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New Spanish Migrants in Europe's Capital: Mobility Strategies, Labor Insertion, and Political Participation

Nuevos migrantes españoles en la capital de Europa: estrategias de movilidad, inserción laboral y participación política

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical analysis of the mobility, labor, and political strategies of migration from Spain to Brussels following the 2008 economic crisis, comparing it with past migration flows. of the data used in this study is based on fieldwork conducted from 2018 to 2020, which involved qualitative interviews with Spanish migrants. The results allow us to identify two distinct mobility profiles: first, individuals who relocated to Brussels and interrupted their labor trajectories in Spain, and second, those who migrated as part of a transnational professional project. These two profiles exhibit different strategies in terms of mobility, labor insertion, and transnational political participation. Our analysis contributes to the existing literature on new intra-European mobilities from South to North, specifically focusing on the context of Brussels as a global city with dual characteristics, which provides opportunities as well as precarious conditions for these new migrants.

Keywords: 1. mobility strategies, 2. labor insertion, 3. political participation, 4. Spain, 5. Brussels.

RESUMEN

Este artículo ofrece un análisis crítico de las estrategias de movilidad, laborales y políticas de las migraciones desde España hacia Bruselas a partir de la crisis económica de 2008, en contraste con los flujos del pasado. Los datos que lo sustentan son resultado del trabajo de campo realizado durante 2018-2020 con migrantes de nacionalidad española, basado principalmente en entrevistas cualitativas. Los resultados permiten describir dos perfiles de movilidad específicos: por una parte, el de quienes marcharon a Bruselas interrumpiendo su trayectoria laboral en España y, por otra, el de quienes se desplazaron hasta la capital belga en el marco de un proyecto profesional transnacional. Estos dos perfiles se proyectan en estrategias diferenciadas de movilidad, inserción laboral y participación política transnacional. Nuestro análisis complementa estudios recientes sobre nuevas movilidades intraeuropeas Sur-Norte, en este caso dirigidas a Bruselas, ciudad global dual generadora de oportunidades, pero también de precariedades para los/as nuevos migrantes.

Palabras clave: 1. estrategias de movilidad, 2. inserción laboral, 3. participación política, 4. España, 5. Bruselas.

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INTRODUCTION

After having been a country of emigration until the 1970s, Spain then became one of the main recipients of immigration in Europe from 1980 until the first decade of the 21st century. The restitution of democracy, the country's entry into the European Union (EU), and its economic growth consolidated Spain as a recipient country for foreign labor (Colectivo Ioé, 2021). Although emigration never completely disappeared, in the collective imagination it rather became an option for young people and professionals in search of international experiences, as well as a sign of growing European integration.

However, the onset of the Great Recession in 2008 put an end—at least partially—to this image (Bermúdez & Brey, 2017; Rodríguez Puertas, 2021). Faced with the increase in unemployment and precariousness, the implementation of new austerity measures, and the evidence of a growing flow of emigration abroad, mainly to other European and Latin American countries, two alternative discourses emerged: new migration flows as forced exile of people expelled from the labor market, and the idea that most of these flows consisted of migrants returning to their countries of origin or them being the logical result of European globalization and mobility (Bermúdez & Brey, 2017).

At the same time, the reception context of new intra-European migration flows has changed since then (López Sala, 2005; Martín & Roca, 2017), from the guest worker system associated with the Fordist economic model that dominated since the 1950s, to the idea of *problem-free mobilities* (Favell, 2008) or *liquid migration* (Engbersen, 2012). Within this new scheme, nationals of EU member countries arriving in another EU country are no longer socially constructed as migrants, but as mobile citizens with extensive rights in key areas such as residence, work and political participation.

Still, the EU enlargement processes to the east and the impact of the 2008 economic crisis in southern Europe, intensified the rejection towards the arrival of EU citizens in search of employment and, later, towards the so-called refugee crisis (Ambrosini, 2016; Lafleur & Stanek, 2017). In a climate of growing political-identitarian withdrawal and cuts in social rights, opposition to intra-European mobility continues on the rise, associated with the perception of phenomena such as *secondary movements*, *mixed flows*, or *welfare shopping*[4] (Dalla Zuanna et al., 2015).

This article aims at describing and analyzing the mobility, labor and political strategies of Spanish migrants arriving in Brussels since 2008, in terms of the conditioning factors that frame them. Although new migrations from Spain to Europe have received increasing attention (Bermúdez & Oso, 2020), the uniqueness of Brussels as a global city (Lara-Guerrero & Vivas-Romero, 2020), dual or *fragmented* (Garzón, 2010), and as political center of the EU, has been less studied than other destinations such as London or Berlin (Castellani, 2020; Rubio et al., 2019).

[4] Along the same line, these terms refer to non-EU nationals and stateless persons migrating from one EU country to another, to the coexistence of refugees and other migrants within some flows, and to the intra-EU mobility of EU nationals seeking to reside in countries with more generous welfare systems.

Next, the theoretical framework of our research is presented, followed by a brief description of the methodology applied, and a contextualization of Spanish migration flows into Belgium. This is followed by an analysis of the main characteristics of the new migration flows, as well as a discussion of their patterns of labor incorporation and of transnational political participation. This article focuses on those who migrated for labor reasons, identifying two main profiles: those who migrate to Brussels to make a living, and those who move to Brussels as part of a transnational professional career. These profiles will correspond to specific strategies of mobility, labor insertion and transnational political participation.

From Traditional Migration Patterns to Lives in (Im)mobility in Global Cities

The recent migration flows of Spaniards to Brussels should be interpreted within the broader framework of internal mobility that characterizes the EU, based on a legal regime that enables citizens of member countries to move freely within the European territory. This allows the emergence of a great diversity of mobility projects that do not necessarily conform to the traditional migration patterns of the Fordist era (Recchi, 2015). Thus, these new migrants arriving in Brussels will meet Spaniards from the migration flows of that era, something that may allow them to take advantage of available networks and knowledge to facilitate their integration (Oso, 2020). Still, the continuity between flows is not so clear, and there are differences between them (Lafleur et al., 2017).

In this new emigration, on the one hand, there are intrinsic conditioning factors that determine different profiles of Spaniards in Brussels; we can find those related to personal characteristics such as age, sex, ethnic-national origin, family situation, level and type of education, access to networks, political-ideological orientation, availability of economic resources, and level of migration planning. On the other hand, there are extrinsic factors pertaining the conditions of Spanish society and the place that Brussels, as a European destination, occupies in the possibilities and aspirations of this migrant population. To this must be added the characteristics of the labor markets and social resources of Brussels itself.

One distinct feature of these new flows is that more women partake of them than in the past, and many do so on their own (Bartolini et al., 2017). The feminization of migration flows has been associated with changes in gender roles and the autonomy achieved by women. Yet, female migrations also tend to exhibit patterns of downward socio-occupational mobility, at least in their first stages (Escrivá, 2000). McIlwaine (2020) argues that the growing precariousness of employment is linked to its feminization, and warns that new mobilities (constant and fluid) do not necessarily imply success, but are often a trap of precariousness.

Another characteristic of new migrants is their higher education levels when compared with previous generations (Martín & Roca, 2017). Their education credentials are recognized, however, only partially and in a selective way, depending on their area of knowledge and their suitability to local labor markets. Even so, as Landolt and Thieme (2018) noted, in terms of

Spanish migration in Switzerland these precarious integrations are experienced as a learning curve and a transition towards better situations in the future, which may well be achieved in the destination society or upon return to Spain.

The European cities that receive migrants from southern countries have also been transformed at the economic, political and sociocultural levels. Economically, an era of large corporations and network companies is consolidating thanks to the development of telecommunications and transportation (Castells, 2000). Jobs in the new economy increasingly involve periods of residence and/or work in different countries and cities, especially when working for supranational corporations and entities. In the case of Brussels, its status as the political and administrative capital of Europe allows it to function as a *global city* in the terms described by Sassen (2007), that is to say, as a symbolic space of new modernity and a hub that brings together economic and political resources.

These new cosmopolitan migrants are attracted by the central position and international atmosphere of the city, the circulation of at least one instrumental language and a global currency, all of this making it possible to live in an environment permeated by the different lifestyles of European technocracy. Along with this, global cities are also witnessing the deregulation of large sectors of the economy and a precarization of labor. Sassen (2007) points out that it is precisely global cities that are characterized by the coexistence of extremes. In Brussels we can see, on the one hand, an army of technocrats linked to European institutions and international organizations; on the other hand, Brussels is also the city that has been occupied by various migration waves connected to previous European migrations, but also by former colonies and other non-EU migrants (Rea, 2013).

Life expectations and professional success in contexts perceived as very open culturally can clash with exclusionary practices, the product of a social hierarchy that is imposed through racist, xenophobic or sexist discourses and attitudes. Lafleur and Mescoli (2018) point out that Belgium has become a country increasingly hostile to immigration, including EU immigration, and point out the administrative difficulties in registering, the tightening of access to social benefits, and even the "deportations" of EU citizens.

Still, uncertainty and the ups and downs of life associated with employment are a recurrent element of contemporaneity, both at origin and destination. This impact can be interpreted in different ways. While Godinho (2017) speaks of the increase of mobilities with no apparent end, "rootless and aimless" (p. 109), related in many cases to increasing precariousness and uncertainty, Engbersen (2012) picks up Beck's (1992) thesis to allude to *liquid migration* as an opportunity lived from temporality, flexibility, and an individualization attributable to a youthful, carefree and cosmopolitan culture. According to this assessment, having a life project is decisive, because, as Bygnes and Erdal (2017) note in their study on recent Spanish and Polish migrations to Norway, despite the advantages that the *liquidity* of their lives may initially entail, many migrants still preferred that over time their lives would rest on more solid foundations. The

question is, therefore, how to capitalize on the opportunities for mobility and the ongoing medium- and long-term changes in this risk society.

New migrants from Spain tend to occupy jobs below their qualification level, which prevents them from undertaking a family or professional project more in line with the different stages and needs of their lives (Cortés et al., 2020; Castellani, 2020). This also has consequences for their political orientation, since their participation is interrupted by the constant changes in their daily lives and place of residence. The impossibility of stability and of predicting the near future can generate such frustration that leads to disengagement from previously developed political practices (Marx & Nguyen, 2016). It can also promote a rather practical and instrumental way of engaging in politics, aimed at the most immediate interests, abandoning broader transformative ideals.

In order to explore these debates, the narratives and discourses of a series of cases of emigrants in Brussels are analyzed. In them we can see to what extent and on the basis of what factors it is possible to speak of a specificity of Spanish migration in the last decade in this destination country. This allows us to consider how the conditions described affect the ways in which migrants insert themselves into their new place of residence, as well as how they relate with their country of origin.

METHODOLOGY

The data analyzed is part of a broader project on new intra-European migrations from Spain (Bermúdez & Roca, 2021), focusing—in this case—on Belgium (Brussels) as one of the main destinations. The fieldwork was conducted between 2018 and 2020, including an online survey with 180 questionnaires applied to Spaniards in Belgium, which, despite not being representative, reflects some of the main characteristics of this collective, as well as qualitative interviews (approximately twenty-one, in addition to other informal conversations) with migrants from Spain arrived from 2008 onwards, of different profiles, and with key informants.

The interviewees were contacted through social media, by participating in events, migrant organizations, or through the online survey; they are men and women, families with children, native Spaniards, and people of migrant origin who were naturalized Spaniards. Both in the survey and in the interviews, in addition to obtaining biographical information, questions were asked about migrant trajectories, integration processes in the host society, and ways of keeping ties with their country of origin.

The data analysis focuses on a sample of 16 in-depth interviews conducted with migrants from Spain living in Brussels. These include seven men and nine women, mostly aged between 30 and 45 years, most of them without children, and of college education level. Despite the plurality of situations we found, it should be noted that eight of the people interviewed arrived in the Belgian capital to occupy a position guaranteed in advance, and in line with their training, while the rest had to look for a job upon arrival.

It is from this analysis that two distinct profiles emerge in terms of reasons for and type of migration, social and labor insertion in Brussels, and sense of belonging to Spain and political participation, which is related to the context of origin, but also to the condition of Brussels as a dual global city. These profiles are explored in depth based on six cases selected as representative, among which four women and two men were included, ages between 29 and 37 years, and of different education levels, but generally qualified, coming from different areas of Spain and arriving in Brussels between 2013 and 2019.

Historical Contextualization of Spanish Migration to Brussels

Belgium was one of the main destinations for the approximately 2.6 million Spaniards who emigrated to Europe between 1946 and 1973 (Vilar Ramírez, 2000). Although there were indeed earlier migration flows, Belgium did not become a large-scale immigration receiving country until after World War II, in parallel to "the golden age of economic growth" in Europe (Sánchez Alonso, 2015, p. 11). It was then that workers from Spain began to arrive, initially for industry and mine labor, with the first official agreement between the two countries being signed in 1956 (Rodríguez Barrio, 2006; Fernández Asperilla, 2021).

Spanish immigration to Belgium grew from 1 218 persons in 1935 to 15 787 in 1961, and 67 534 in 1970, as workers arrived for other sectors such as construction and domestic service (Díaz Álvarez, 1989; Rodríguez Barrio, 2006). As in other European destinations, after the oil crisis of the early 1970s, such immigration declined due to the end of work permits and consequent returns (Díaz Álvarez, 1989). Although migrations to Belgium continued in the following years, these flows were much smaller and responded to some extent to Spain's entry into the EU in 1986 and the arrival of Spanish civil servants to the EU institutions, as well as students and others. It was not until the 2008 crisis that a new increase in flows was observed (as shown below in Table 1).

According to Díaz Álvarez (1989), the appeal of Belgium as a destination has to do with the economic development experienced by the country and, later, its conformation as the administrative center of the European project. These two poles of attraction are key to understanding subsequent flows, in addition to the role played by migration networks. Thus, studies on the first waves of Spanish migration to Belgium show that a majority of migrants arrived mainly outside the official channels, sometimes from other European destinations, and settled, above all, in Brussels and in the French-speaking part of the country, achieving full integration.

Due to the ease of housing, many of these migrants were men with families (Gonzalo, 1982), very active in the labor market, especially in industry, construction and other services, while women were engaged in domestic work (Díaz Álvarez, 1989). In Brussels they were grouped in run-down neighborhoods in the center, such as Saint-Gilles, together with other foreign collectives, emerging over time a network of communal services (recreational, educational, political institutions, etc.), which, as Ruiz Morales (2018) points out, contributed to integration and served as a bridge to the country of origin.

From the 1990s and with the new century, immigration to Belgium has grown and diversified rapidly, the European population representing more than half of the total number of foreigners (Vause, 2020). The Spanish resident community went from totaling 45 924 in 2000 to 65 476 in 2019, showing a remarkable increase in the last decade, matching with the years of economic crisis, being the seventh national community in volume[5] (Myria-Centre Fédéral Migration, 2020). Table 1 shows how flows have evolved in recent years, with Spain moving from 15th position among the main countries of origin in 2007 to the 6th in 2014, although from this year onwards a certain decline is observed.

Table 1. Spanish immigration flows to Belgium, 2000-2018

Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
2000	1 632	2007	1 902	2013	6 417
2001	1 527	2008	3 095	2014	6 440
2002	1 503	2009	3 861	2015	5 356
2003	1 545	2010	4 795	2016	4 836
2004	1 591	2011	5 603	2017	5 175
2005	1 827	2012*	6 200	2018	5 202
2006	1 848				

Note: * The 2012 figure is an estimate.

Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from DEMO (2013) (from 2000 to 2011) and Myria-Centre Fédéral Migration (2020) (from 2013 to 2018).

According to Spanish statistical sources (National Statistics Institute [INE, acronym in Spanish for Instituto Nacional de Estadística], 2021), in 2020 there were 67 960 Spaniards residing in Belgium, with a slight majority of them being men, compared to 40 130 in 2009, with new registrations showing annual increases until 2016. Data from the Population Register (residential variations according to country of destination and nationality) also point to an increase in flows to Belgium since 2008, exceeding 3 000 annual departures between 2013-2015, largely from Spain population, and affecting more men than women, of ages mostly from 16 to 64 years (INE, 2021).

Among the little information on these new migrations, a virtual survey of Spaniards between 18 and 40 years of age, who arrived in Belgium between 2008-2016, stands out, which evidences a relatively young population, of higher education level, and a high proportion of women, mostly born in Spain, who left the country of origin due to lack of job prospects (Montes, 2017). Many of these people chose Belgium because they had some contact person, because it was home to international institutions, or because they spoke French, while others did so because they found a job or were transferred by their company. The main sectors of employment of these migrants are international organizations, catering, and tourism. Although a majority found integration into the

[5] These figures do not account for persons of Spanish origin acquiring Belgian nationality, which totaled 13 609 in 2015 (Myria-Centre Fédéral Migration, 2020).

country easy, some highlighted difficulties associated with language, cultural differences, climate, or discrimination. As can be seen below, this data matches in part with that obtained in the study presented here.

New Profiles Among Migrants from Spain in Brussels

The current migration from Spain to Belgium is similar in its basic aspects to that directed towards other European destination countries: its origin is directly linked to the economic crisis that started in 2008; it is largely made up of young adults, has a large representation of women, and a high level of education (Pérez Caramés et al., 2018). Most of the people interviewed justify their mobility with arguments related to professional development and contextualize it in an early moment of their lives that they consider important for the beginning and consolidation of their work projects. Likewise, there are recurrent references to the Spanish crisis (in its different aspects: economic, political, institutional) as a triggering factor for the migration project. Some significant different in the discourses still should be noted, consistent with two clearly differentiated forms of mobility.

A first profile is made up of those who parted ways with their professional career in Spain to start a new one in Brussels. Within this group are those who suffered precarious work experiences in Spain and decided to emigrate in search of better conditions:

> I found that precisely in my profession I had no education on languages. Then, when I finished my master's degree in human resources, all the job offers, the human resources consultants, they speak three languages or two languages. And I really found that, although they did offer me some internship contracts [...] they offer you contracts of 800 euros or 600 euros, working 50 hours, 60 hours a week. So, I said: "well, I'm leaving" (Sofía Varela, personal communication, November 8, 2019).

People with these trajectories have unequal levels of education, often including postgraduate studies. They all share the loss of hope of being able to achieve their goals in Spain. Leaving the country is experienced as fleeing, and arriving in Belgium as an uncertain gamble. In their discourse, migration appears as the seizure of an opportunity to circumvent or, at least, cushion the difficulties they suffer in Spain. This emphasis on the positive compensation of migration can be seen, for example, when they regret working in sectors that do not meet their expectations, but still emphasize the comparative advantage they find in Brussels in aspects such as salary, working hours, the opportunity to learn languages, or the experience gained from living abroad:

> As I never did the Erasmus, I missed the experience of living in another country and practicing my English, learning another language and making a living there [...] The hotel business here has nothing to do with how it is in Spain. Of course, then there's the schedules: they have breakfast early, then eat from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and they have dinner at 6:00-7:00 p.m. In other words, you are at home at 10:30 p.m. or 11:00 p.m., when the latest. Then, on the weekends, many businesses are not open [...] They pay you 11-12 euros per hour. So, if you work half a day, which is not 20 hours, it is less, you get the

> same as the minimum wage in Spain working 40 hours (Laura Recarte, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

In any case, mobility is experienced as an abnormality according to this profile, as a disruption in the regular evolution of their projects that forces them to cut short a trajectory in Spain to start a new one abroad, perhaps bringing them—in a particular sense—closer to the migrations of the Fordist period. It is for this reason that they tend to emphasize the progressive worsening of the political and economic situation in Spain as something that increased their willingness to leave the country:

> It made no sense to me to wait for a reason to stay in Spain hoping that the situation would improve, knowing that in other places it was better. [...] I had been unemployed for six months. I was making substitutions as a teacher. There came a time when I had no substitutions, they became more and more distant, six months went by without me having anything. And every time I had nothing I started working as a sales clerk at Zara, or as a waitress (María Perales, personal communication, November 6, 2019).

This approach contrasts with a second profile, that of those who arrived in Brussels already with a job appropriate to their training. This second profile includes highly qualified workers (not necessarily much higher than those in the previous group) who settle in Belgium to develop a professional career under advantageous conditions, usually highly specialized professionals in fields with a wide job offer.

After finishing their studies, many of these people also discovered the precariousness of the Spanish labor market. What sets their experience apart is that they managed to get jobs suited to their training (or study grants) before emigrating. Most of them sought employment in Spain with an open approach to mobility, and opted for Brussels when an opportunity came about that suited their expectations. Therefore, the Belgian capital usually appears as a contingent destination, justified as it was in this city where they found a convenient option at a given time. This is the case of Teresa, a physicist from Extremadura who, after finishing her studies in Madrid, obtained a scholarship to do her doctorate in Brussels, where she still lives and works as a researcher:

> I finished my degree and started getting job interviews [...] They offered me some conditions, like 800 euros and so on [...] And the truth is that nothing available at that time convinced me. And I said: “well, I’m going to look about abroad.” [...] I started to apply in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, I think I didn’t apply in Germany because of the whole language thing, it didn’t motivate me. I also applied in the United Kingdom. I had some interviews, and these people from my lab, I liked the project they proposed, and they also liked me, I signed my contract and here I am (Teresa Pedregal, personal communication, November 11, 2019).

It is striking that, for some of the people interviewed, the commitment to professional mobility is decided before finishing their studies and is experienced as the natural projection of a training process crossed by permanent mobility. This is clearly seen in the discourse of Marcos,

an Andalusian doctor trained in France, Cadiz and Barcelona, who arrived in Brussels after having lived and practiced professionally in Catalonia, Andorra and the United Kingdom:

> When I finished my residency in Barcelona, I already knew that I was going abroad. Because I already knew what the healthcare system is like in Spain, I knew what they pay in Spain, and I knew what they can pay abroad. And knowing that I had no mobility problems, language is not a big problem to me, and the truth is that, even during the four years I was in Barcelona, when I had to do my external rotation, I went to New York. I have always tried to go abroad, as internationally as possible, for the sake of my curriculum more than anything else (Marcos González, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

Almost all of the people interviewed related numerous and varied experiences of mobility, including labor migration, Erasmus stays, international volunteer work, or extended periods of tourism. In this sense, the decision to leave Spain seems to be favored not only by the advantages derived from improvements in transportation or the options provided by intra-European mobility, but also by a general context of globalization that makes mobility itself a familiar and constant component in the lives of many people, replicating—in certain cases—some of the characteristics of so-called *liquid migration* (Engbersen, 2012) or the *Euromovers/Eurostars* described by Favell (2008).

Our analysis clearly evidenced two different profiles. On the one hand, there are those who decide to cut short their professional career in Spain and go to Brussels, risking new projects; on the other hand, there are those whose mobility is part of a transnational professional project and who arrive in the European capital with a job in line with their expectations. These two profiles are projected both in the relationships that these people build in the receiving society, and in their attitude towards the country of origin, as shown below.

Diversity in the Patterns of Insertion in Brussels

The two migratory profiles described above are projected in differentiated patterns of integration into the city. In general terms, it can be said that for the first group, settling in Brussels implies a significant outlay of resources whose recovery, in principle, is not guaranteed. Those who cut short their projects in Spain and arrived in Brussels without work faced the first phase of the migration project as a challenge with an uncertain outcome, and for which they needed courage and family and/or emotional support. Interestingly, several of the women interviewed reported having arrived in Brussels accompanied by a friend, which is important both for jointly making the decision to migrate and for supporting each other during settlement:

> Yes, it was a little bit together. Because she also had a crisis of sorts in her life. And it came to both of us at the same time. And then, I told her: "I want to leave." And so did she. And then we both started to motivate each other [...] I mean, I started to think about it a long time ago, but in the end we did it together. Here I live with her (Laura Recarte, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

At other times, the importance of these networks becomes clear when someone helps from Brussels. This is the case of Sofia, mentioned earlier in this paper, whose decision to migrate is explained by the support she received from a friend in obtaining a European volunteer position. This allowed her to work for an NGO in exchange for accommodation, food and a small stipend, thus cushioning the difficulty of insertion in Brussels. Other fellow students have since taken advantage of this opportunity as well:

> I had a friend from college who had come to Belgium and who knew about this association. In fact, she stayed here to study. I was not convinced by the project, because I had never worked with people with disabilities [...] I wanted to work in human resources. But I also found that the projects offered to me as a European volunteer did not convince me too much [...] I said: "I'm going to Belgium." And a friend of mine from psychology, from the same class, said: "Oh, well, if you're leaving, I'm leaving too." And two months later she presented the same project and so on, to work in the same association. And another friend was going to get a work contract in Spain for August and so on, but in the end she didn't [...] and she said: "I'm going to Belgium." [...] We are all from Valencia, all psychologists, and we all studied at the same university (Sofía Varela, personal communication, November 8, 2019).

In other European contexts, evidence has been found of links of these new migrants with people from the Fordist era migrations, mainly for them to reach the country of destination, and to facilitate their insertion, as, for example, in the case of France (Oso, 2020). The survey also found cases of children of former emigrants who, after having returned to Spain, then go back to Brussels and are in contact with acquaintances from the migrations of that period.

On the other hand, the experience is very different when it comes to the second group: people whose arrival in Brussels responds to having obtained a job in line with their professional career. This is the case of Marcos, who arrived in Brussels from London with an employment contract as a doctor specializing in pathological anatomy. Contacted via the Internet by a professional recruiter and after being interviewed, he obtained a good job that not only made it possible for him to finance the costs of settling without problems, but also to receive the necessary advice to solve the initial formalities:

> The recruiter took care of everything. He was in charge of telling me everything I had to do, and if anything else was needed, he took care of it. The only thing I had to do was to send the translated degrees, which, in fact, was enough for them [in English]. [...] In terms of housing, I had no problem. [...] Here everything works very formally. The thing is, it involves more paperwork and a bit more hassle, but at least this way you know that everything is going according to how it is supposed to be (Marcos González, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

A similar case is that of Javier, who arrived in Brussels as a European civil servant after passing the competitive examinations from Spain and working for the European Commission in

Luxembourg for a few months. Arriving with his partner, also from Spain, he explained that under his conditions it was not difficult to settle in the Belgian capital:

> I make enough to live here very well and it is a salary that I would find very difficult to get in Spain. [...] We did not have too many problems finding housing, because, above all, compared to Luxembourg, there is a much bigger real estate market here and it is much more affordable. The thing was to get organized before, when we already knew that we were going to come to live here. [...] It does not seem to be a particularly difficult city in that aspect (Javier Carrasco, personal communication, November 9, 2019).

These two experiences clearly contrast with those of migrants who arrived in Brussels without work and with fewer resources. Among the latter, there are discourses that emphasize the harshness of some situations, especially in the first stages, as related by Maria:

> This guy was analyzing the profiles of people who had just arrived, who don't know where they are arriving in, to take advantage of their situation a little bit. And many of the Spaniards I have met have gone through that. You've been looking for a place to live for three months, because until you have a job you can't have an apartment. Then suddenly someone comes along and says, "Don't worry, I'm going to sort everything out for you." That's what happened with my first job, the guy was a scammer. After that, I went out and found a job in an art gallery, then in a clothing store, until I found a job in a school, teaching Spanish (María Perales, personal communication, November 6, 2019).

These abuse or exploitation situations have also been exposed in other studies on recent migration flows from Spain, both to London (Cortés et al., 2020) and to Germany (Castellani, 2020). And they account for very different experiences of insertion between those who travel to Brussels looking for work and those who move to this city because of a good opportunity already awaiting them. This explains why the use of networks of countrymen is clearly different for each profile. Those who come to Brussels to occupy positions as qualified professionals oftentimes relate relationships with other Spaniards, but limited exclusively to friendly leisure and socializing. For those who arrive in more precarious conditions, access to networks of Spaniards or other migrants is crucial for aspects as important as finding employment or housing. Laura found two of the three jobs she currently has through this means:

> I'm working three jobs at the same time, which are the first three I got. [...] [A Spaniard acquaintance told me:] "hey, I have a friend who works as a babysitter and she knows a Spanish family who wants someone to talk to the child in Spanish. [...] I work in the morning in a restaurant that is right here. [...] In the afternoons, I am with a Spanish family: picking up the kids from school, taking them home and doing exercises for them to practice Spanish and such. And then I go two days, Thursday and Friday evening, I go to the [Spanish] restaurant, I'm a waitress there: waiting tables, picking up (Laura Recarte, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

Specific cases may vary widely and often the use of networks is unequal, even among the members of the same migratory project. This can be clearly seen in couples in which only one of

the members has a job in Brussels. Such is the case of Amanda, Javier's partner, who arrived in Brussels with him, but with the hope of building her own professional project. With a degree in Political Science and experience in international cooperation, she tried to take advantage of the benefits offered by this global city, but feels that competition is very harsh, and has chosen to volunteer as a strategy, in search of contacts that will make future opportunities possible.

The patterns of insertion into Belgian society thus reflect the two profiles described above, which are projected in unequal experiences in access to housing and in access to employment, reflecting the duality or fragmentation found in Brussels, as a European capital and a recipient of different migration flows (Garzón, 2010; Lara-Guerrero & Vivas-Romero, 2020). However, the differences between these two subgroups of migrants are not limited to life in Brussels, but also extend to their relations with their country of origin.

Expectations in Brussels and Attitudes Towards Spain

The two profiles of migrants described above hold different expectations for the development of their migration project and the possibilities of returning to Spain. Those who went to Brussels with nothing, experience their mobility as an investment representing an important cost, both economically and in terms of separation from their environment. They hope this investment to repay by finding a job in Brussels that matches their training and/or is well paid, and by reinforcing their skills with a college degree or language learning. Laura, for example, assumes her current situation of moonlighting in the hope of being able to further her education later on:

> First I have to settle myself a bit and have an economic foundation. Then, yes, I would like to study something else. But [I can't] until I know a little more French or get a better handle on English (Laura Recarte, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

Bearing in mind that these are people with a relatively short career in Brussels, who decided to leave Spain due to a lack of expectations, it is to be expected that they do not consider returning as an immediate project. In cases such as Sofia's, the pain of having had to emigrate is reflected in a certain resentment towards the country of origin and an explicit rejection of the possibility of returning. However, even in this case, returning appears as a hypothetical option in the migratory project, and importance is given to aspects that—such as training—may be advantageous in the event of returning to Spain:

> Then it is true that if you are four, five or six years abroad, you can get a C1 in English or a C1 in French. [...] If I wanted to return, which is not going to happen, but if I wanted to return at some point to Spain, with three languages, a master's degree, work experience, well, it changes things a bit. [...] I am going to study a master's degree here (Sofía Varela, personal communication, November 8, 2019).

In the meantime, people who have good jobs in Brussels think of returning as just one option among others for future mobility, which will only be realized if it suits them professionally. This is consistent with a migratory experience that is not felt as an investment that has to repay in the

future, but as part of a project that is already bearing fruit. The favorable expectation of continuing to develop a satisfactory professional career predisposes to mobility, but not necessarily with Spain as the destination. This can be seen in Teresa's words. As a researcher, she is aware that her future residence will depend fundamentally on the job possibilities she finds:

> It is a bit uncertain, I think this applies to every researcher. I'm under a postdoctoral contract right now. Back when I finished my PhD, I signed for two years, now I have renewed for another two. But it depends a bit on the funding that the laboratory has. It is not a fixed professorship. You get funding for specific projects. And when that funding runs out, it all depends if the group continues to have funding or not [...] or I can start applying for European grants (Teresa Pedregal, personal communication, November 11, 2019).

A particular case is that of those who work in European institutions. For them, living in the capital of the EU is consubstantial to their work, and they consider life in this city as a long-term project. However, some, like Javier, are very aware of the guarantees that their situation provides them with, and assume the stability and material conditions they enjoy as resources that allow them to think about future mobilities:

> As of today, yes, I would say that for the next three years, [I will be in Brussels] for sure. Where I will be in five years, I don't know. Maybe I will go to some delegation in any country. Or maybe I'll do the math and say: "fuck it all, I can live anywhere for two dollars and be there indefinitely", or take a leave of absence [...] or something even better will come up, which is not likely anyway (Javier Carrasco, personal communication, November 9, 2019).

Something similar can be seen in the discourse of Marcos, who assures that it would be easy for him to work in his area in Spain, but still prefers to stay abroad for the time being, motivated, in his case, by the search for better professional conditions. Beyond these material advantages, Marcos especially values certain incentives linked to mobility, such as lifestyle:

> In terms of curriculum, I think I have grown more than in Spain. There are also more benefits. In England I even had a little more benefits for research: a little more money and more time than I have here [...] Right now you go to the page of the Spanish Society of Pathology and there is a section of job offers, and there are a lot of them. And in some of them they say "indefinite term contract." That is what everybody is looking for. I am not looking for it [...] I want to keep moving [...] I suppose that when I decide to stop, maybe I will return to Spain. If I haven't found anything anywhere better before [...] As of today, for example, I don't see myself here [in Brussels] (Marcos González, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

Thus, it can be seen—among those who arrived in Brussels as part of a transnational professional project—that the discourse is fully in line with a model of liquid migration, where the destinations and rhythms of mobility are flexible. In this context, returning to Spain appears

as an indefinite possibility and always dependent on the future development of professional careers. Compared to those who left for Brussels with nothing, the relationship with Spain is usually constructed in more positive terms. Still, in both cases, the discourse is not usually free of criticism and skepticism towards the future of the country, which will determine, to a certain extent, other types of links with the country of origin, by means of political participation.

Political Ties and Patterns of Participation in Spanish Society

In general terms, it can be stated that the political, economic and institutional crisis, whose origin is identified around 2008, has marked both migrant profiles with a deep skepticism and distrust. In the discourse of all the people interviewed, Spain appears as unreliable, where both the economic possibilities and the general political climate represent a permanent uncertainty, forcing them to be cautious. In this sense, there do not seem to be many people who are optimistic and expressly committed to the collective future of Spanish society:

> I have never been very interested in politics. And so I don't understand them either. I vote because I'd rather vote than stay home. But it's not something that I find motivating. I'm bored, in fact, by politics (Laura Recarte, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

In some cases, the decision to leave Spain or not to return for the time being also stems from a certain tiredness, boredom or rejection of the political situation in the country of origin, something observed among other groups of young Spaniards in Europe (Rubio et al., 2019). These discourses are found especially among those who feel expelled from Spain and forced to seek a life outside. In these people, criticism of the political reality of the country of origin often adopts a bitter tone, and connects directly with the migratory experience, which is given meaning as a response to the problems of Spanish society and proof of its shortcomings:

> I have seen the whole economic crisis, I have seen how the country has been getting worse, and the day I said: "I am leaving this country," was the day Rajoy won the elections for the second time. [...] Fleeing Spain, fleeing the political situation. Because I get angry, I get very angry. [...] I didn't care about the country (Sofía Varela, personal communication, November 8, 2019).

These reasonings appear not only in the discourses that migrants construct as individuals, but have also been made explicit in the associative movement developed both in Belgium and in other migratory destinations that crystallized in the Marea Granate and is expressed graphically in the slogan "We are not leaving, they are throwing us out,"[6] or demands such as a dignified return (*retorno digno*) or against the vote by request (*voto rogado*) (Schryro, 2020). It is a discourse built from belonging to the Spanish society from a distance, which directly calls out the country of origin, demanding responsibility towards its expatriates, and an activism that

[6] Translated from slogan in Spanish "No nos vamos: nos echan."

shows both similarities and differences from the associative patterns of the migrations of the Spanish Fordist period, at least in the case of Belgium (Ruiz Morales, 2018).

In the second profile we described, the same critical attitude towards the Spanish political situation is differently constructed. It can be said that here it takes on dispassionate forms, where emotional distancing and skepticism often appear as irony or cynicism. The Spanish political situation is perceived in a negative way, yet apart from the course of the migratory project:

> The truth is that I have never been much of an activist: neither in England, nor here, nor in Spain [...] I do not participate in elections either. I think I am still registered at the consulate in London (Marcos González, personal communication, November 12, 2019).

> I don't know, the way I see it now, especially seeing how the political situation is in Spain, it would be very difficult for me to return to Spain (Javier Carrasco, personal communication, November 9, 2019).

As for levels of active participation, specific cases within these two profiles vary widely and tend to be consistent with the trajectory of each person. In Sofia's case, the same feeling that prompted her to flee Spain corresponds to a disenchantment with the possibilities of political participation. After having been actively involved in both the 15-M movement and *Podemos*, she claims to have lost hope in making things better:

> The truth is that I was very disappointed with the participation in Spain. I always had the feeling that it was worthless. In the sense that I also participated in the demonstrations against the Bologna Plan, we locked ourselves in the universities, the Bologna Plan was implemented: nothing happened. We participated in the demonstrations against the Zapadores Alien Detention Center: well, the site is still there. The demonstrations against Camps in Valencia were impressive, and against Rita [...] nothing happened. 15-M: well, the situation has been getting worse in politics. There you have Rajoy, who is corrupt: nothing happens [...] Now comes VOX, national socialism in Spain: perfectly fine (Sofía Varela, personal communication, November 8, 2019).

In her case, the decrease in her participation level seems to be parallel to the frustration of her professional projects in Spain and her decision to start again in Brussels. The opposite tendency can be seen among those who, without having had any militant activity in Spain, begin to develop such in Brussels, such as Teresa, who presides an association of Spanish researchers in Belgium. The activity developed by this organization, which she considers political, has to do with the professional demands of its members, but also with the desire to influence Spanish scientific policy:

> With the association we do things in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy in Belgium. Especially with the Ministry of Culture and Science. [...] they provide us a lot of funding also to do events. [...] We are starting to do more meetings in Spain. [...] Recently, on October 1, we were with the President [...] with the Minister of Science: Pedro Duque. And we were also received by the Royal House. That is, little by little we are gaining visibility. [...] Well,

> to influence the Spanish R&D system. [...] We are non-partisan, not apolitical. [...] But we do try to have an influence, to participate politically, let's say, but with Spain, with Belgium we have never done anything (Teresa Pedregal, personal communication, November 11, 2019).

In Teresa's example, activism follows parallel to the consolidation of her professional career and adopts the same transnational characteristics as her work project. For her part, María, who lives with her Belgian partner and works intermittently, as she did in Spain, maintains in Belgium the same discontinuous cooperation with NGOs that she already practiced before migrating. But now she is working with a local association for abused women, which she contacted through friends in Brussels. What these cases seem to point to, beyond a disaffection towards the traditional forms of political militancy, is a strong coherence between the modes of participation and the general evolution of the migratory project, in such a way that the political participation of both of them takes shape in issues related to their personal profiles, and limited to the scope of their own networks.

Moreover, the levels of participation found may also be related to the fact that the people interviewed had been living in Brussels for a relatively short period at the time. Some, like Javier, anticipate that their personal involvement will be activated when they meet more people and feel more integrated at the local level. It is possible that the acquisition of full rights and duties in Brussels will open up a scenario of possibilities for them, including not only access to the labor market and social services, but also political and social participation, especially at the local level, thus becoming a target group for both transnational and local policies. However, these future patterns may still show a duality in terms of levels of stability and insertion, as well as possible future mobilities (of return or else), which could also lead to disparate ways of thinking and political involvement.

CLOSING REMARKS

New migration flows of Spaniards to Brussels is deeply linked to the 2008 crisis and its impact on the labor market. However, within this migration flows, a plurality of profiles can be observed, connected with diverse trajectories and reflecting different ways of facing the migratory project. The data hereby presented allows us to infer the existence of two major profiles which, without being the only ones, structure two clearly differentiated forms of mobility.

On the one hand, Brussels welcomes people who saw their professional expectations frustrated in Spain and decided to travel abroad to start new projects, even with few guarantees and little planning. These migrants arrived in the Belgian capital lacking employment, or else accepting precarious jobs below their qualifications. In their discourse, the 2008 crisis occupies a central place as a detonating factor for a departure abroad that is experienced in terms of a flight: as a disruption that forces them to break with the experience developed in Spain. For them, migration implies a significant personal cost and, especially during the first stage, requires an outlay of resources that they are uncertain to recover. In their incorporation into the city, the

networks of countrymen play a fundamental role, including relatives who lend resources, friends who migrate together, and networks of Spanish migrants who help in the search for employment and housing. However, the labor supply of a global city like Brussels seems to welcome this population under relatively advantageous conditions compared to what they leave behind in Spain.

At the same time, the new importance of Brussels as a global business center and as the administrative and political capital of the EU makes this city a strategic node in the absorption of highly specialized labor. In this area, there is a second profile of migrant Spaniards who come to Brussels for good jobs they have already obtained. The incorporation of these people into the city is made easier by them not having to look for a job, but also by material conditions that facilitate the search for housing and other needs during the first phase of insertion. For these cases, mobility represents an advantageous endeavor from the onset, one in which they do not experience great dependence on support networks, so that their relations with other migrants from Spain are limited to socializing. Thus, this duality characteristic of the global city (Sassen, 2007)—and especially of Brussels—seems to be reflected in the parallel existence of these two clearly different migratory profiles.

Compared with the migration flows of Fordism, both profiles consider that they fit into a common pattern of constant and uncertain mobility (Engbersen, 2012). The discourses of the two profiles reflect a notable uncertainty on issues such as their future in Brussels, returning to Spain, or mobility to a third country. However, the way in which this is concretized differs. On the one hand, those who came to Brussels to start from scratch hope to recover the investment made, and in any case wish to improve their personal situation in order to return with guarantees to the country they unwillingly left. On the other hand, those who moved to Brussels to take up a highly qualified job prioritize the furthering of their work project, and make any future change in their mobility dependent on what better serves their professional interests.

In any case, the uncertainty that can be seen in the analyzed testimonies is to a large extent linked to the 2008 crisis and its effects. Likewise, the crisis seems to strongly condition their modes of political participation, where there is an evident distrust towards traditional forms of militancy, a deep skepticism towards the political future of the country of origin, and a lack of roots with respect to now-local politics due to the short time residing in the city.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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