and Emigration Marina del Corral Téllez made a series of declarations on the departure of qualified workers reported in the media, which were not free of polemics:

It is true that the internal situation adds to the possibility of looking to the outside, but I do not believe there is substance to the discourses stating that the departure of qualified Spanish workers is only and strictly due to conditions of crisis (El País, 2012, n.n.).

The celebration of these Spanish workers who have ceased to be local and have made their way into the international market as a field of opportunities is reproduced in institutional events, essentially appealing to different cultural markers of the slippery arena that is the expression of the Spanish national character, such as referred as the spirit of adventure and conquest. It should be noted that in the late 20th century this “spirit of adventure” was attributed to emigrants as part of a deeply rooted national character, similar to that of the Spanish conquistadors. Such spirit was meant to portray the values, feelings, and aspirations of the conservative and liberal elites, that through those obtained the moral basis that explained the departure of thousands of migrants fleeing from poverty and misery, while at the same time helped strengthening a “national collective self” (Betrisey, 2017).

This way, various government agents gradually assimilated these figures that were first expressed more than a century ago to provide a line of continuity through the entrepreneur spirit incarnated in those youngsters who mobilize due to supposed creativity and adaptability in different fields of the arts, sciences, business, employment, etcetera.<sup>7</sup>

In the official journal *Carta a España* (Letter to Spain), originally emerged under the government of Franco (Estévez, 2010) and reissued by the State Secretariat of Migration,<sup>8</sup>

---

one that is nourished by referents of significance shaped by hegemonic values, in which they often highlight highly valued qualities by the current capitalist order: talent, competitiveness, and ability to be self-made.

<sup>7</sup>This was evidenced in several institutional acts developed by officers of the State Secretariat of Migration from years 2014 to 2016, as part of their bureaucratic routines with business societies, chambers of commerce, and higher education private centers in the national context. Also, with consulates or embassies of some European cities of the United Kingdom or Germany, where there are large numbers of Spanish people.

<sup>8</sup>In its beginnings, the *Carta a España* journal gathered news on the work of emigrants in their new locations, as part of diverse and differentiated communities (Galician, Andalusian, Basque, etcetera) abroad. Since its reissuing in 2006, the sections on emigrants and work are

in its section *Españoles por el mundo* (Spaniards around the world), various testimonials of young people are featured, that match the cultural markers of adventure and entrepreneurship with which the current institutional agents work to explain nowadays emigration flows. These testimonials are reconstructed in said printed media through interviews, or what they term case stories, wherein leaving the country tends to be highlighted as part of a quest for job positions that can be likened to the working experience or previous education in big European or North American cities. In these stories of Spaniards around the world, cities are presented as kind, multicultural, full of opportunities for personal learning and growth for Spanish workers, always that they manage to overcome their “inner fears” (not speaking the language, as one example) (Carta a España, 2016). Great capitals (London, New York, Sidney, and others) are shown as the expression of liberty where a new life can be started, trusting in their luck, tenacity, good network, and hard work, if they are willing to conquer, just like the olden conquistadors of the Americas, far-off lands by means of Spanish traditions (food, art) (Carta a España, 2015) or by globalizing companies creating networks adequate to the global market (Carta a España, 2014).

#### INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY PROGRAMS FOR THE YOUNG AND ONLINE PROJECTS: NEW STATE KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL LOGICS

In the year 2010, the first programs for international mobility were published by the State Secretariat of Migration for young Spanish people, wherein many of the social and cultural markers previously pointed out were at play. These programs were agreed upon mainly with countries not belonging to the European Union<sup>9</sup> such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan, under the name of “Work and Holiday,” so that these youngsters “could widen their life experiences, practice languages abroad and acquire work experience” (Official State Bulletin, 2014, p. 73352) thanks to mobility. Most of these programs are justified under this heading:

Willing to promote the mobility of young people, as well as the cooperation and collaboration between both countries, and reinforce the excellence of education centers and the competitiveness of companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, of both countries.

---

full of symbolic markers of liberal individualism, immersed in a single collective essence based on the cultural homogeneity granted by Spanish citizenship.

<sup>9</sup>It is noteworthy that the programs analyzed here are not exhaustive when it comes to programs from national and international organizations that from the 1980s decade have had as the purpose of their intervention the mobility of young Spaniards in the European context. These include the Erasmus and Erasmus Plus programs for student mobility within the scope of the so-called internationalization of higher education funded by the European Commission.



Willing to develop the possibilities of young students from both countries of acquiring work experience that relates to their field of competence, to complement their higher education with fieldwork, or to improve their knowledge in the languages, culture, and society of the other country, thus promoting mutual comprehension between countries (Official State Bulletin, 2014, p. 73352).

These programs averaged the stay in destination locations to one year, as this is the time granted by the visa issued for the youngsters that allowed them to be employed in paid jobs or not, implying thus the possibility of establishing unpaid work relationships. When it comes to mobility for studying, the education or training courses in which young people could enroll were esteemed to last no longer than four months, given that they can pay for the corresponding costs on their own. The permanence beyond the established amounts of time implied according to the information from one of the programs, the so-called re-admission with consular assistance, also known as repatriation.

Now, not all young people, between 18 and 35 years old, would have the same possibilities to participate in these programs of personal self-realization through mobility. First, they should be able to prove university education of at least two years, not being in charge of a family, being self-financed, able to pay for medical insurance and a roundtrip flight ticket, have savings, no criminal record, and be proficient in the language of the destination country at a medium level, as their stay in said country is supposed to improve their level of fluency. In a context where living conditions in the destination are less of a concern that the possibility of leaving itself, this type of young person should have a social history marked by widely diversified economic, social, and education resources, allowing them to plan their departure in the terms established by the agreements between governments.

Broadly speaking, these agreements created a space highly regulated and conditioned by the intervention and participation of the participating countries, under technical and neutral terms, appealing generally to the global discourse of those international organizations (International Organization for Migration, World Bank, European Commission) also invested in professional education and training. As an example, the program for Dual Vocational Training in Germany, signed with Spain and publicized by the State Secretariat of Migration, had as its purpose attracting young Spaniards for internships. The German government stated that its role would not be to provide jobs or places where to carry the internships, but rather to facilitate and counsel in terms of processing their residence in the destination.

This role of the State as a facilitator is shared by Spanish government officials and representatives in charge of intervening in the mobility programs as part of the migration policies. It is in this framework that online projects become relevant, as they encourage the mobility of young people based on professional knowledge derived from business

management. These projects were oriented towards a specific goal: to ensure that those so-called young enthusiasts with personal attributes (open to the world, without family responsibilities, etcetera) can achieve the personal growth and job placement abroad they strive for.<sup>10</sup>

The prescriptive nature of most knowledge related to the management of the mobility of workers or expatriates in the Spanish context (Espinosa & Verdeal, 2007; Álvarez & Gómez, 2012),<sup>11</sup> usually intended for those business managers that need to mobilize qualified personnel to their subsidiaries abroad, become extensive in the aforementioned online projects for young Spaniards. In this way, mobility is highlighted as an opportunity for personal realization, getting to know other cultures, and living in a space of freedom. All of this given that they have accumulated economic and educational resources concretized in certifications (languages, degrees, master's degrees, doctorates) and present what these business management manuals call global leadership qualities and international awareness. Following Ong (2006), since the 1980s, an important part of socialization under these values and principles has been established in U.S. and European universities with a neoliberal orientation, which offers the training required to achieve the desired mobility, take risks, and thus strengthen a global ethos by developing specific courses in multiple branches of knowledge (experimental sciences, social sciences, humanities, etcetera) or internships, unpaid for the most part, in different companies.

One of the first projects disseminated through the State Secretariat of Migration website was the portal for CEXT, Citizenship Abroad (*Ciudadanía en el Exterior*), referred to as the portal for young people abroad. In 2014, this website displayed the following:

Whether you are one of those who just dared and arrived at your new country of residence or have already been abroad for some time and wonder if it is time to return, this new CEXT portal is for you. We have adapted to the needs of a brave generation. A generation of young Spaniards who managed to overcome the fear of the unknown and have woven into their biography a landscape of airports, goodbyes, and new meetings. A generation who knows

---

<sup>10</sup>The mobility programs for young people signed with other countries that we have analyzed contain no element of financial subsidy. On the other hand, the online projects developed by private companies have obtained public funding ranging from 10,000 to 1,000,000 EUR between 2011 and 2018.

<sup>11</sup>The literature on business management that emerged in the 1990s decade on the arena of the internationalization of Spanish companies focuses on achieving a good organization of the mobility of those highly qualified workers who also possess great personal skills and an open mentality, doing so through prodigious advice contained in several reports aimed at creating a sense global managerial culture and working in flexible networks.

that once the most challenging limits, those of the mind, are overcome, there is nothing impossible. Yet, when living abroad, doubts will always arise, and uncertainties on bureaucratic procedures always follow the handicap of language or culture; or maybe you just feel like sharing interests and adventures with people in your same situation, and so now we offer the possibility for you to easily register on our website (Citizenship Abroad, 2014, n.n.).

As in this case, most of the mentioned above online projects work to enhance the personal skills of those mobilizing in a supposedly obstacle-free world, assuming the role of psychological counterbalance to break the possible isolation and connect them to other people, thus developing bonds that are presented as permanent, available whenever needed, and essential to their economic growth. These programs assume that mobility can bring about a cluster of feelings, fears, and anxieties paralyzing young people in their places of origin. This way, the programs are developed to provide solutions through the figure of a coach or virtual mentor, who will make great efforts by means of advice and motivation to guide young people through their knowledge, in discovering their skills, and to direct them into solutions to the anxieties that may arise from living in a world deemed in constant movement, yet full of opportunities for those young entrepreneurs able to grab them.

Following these ideas, in the last few years, the State has funded online projects for young people (younger than 35 years) abroad who may have an innovative idea on entrepreneurship that would be awarded and passed onto international experts. There also are many projects at work through systems that alert on scholarships, entrepreneur courses for young people looking for opportunities in Europe, or to improve job positioning for Spaniards living abroad and working in certain areas of production (new technologies, media communication, marketing, business management, tourism, etcetera).<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, online projects coming from business organizations, such as that by the Chamber of Commerce of Spain in Belgium and Luxemburg, proposed the Erasmus program for young entrepreneurs (funded by the European Union) lasting from one to six months, aimed at creating networks and facilitating connections among young Spaniards who “seriously see themselves as future businessmen” and can prove, although how that would be done was not specified, their motivation and commitment to experienced businessmen in other countries. The participation of future young businessmen in these projects is to be conditioned by “contributing to the development of the company of the businessman taking them in” and to “being willing to cover the expenses of staying abroad that exceed the subsidy of the EU” to develop “new entrepreneurship ideas” (Official

---

<sup>12</sup>During 2016 and 2017, some foundations and private university centers, such as the University Foundation of Las Palmas or the Faculty of Tourism of Oviedo, began to participate in projects funded by the State Secretariat of Migration, providing advice on labor matters and entrepreneurship workshops.

Chamber of Commerce of Spain in Belgium and Luxemburg, 2014, n.n.). These programs are based on a hierarchy of knowledge (those who possess the knowledge before those who do not), wherein the said promoters (ibid.) function as agents moralizing and regulating work relationships that, beyond their forms and characteristics, are to be ambiguously translated as part of gratification for those youngsters who are being trained to become entrepreneurs. This proposal is thought of as part of a common effort of all the agents involved, in which the mechanisms that regulate the transfer of value of young people as available workforce are bypassed within the framework of current business strategies (decrease in wages and labor precariousness).<sup>13</sup>

Although many of the online projects are meant to prepare the departure of young people and their possible positioning in other European markets, the government also finances programs for them to return to the country, always that they can demonstrate having acquired innovative ideas abroad. One of these projects is the Roundtrip Ideas (*Ideas de Ida y Vuelta*), aimed at advising those youngsters who are not older than 34 years and have acquired innovative ideas in their stay abroad so that these ideas can be brought back into Spain. And so, in year the 2014, the creators of this program presented in its website a proposal heavy with markers and symbols lifted from Spanish popular culture:

The “Roundtrip Ideas” program is similar to flamenco music. The expression roundtrip is a reference to the old idea that these styles had come to America with Spanish emigrants, transformed there, and then with the return of the emigrants and the turning of their descendants back to their roots, our folkloric, cultural and musical inheritance was enriched. Among these roundtrip music styles, we have the Guajira, Rumba, Milonga, and Colombiana... the idea is quite simple. You currently reside abroad and have accumulated a set of personal and professional experiences, and so you have an idea that you consider can be a business opportunity in Spain... Well, through the Roundtrip Ideas program we will help you analyzing the viability of this idea, and we will train you for starting it up in Spain... (Entrepreneurs, 2014, n.n.).

Nowadays, projects aimed at returning emigrants stress the idea of directing the innovative and liberating side of the individual experience abroad, highlighting the need of putting it at the service of the common good of the country. To this purpose, a particular type of entrepreneurship is encouraged, which has managed to incorporate aspects of so-called sustainable development, without leaving behind the rhetoric of usefulness and the ecological principles of some companies (Return in Green-Asemfo, Eco-Entrepreneurship, Iudicem-Peru, among others). These ecological principles are circumscribed in what Boltanski and Chiapello (2002) have termed “eco-marketing,” which incorporates demands for the care of the environment and authenticity to gain new consumption markets.

---

<sup>13</sup>Although this project attracted the interest and support of the State Secretariat of Migration at first, it is currently financed by the European Union.

The frameworks of cultural meaning that to a great extent serve as the basis for the set of programs and projects analyzed here presuppose the existence of particular natural qualities in certain Spanish young people, which predisposes them to seize the opportunities that “the online world” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002) has to offer to get ahead in life, in contrast to less intrepid others who tend to evade said opportunities and who are then responsible for their precariousness. These socio-cultural assumptions, understood as derived from a particular historical and power education, become dominant in the context analyzed here and rest based on liberal and individualistic ideologies that involve social agents in a constant praxis of self-construction. In this environment of constant change, not moving or not changing becomes synonymous with failure, as Sennet (2006) warned after several case studies on those affected by the current conditions of late capitalism, or else becomes a reason for negative critique due to not being willing to assume the sacrifices demanded by the social or geographical mobilizations that make someone adaptable and flexible (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002).

These new cultural formations expressing, shaping, and creating subjectivities allow for us to better understand the point of view of many young Spaniards, who through these state programs or on their own have moved abroad in the last years. Now, we understand that this does not happen as the mere replication of a dominant structure or culture, but from complex experiences and subjectivities taking place within the framework of widely unequal relationships of power thoroughly permeating their lives.<sup>14</sup>

#### INTERPRETIVE TENSIONS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA: “BRAIN DRAIN” AND “EXILE”

The dominant narrative on international mobilization in bureaucratic routines, based on the set of technical and moral repertoires we analyzed, has also been met with tension and conflict, having been challenged and confronted in various ways by groups within the national (political parties, associations, protest movements, among others) and international (groups and associations of Spaniards abroad) political arena. The main public confrontations took place in the parliament, which we understand as Bourdieu (2014, p. 484) did: a place of regulated consensus or limited dissent among groups competing for political power. These confrontations were started by progressive political sectors challenging those

---

<sup>14</sup>These approaches reveal a path of analysis that we are unable to fully explore in this paper, as we are also unable to address all its dimensions; it requires a deeper analysis that we have started to develop from fieldwork carried out between 2016 and 2018 with Spaniard emigrants in two cities of the United Kingdom (Edinburgh and London).

representations that consider the departure of young people to other countries as an opportunity, seeing such instead of as a loss for the country categorizing it as “brain drain.”

On April 17, 2013, as recorded in the Diary of Sessions of the Congress of Deputies, deputy for the Socialist Party María González Veracruz, appeals to the Minister of Labor and Social Security in the Congress of Deputies with the following question: “what measures has the government undertaken in face of the situation of young people who have to leave Spain looking for jobs, a tragedy that undoubtedly grows every day?” (Diary of Sessions of the Congress of Deputies. Plenary Session and Permanent Delegation, 2013, p. 17). In this sense, the reply of the Minister revolved around the creation of law 14/2013, aimed at “entrepreneurship as a way out of this situation,” putting into play in her argument the values of liberal individualism to account for the mentioned departure of young people as a process in which “everyone wins”:

Deputy, it is true that many young and not so young people have left Spain looking for opportunities to the crisis. That is called exterior mobility (Rumores) since people are looking for work and education opportunities. But it is a reality, deputy, that unfortunately did not start only yesterday, 50,000 young people left our country under socialist governments. That idea of mobility also implies exchange—in 2012, 17,300 Spaniards living out in Europe because of the crisis—and people also come to Spain. There are 30,000 Germans, 40,000 from the United Kingdom, and 63,000 Italians in our country. What we want is working so those who want to go out, can go out, but that the talent that scaped because of the crisis returns as soon as possible. That is your job and also of this government, no doubt. [Applause] (Diary of Sessions of the Congress of Deputies. Plenary Session and Permanent Delegation, 2013, p. 17).

The use of technical-economist language by politicians of different ideological tendencies to describe the departure abroad of young people, based on additions and subtractions, manages to relocate the discourse to an arena where social disagreement is less likely: that of an “exemplary absence” (that of the best, the highly educated, the most prepared, etcetera) perceived as temporarily away from the “land of origin” (Sayad, 2010).

It should be noted that the disputes between political groups taking place in the parliament were also previously had in the media and social networks by organizational movements of Spaniards who emigrated to cities in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, or Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and others). In the beginning, the network of emigrants organized under the name of Garnet Tide (Marea Granate) established in 2013 and aligned with some protest movements in Spain (there are other Tides, such as White and Green,<sup>15</sup> Juventud sin Futuro, Youth Without Future) characterized from the outside by

---

<sup>15</sup>These Tides were identified under different colors depending on the activity of the workers who protested against the austerity measures implemented by the Spanish State. For

providing justifications different from the dominating ones by means of their various websites and through different Spanish newspapers. These groups tried to invalidate the line of continuity with the political discourse that considers the adventure impulse of the emigrants, although it does not necessarily break away from the common discourse based on the absence of the better educated, around which some collective critiques, demands, and strategies would continue gravitating.

The discursive axis of this movement is based on the nature of the need of the current emigration project of those considered the better-educated young people in the country, thus defying the official explanation for international mobility. The “economic exile” category becomes the unifying foundation of the protests, widening the meaning of exile within the field of this hegemonic struggle, as in the European and Latin American context the term is commonly associated with persecution, war, and armed struggle, thus considering that leaving the country is no less than exile when its due to losing jobs and low wages, all under the rallying cry of “we are not leaving, they are throwing us out.”

Broadly speaking, the social critique and the mobilization practices implemented by this movement bring together protests, demands, and negotiations with the Spanish State through some of its bureaucratic institutions to claim rights (such as improving their right to vote by mail or not losing their public health benefits) even when forced into disconnection from what is considered their land of origin. These vindictive discourses are to be articulated in terms of moral and contractual rights and obligations in the national community they belong to, infused with a sense of indignation that will question the symbolic authority of the State that presents itself as a beneficent and integrating system. This way, the image of a negligent State is evoked, one that causes the displacement of many its citizens, while at the same seeking after political acknowledgment abroad as “necessary victims,” and not as “dysfunctional elements” in terms of the current selective hegemony of the neoliberal State projects (Smith, 2010).

## CLOSING REMARKS

In this paper, we have focused on the bureaucratic discourse and agency of the State intended to manage the departure of the Spanish population as part of the migration policies and their connection with international organisms working to achieve a legal harmonization on a global level in terms of the international mobilization of the population selected based on certain attributes. As suggested by Shore and Wright (1997), analyzing these policies from an anthropological point of view implies looking at them not only as examples of persuasion

---

example, White Tides were a reference to the organization of different public health collectives that would wear their white coats during protests. Garnet Tide thus refers to the color of the passport that Spaniards needed to leave the country.

and legitimization but also as a particular form of social and symbolic action impacting on the construction of new individual and subjectivity categories.

In this way, combining technical and moral arguments that refer to mobility as part of the liberation, emancipation, or self-realization promise, it is expected that a certain sector of the Spanish population can integrate into a receiving society chosen as the destination, with the aid of mobility programs and online projects, and in a journey of constant education. It is also expected for these sectors to integrate in other labor markets not detached from the current forms of capitalist production, which are commonly assumed as natural in the social world, and not as dependent on historically determined economic, political, and ideological connections and relationships.

In this context, the distinctions generated from government and non-government organizations in terms of local/mobile young people linked to the mentioned labor markets become factual. The employment of these distinctions makes it possible to keep current the processes of inequality, leaving behind those who do not seize the opportunity of mobility because they consider having certain natural dispositions that fix them to a location, and at the same time facilitating the distribution of those better disposed as long as they comply with a series of requisites that are highly valued by global capital (economic resources, free from family responsibilities, willing to take risks) and provide the basis for a “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). This new spirit of capitalism spreads widely the rules of business culture, understood not as a mere set of economic guidelines but as ways of thinking, talking, and acting in a global and interconnected world that transcends governments and institutions to encompass other social fields: work, school, university, etcetera, all of them worthy of in-depth ethnographic study.

In this sense, the efficiency with which the concept of international mobility tends to operate in the new instruments and regulations of the Spanish State that deal with migration policies is not exclusively due to a direct translation of the point of view of a dominant class or a global business sector, but rather can be located in a horizon of subjective assumptions already available in the social consciousness. This will make it possible, at least for a given time, to reinforce new representations and meanings that are logical and coherent in appearance, intended to liberalize part of the population towards other geographical and working spaces.

However, when considering the open and debatable nature of the beliefs and representations of international mobility in the field of contextualized political forces (the parliament, social movements), we can step back from interpretations that propose the existence of social actors whose conscience is either free of any dominant ideology or is subjected to deception. All this while the all-too-real consequences of poverty and inequality between sectors spread forcefully, sectors that according to Smith (2010, p. 192) “are increasingly excluded from participating in politics of negotiation [...] in terms of the current



productivist hegemony that only allows negotiating for a selective acknowledgement” of “the best,” always that they continue in the process of building themselves.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

## REFERENCES

- Alaminos, A., & Santacreu, O. (2010). La emigración cualificada española en Francia y Alemania. *Papers. Revista de Sociología*, 95(1), 201-211.
- Alba, S., & Fernández, A. (2015). Nueva Emigración Exterior y Cuestión Laboral. *Fundación 1º de Mayo*, (91), 3-19.
- Alcalde, R., Petroff, A., Cavalti, L., & Alarcón, A. (2014). Las migraciones de españoles hacia los Estados Unidos en el siglo XXI: un análisis desde las migraciones cualificadas. *Camino Real. Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas*, 6(9), 13-38.
- Álvarez, M., & Gómez, S. (2012). *Políticas de expatriación en el contexto económico actual: visión de las empresas*. Navarra: Ernst & Young/IESE Business School/Universidad de Navarra.
- Betrissey, D. (2017). El estado nación y la producción del conocimiento sobre emigración española a finales del siglo XIX. *Revista de Diáctelología y Tradiciones Populares*, LXXII (2), 457-476.
- Boletín Oficial del Estado. (2014). Aplicación provisional del Acuerdo entre el Gobierno del Reino de España y el Gobierno de Australia relativo al programa de movilidad para jóvenes. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación. Madrid: 3 de septiembre de 2014.
- Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, È. (2002). *El nuevo espíritu del capitalismo* (M. Pérez, A. Riesco, & R. Sánchez, Trans.). Madrid: Akal.
- Bourdieu, P. (2014). *Sobre el Estado. Cursos en el Collège de France (1989-1992)* (P. González, Trans.). Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (2005). *Una invitación a la sociología reflexiva* (H. Levesque, Trans.). Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.
- Cámara Oficial de Comercio de España en Bélgica y Luxemburgo. (2014). Programa Erasmus para jóvenes emprendedores [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <https://e-camara.com/web/erasmus-jovenes-emprendedores/>
- Carta de España Online. (2014). “Spanish startups en la Tech City londinense” [Spanish Citizenship Website]. Retrieved from [http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia\\_0323.htm](http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia_0323.htm)
- Carta de España Online. (2015). “Pizarro, el conquistador de las tapas” [Spanish Citizenship Website]. Retrieved from [http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia\\_0023.htm](http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia_0023.htm)

- Carta de España Online. (2016). “Irlanda para empezar una nueva vida” [Spanish Citizenship Website]. Retrieved from [http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia\\_0358.htm](http://www.inclusion.gob.es/cartaespana/es/noticias/Noticia_0358.htm)
- Chartier, R. (2000). *El mundo como representación. Historia cultural: entre práctica y representación* (C. Ferreira, Trans.). Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa.
- Ciudadanía exterior. (2014, May 20). El portal de los jóvenes españoles en el exterior [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <https://www.cext.es/>
- Comisión Europea. (2013). *Informe sobre la ciudadanía UE. Ciudadanos de la UE: vuestros derechos, vuestro futuro*. Informe de la Comisión al Parlamento Europeo al Consejo al Comité Económico y Social Europeo y al Comité de las Regiones (2013). Brussels: [Author].
- Corrigan, P., & Sayer, D. (2007). La formación del Estado inglés como revolución cultural. In M. Lagos & P. Calla (Eds.), *Antropología del Estado: dominación y prácticas contestatarias en América Latina* (pp.41-116). Bolivia: INDH/PNUD.
- Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de Diputados. Pleno y Diputación permanente. Cortes generales del Estado, Madrid: April 17 of 2013.
- Domingo, A., & Blanes, A. (2015). *Inmigración, migración y emigración en España: estado de la cuestión y perspectiva de futuro. Anuario de la Inmigración en España 2014*. Barcelona: CIDOB.
- El País. (2012, November 30). “Un alto cargo de inmigración: los jóvenes emigran por “impulso aventurero”. *Author*, Retrieved from [https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/11/30/actualidad/1354286966\\_753467.html](https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/11/30/actualidad/1354286966_753467.html)
- Emprendedores. (2014, May 20). Programa “Ideas de Ida y Vuelta” [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <https://www.emprendedores.es/noticias-de-empresa/a45655/ideas-de-ida-y-vuelta/>
- Ermólieva, E., & Kudeyárova, N. (2014). La movilidad internacional de recursos humanos cualificados: Nuevas tendencias (el caso de España). *Camino Real. Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas*, 6(9), 39-55.
- Espinosa, S., & Verdeal, J. (2017). Algunas reflexiones acerca de la movilidad internacional de los trabajadores. *La internacionalización de la empresa española ICE*, (839), 103-111.
- Estévez, M. del P. (2010). Carta de España. La imagen oficial de la emigración española, *Cuadernos de Historia del Derecho*, (2), 103-128.
- Fassin, D. (2016). *La razón humanitaria. Una historia moral del tiempo presente* (H. Pons, Trans.). Buenos Aires: Prometeo.
- Fernández, B. (2018). *La alteridad domesticada. La política de integración de los inmigrantes en España: actores y territorios*. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.
- Ferrer, A. (2013). La nueva emigración española. Lo que sabemos y lo que no. *Zoom Político*, (18), 2-20.
- Foucault, M. (2006). *Seguridad, territorio y población* (H. Pons, Trans.). Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

- Franzé, A. (2013). Perspectivas antropológicas y etnográficas de las políticas públicas. *Revista Antropología Social*, (22), 9-23.
- Gupta, A. (1995). Blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics and the imagined state. *American Ethnologist: The Journal of the American Ethnological Society*, 22(2), 375-402.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *Breve historia del neoliberalismo* (A. Varela, Trans.). Madrid: Akal.
- Heyman, J. (2011). Cuatro temas en el estudio de la frontera contemporánea. In N. Ribas Mateo (Ed.), *El Río Bravo Mediterráneo. Las regiones fronterizas en la época de la globalización* (pp. 81-96). Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra.
- Kearney, M. (1996). *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry: Anthropology in Global Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- López, D. (2010). Emigración, inmigración y retorno: tres etapas de un mismo fenómeno. *Polígonos: Revista de Geografía*, 20, 9-27.
- Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception*. Chapel Hill: Duke University Press.
- Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM). (2012). *La emigración de profesionales cualificados. Una reflexión sobre oportunidades de desarrollo. Encauzar la emigración para beneficios de todos*. Elaborado por A. Díaz Gil. Octubre de 2012, Madrid: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social/Secretaría General de Inmigración y emigración.
- Ortega-Rivera, E., Domingo, A., & Sabater, A. (2016). La emigración española en tiempos de crisis y austeridad. *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 20, 549-5.
- Parella, S., & Petroff, A. (2014). Migración de retorno en España: Salidas de inmigrantes y programas de retorno en un contexto de crisis. *Anuario CIDOB de la inmigración*, 61-88.
- Pérez-Caramés, A., Ortega, E., López, D., & Domínguez-Mujica, J. (2018). La emigración española en tiempos de crisis (2008-2017): análisis comparado de los flujos a América Latina y Europa. *Notas de Población*, (107), 11-40.
- Ródenas, C., & Martí, M. (2016). La imagen estadística de la Emigración internacional en España: análisis de las nuevas fuentes en relación con la fiabilidad de las estadísticas de las variaciones residenciales. *Boletín de la Asociación de geógrafos españoles*, (72), 305-326.
- Romero-Valente, J. M. (2016). Los flujos migratorios en las estadísticas de origen y destino: la emigración de españoles a Europa (2008-2013). *Cuadernos Geográficos*, 55(2), 151-172.
- Santos, A. (2013). Fuga de cerebros y crisis en España: los jóvenes en el punto de mira de los discursos empresariales. *Áreas. Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales*, (32), 125-137.
- Sassen, S. (2004). Formación de las condiciones económicas para las migraciones internacionales. *Ecuador Debate*, (63), 47-62.

- Sayad, A. (2010). *La doble ausencia. De las ilusiones del emigrado a los padecimientos del inmigrado* (E. Santamarina, Trans.). Barcelona: Anthropos.
- Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones. (2015). *Informe sobre la aplicación de la sección de movilidad internacional de la ley 14/2013, de 27 de septiembre, de apoyo a emprendedores y su internacionalización*. Madrid: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social.
- Sennet, R. (2006). *La corrosión del carácter. Las consecuencias personales del trabajo en el nuevo capitalismo* (D. Najmías, Trans.). Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (1997). *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*. New York: Routledge
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2015). Governing by numbers: Audit culture, rankings and the new world order. *Social Anthropology*, 23(1), 22-28.
- Smith, G. (2010). Hegemonía y superpoblación: Límites conceptuales en la antropología de los movimientos políticos. In V. Bretón (Ed.), *Saturno devora a sus hijos* (pp. 175-194). Icaria: Desarrollo Rural.
- Stephen, L. (2018). "Creating Preemptive Suspects National Security, Border Defense, and Immigration Policy, 1980-Present". *Latin American Perspective*, 223(45), 7-25.
- Stoler, A. L. (1995). *Race and the education of desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Turner, T. (2003). Clase, cultura y capitalismo. Perspectivas históricas y antropológicas de la globalización. In J. L. García García & A. Barañano (Coords.), *Culturas en contacto. Encuentros y desencuentros* (pp. 65-110). Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.