

# Symbolic Strategies in Migratory Contexts: Middle-Class Argentineans In Spain\*

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## ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at exploring how migration has affected the class distinction of an immigrant group belonging to Argentine middle-classes in Spain, and the symbolic strategies that these immigrants have developed during the migratory process. With Pierre Bourdieu's theory as a reference, the ways in which agents leverage the cognitive dissonance between the classificatory schemes of origin and destination according to their *habitus* and previous social trajectories are examined. Based on a qualitative methodology, these strategies relating to two classification axes that tend to position migrant subjects: immigration status and class membership, are analyzed. One of the research findings was how these classifications impact on the perception of possibilities present in the social space of destination, redefining the subjects' migratory projects.

*Keywords:* 1. social classification, 2. misrecognition, 3. Argentine migrants, 4. migratory projects, 5. Pierre Bourdieu.

## Estrategias simbólicas en contextos migratorios: Argentinos de clase media en España

## RESUMEN

En este artículo se propone explorar cómo ha afectado la migración a los enclavamientos de un grupo de inmigrantes pertenecientes a las clases medias argentinas en España, y las estrategias simbólicas que los mismos han elaborado durante el proceso migratorio. Tomando como referencia la teoría de Pierre Bourdieu, analizamos el modo en que los agentes explotan en su favor las disonancias cognitivas entre los sistemas clasificatorios de origen y de destino, de acuerdo con sus *habitus* y trayectorias sociales previas. Apoyados en metodología cualitativa, analizamos estas estrategias en torno de dos ejes clasificatorios que tienden a fijar a los sujetos migrantes: la condición de inmigración y la adscripción de clase. Uno de los hallazgos de la investigación fue la incidencia de estas clasificaciones en la percepción de las condiciones de posibilidad en el espacio social de destino, redefiniendo los proyectos migratorios de los sujetos.

*Palabras clave:* 1. clasificación social, 2. desconocimiento, 3. migrantes argentinos, 4. proyectos migratorios, 5. Pierre Bourdieu.

\* Text originally written in Spanish.

## Introduction

The symbolic strategies devised as a result of migration processes are highly complex. The cognitive dissonance between the classification systems of origin and destination, which are not usually identical, means that agents tend to *interpret* the social space of their destination using the categories of perception of their place of origin, creating a wealth of opportunities for confusion and *misunderstanding*. This gap provides fertile ground for migrants to devise various symbolic strategies.

Authors such as Abdelmalek Sayad refer to these symbolic strategies as *illusions*, ways of coping with the tension caused by the contradictions of immigration, due to the fact that it is a provisional state that lasts over time, since migrants are permanently stressed by the idea of returning (Sayad, 2010). Some illusions involve misrepresenting living conditions in the destination country, which leads immigrants to utter the following types of discourse: “You have to put up with not feeling like yourself (here) for eleven months—as a slave—so that you can feel like yourself (there)—like a prince—in order to be able to endure another eleven months here as a slave, and so on” (García and García, 2002:105). Symbolic strategies also make it possible to display the status achieved in the destination in relation to the reference groups at origin, as Pedone (2004) and Goldring (1998) point out. These authors emphasize the fact that immigrants’ place of origin represents a fundamental context in the appraisal of the status acquired from migration. Pedone analyzes the construction of social prestige in the country of origin, especially by male Ecuadorian migrants. The latter make investments or grant loans, strengthening their position of honor in their social space by accumulating a certain symbolic capital (Pedone, 2004:7). Meanwhile, Goldring argues that the place of origin provides a special context for people to improve their position in terms of power and status (Goldring, 1998:167).

In the case presented in this paper, based on the results of a study of middle-class Argentinean migrants impoverished in their place of origin during the 1980s and 1990s (Jiménez, 2011),

the symbolic strategies devised during the migration process are analyzed. The way migration has affected the social status of a group of Argentinean immigrants in Spain is explored, since the social status determined in Argentina continues to matter after emigration, and has different implications for lending meaning to migration projects. These strategies are discussed on the basis of two main classifications: *a)* immigration status, and *b)* class membership. The way these perceptions influence the redefinition of the subjects' migratory projects in the social space at destination is examined. Pierre Bourdieu's theory is used to explore the symbolic strategies elaborated by migrant agents, whereby they exploit the gap between the nominal and the real, exacerbated by the migratory context. This context not only entails the difference between all systems of classed and classing words, regarding the material distributions that correspond to them. The context of immigration also includes the dissonance between two classification systems with different socio-historical configurations: the one existing in a person's social space at origin and the one operating in the social space at destination.

### *Symbolic Strategies in the Transposition of Settings*

This paper posits that migration entails a degree of transposition between two social spaces: origin and destination. In the same act, migration enables a change of position in relation to the one occupied in the social space of the origin, and also involves the concealment of the position acquired in the social space of destination, which may be masked by another one through symbolic strategies. Below is a brief introduction to the theoretical coordinates on which the analysis will be based, to outline the interplay of tensions underlying the subjects' position as immigrants.

Symbolic strategies exploit the gap between the nominal and the real, since, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998:491) points out: "the order of words never strictly reproduces the order of things." Instead, there is a relative independence of the structure of classed and classing words regarding the structure of capital distribution.

Since class distinction systems operate as legal institutions that sanction a state of power relations, the nominal anticipates the real through a kind of inertia characteristic of words, creating scope for mismatches and symbolic maneuvers.

From these theoretical coordinates, cognitive structures shape the social structure that has been incorporated, defining the meaning of social groups. The class distinction systems that reinforce these cognitive structures are only “partially objectified and institutionalized in the form of codes” (Bourdieu, 2011:185), and contribute to the existence of social groups, since groups depend for their existence on the words that designate them (Bourdieu, 1998).

Within a national social space, agents are usually aware of the different social groups and the meanings of the practices and goods which they are entitled, since they operate as signs associated with certain conditions of existence and social positions. This meaning of social groups (which forms part of *common sense*) has a background of national evidence. Its principles of division are reinforced by institutions tasked with nation building (Wagner, 2007), such as bureaucratic agencies, statistics institutes or the media. The meaning of social space, in turn, assumes a *practical command of class distinction*, always linked to the particular situations in which the agents operate.

Likewise, just as objects in the social world can be perceived in different ways, a certain indeterminacy or *evanescence* operates in them, which becomes a privileged sphere for the *symbolic struggles* that take place in relation to status and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1998), leading to manipulations of the representation of one’s social position. This indeterminacy creates scope for attempting to manipulate the social value of positions and trajectories, and in the case of migrants, it also involves the exploitation of the discrepancy between the two classification systems mentioned—one incorporated in the social space at origin and the other operating in the social space at destination—. The consequences of this approach to the classification systems in migration contexts are analyzed below.

*Migration and Unawareness: A Game with Time Limits*

As Anne-Catherine Wagner points out in her studies of the social classes in globalization, in an immigration or foreign context, agents can *play with the unawareness* of the signs of the social indicators that define agents socially.

The international [context] enables [foreigners] to create illusions and play with the signs of their social rank. Every country has a set of criteria and codes that define a person's social status: their address, clothes, body language, speech, where they studied and so on. Abroad, we can play with the unawareness of signs and the imprecision resulting from the national diversity of these social indicators<sup>1</sup> (Wagner, 2007:97-98) (author's translation).

Thus, for a certain time, immigrants can play with this unawareness, devising strategies involving double dealing, bad faith and lack of acknowledgment. Through these strategies, agents misrepresent their own social value to both themselves and others (Bourdieu, 2011). However, these ploys have a time limit: as migrants become inserted into various areas or fields of activity, they can no longer feign ignorance of the classification systems in place at destination, or of the meanings of the objects (goods and practices) in the new social space.

Likewise, at the beginning of the migration experience, agents can exploit the host society's lack of knowledge about them and benefit from certain preconceived ideas about their country of origin or national group. In this case, in regard to Argentinean migrants in Spain, these representations rapidly define them as middle-class immigrants with cultural capital, due to the former presence of exiles, many of them professionals, belonging to the *exile era* or *cycle* (Actis, 2011). Thus, migrants can take advantage of this established perception—a sort of symbolic capital—of

<sup>1</sup> The term "*méconnaissance*" in the original has been translated as unawareness, which in Bourdieu's theory involves both lack of knowledge and lack of acknowledgement, as will be discussed in the text.

Argentines when they introduce themselves. Some examples anticipating the analysis are given below. One respondent mentioned the advantages an Argentinean immigrant has in his insertion into Spanish society, based on a *myth*: “I think that those myths about Argentines make integration easier and more achievable” (Sandra, 37, psychologist, Madrid, July 2008). Other respondents cited the existence of a kind of *positive discrimination* towards Argentines in relation to other immigrants, which goes so far as to exclude them from the much-maligned group of South Americans (pejoratively known as “Sudacas”). They even mention a certain degree of flexibility enabling Argentines to enter the host society, which respondents cite as a sort of resource they have: “We Argentines fit in very well ... All things considered, they accept and like us” (Hernán, 44, chemical technician, Madrid, June 2008). They therefore perceive a relatively positive response towards this national group as a whole. These notions appear to be based on the construction regarding Argentinean immigration in Spain, which has been configured as a *model minority* (Viladrich and Cook-Martin, 2008). They are regarded as model immigrants, based on a supposed ethnic and cultural similarity to the Spanish population, which would explain the positive reception of this group in Spain.

Another way migrants use this confusion to their advantage is that for a time, they can navigate the social space of the target country under the “tourist syndrome” as one respondent called it. Accordingly, unawareness of himself and the codes of the social space in the target country give him permission to do certain things and not others.

You feel free. You are a tourist, so you can kick a collection bin or a garbage can, you can scream, you can insult... “Who cares, if nobody knows me?” you know? You become uninhibited. You lose your inhibitions, because after all, who’s going to say anything?... There are no consequences and if there is a consequence, they will send me to jail, and if I go to jail, so what? No-one knows me. We feel that a lot here and it is logical that the natives, those [who] have always lived here, have some misgivings about foreigners, strangers (Antonio, 57, Madrid, April 2009).

This respondent used these Simmelian categories to express the lack of social penalization, which is equivalent to a certain freedom of movement. As Simmel notes, the stranger, “Regards things with less prejudice, more general criteria and more objective ideals. They do not feel bound in their action by habits, affects or precedents” (Simmel, 2002:62). Although, as the respondent himself subsequently acknowledged, time alters foreigners’ link to the social space of their destination, when they become *members of the group* (Schutz, 2002). “Nowadays, I have lost that sense of freedom,” says Antonio, because he now has many acquaintances in Madrid, and is subject to greater social constraints.

### *Methodology and Sample*

This brief introduction provides a framework for analyzing how symbolic strategies are devised in the wake of the migration experience. The units of analysis are a group of Argentinians living in various parts of the Community of Madrid, who share certain characters that were regarded as relevant for the research design: migration to Spain after 2000, working age at the time of migration (25 to 65), belonging to the middle-class in the place of origin, from various Argentinian provinces, and with different immigration status.

The research was based on a qualitative design. However, in order to select the respondents accurately, a structural-historical analysis of the Argentinian social space and its transformations, based on secondary sources, was undertaken beforehand. A structural sample (22 subjects) was designed, considering three sectors of the Argentinian middle-classes, according to the predominant composition of capital in the country of origin: *asset-based petty bourgeoisie* (relatively richer in economic capital, small and medium businessmen, artisans), *service-based middle-class* (relatively richer in cultural capital/educational attainment: liberal professionals and salaried employees; secondary and tertiary education teachers, technicians) and *lower middle-class* (lower volume of global capital: administrative and commercial clerks; skilled

workers). All respondents had completed high school. Fieldwork, carried out in the Community of Madrid between March 2008 and February 2009, involved conducting in-depth interviews in order to reconstruct the social trajectories from the social space of origin (Argentina) to the social space of destination (Spain).

Below is an analysis of the *symbolic strategies* devised by the migrants interviewed regarding the systems of class distinction in which they participate: immigration status and class membership. The questions guiding the analysis are: how do migrants represent their immigration status? What is their perception of their new class status *vis-à-vis* the one they had in Argentina? Do subjects resist or resign themselves to the classifications assigned to them by the social space at destination?

*Immigration Status and Class Membership:  
Effects on Migration Projects*

Migration projects are practices of representation produced by the *habitus*, reworked according to the perception individuals have of the situation they are in at a given moment and the resources at their disposal, according to their possibilities and expectations. Since the migration process takes place in time, all projects are transformed once migration becomes a state of *permanent transience* (Sayad, 2010). Projects rely on resource management, strategy deployment and time use in the undertaking of migrations (García and García, 2002). Yet all these factors are cut through by the tension inherent in an immigrant's status: living between two worlds, two spaces in relation to which they act and position themselves. To use Ludger Pries' apt expression, migrants are simultaneously positioned in the systems of inequality in their societies of origin and destination (Pries, 1998). This situation means that migrants continuously weigh up the potential of each place. They do so to justify the cost of being uprooted on the one hand and to enhance their existence in the destination country, which typically assigns migrants more subordinate positions on the other.

Symbolic strategies emerge in the gaps fostered by the encounter between the two classification systems mentioned above. They



also play a role in redefining migratory projects, since they guide the way individuals subjectively justify their stay in the host country. The strategies undertaken by Argentinean immigrants, both as regards the self-classification of their migrations and the hetero-classification (to which react in different ways), which they receive from the coordinates of the social space at destination, are analyzed. A class distinction has been considered based on two classification schemes: immigration status and class membership. These are not the only ways immigrants are marked by classification schemes. Gender, ethnicity and age classes are some of the many other ways of classifying immigrant agents in the host society, although these will not be analyzed in this paper.

*Class Distinction Regarding Immigration Status:  
The Quest for Migrant Legitimacy*

*Immigration status* refers to the assignment of immigrants to different categories on a continuum ranging from certain immigration legitimacy to illegitimacy. In the analysis of the empirical material, three figures illustrating different immigration conditions are identified: the returnee, the cosmopolitan and the immigrant.

In recent years, the specialized literature has seen the emergence—even as a legal category—of the representation of the *returnee* immigrant (Gil, 2010). This discourse was appropriated by Argentinean immigrants, and makes sense given the historical links between Argentina and Spain as countries with significant two-way migration. Among today's 21<sup>st</sup> century-immigrants, it means the return of the descendants of former émigrés from Spain (or other European countries through the legal concept of *European citizenship*), which would be linked to certain administrative benefits (especially since the enactment of the *Law of Historical Memory*)<sup>2</sup>. Some of the respondents who use the figure of return

<sup>2</sup> *The 52/2007 Act*, enacted during Zapatero's socialist government (2004-2012), provided for an extension of rights and the establishment of measures in favor of those who suffered political persecution during Franco's regime. For the purposes of this study, for many Argentineans, this meant a gateway to Spanish nationality, because of the willingness to grant this right to children and grandchildren of political exiles, regardless of age (Cortes Generales del Reino de España, 2007).

also mention biologicist arguments (“because I am of completely Spanish blood,” says Sandra) or even cultural ones, to justify their migration projects, as borne out by the following excerpt from another respondent: “For me, Spain has never been overseas...because for me Spain was like, how shall I put it? my other homeland. I mean, I was raised by Spaniards, with Spanish customs and stories about Spain” (Inés, 63, psychologist, Madrid, June 2008).

This research found that this concept of return migration was assumed by many of the interviewees as a means of justifying their migrations. This type of symbolic strategy appears as a stretching of meanings, which confuses generations, places and even the subjects of these practices: the alleged *return* is a sort of performance by proxy. Authors such as Boltanski analyze the social function of this type of legal formulas for sustaining social multi-positionality, particularly of power positions for the dominant class. Thus, the other person, like a front man, is an agent who assumes certain functions on behalf of the occupant of the position, which exceed the authority contained in the legal definition of that position (Boltanski, 1973: 22).

Indeed, it was found that the type of narration used by these subjects confuses generations and places of origin and destination, and is a means of representing their migrations. A representative case of this confusion of the subjects of practices is Antonio, who says: “for me, living here [in Spain] was rather like living through the eyes and dreams of my father.” This respondent recalls the experience of visiting the village in Galicia where his father was born, and in his reverie—which he recounts using the device *as if*, which somehow enables him to distance himself from this confusion—he discovered the place and the way he arrived at what was once the family home, through his father’s stories. “I went from one house to another with my father’s eyes, through which I remembered what my dad had told me ... I was as though I had left, on behalf of my father, as if I had left the village and returned, as if I was going back to see friends” (Antonio, 57, Madrid, April 2009).

The point of reference for this type of discursive elaboration is the Spanish origin, which is why the alleged return is represented by a *going back to Spain*, even though he was born in Argentina. This is suggested in the following extract from the interview with Sandra, referred to earlier: “Because they taught me to love this country as my second country, without ever having been in it. It was as if I had ‘come back’, because I was born in a village in X (a province in northern Argentina), where the whole neighborhood is Spanish. Even today, that town [and] my family are still very traditionally Spanish.”

In other cases, the space of reference is more ambiguous and includes a combination of the two places (origin and destination) and displacements in both directions. For example, Inés is the daughter and granddaughter of Spaniards (her parents emigrated to Argentina when they were young). She refers to her own daughters, who migrated with her to Spain as “fourth generation immigrants,” without specifying the movement to a place of origin, but as though it involved a kind of *floating* population between the two places that had merged.

These examples give some idea of the images used by agents to make sense of their migration projects, conceiving of them as *returns* in the cases analyzed (Sarrible, 2000). Thus, migrants regard themselves as having a legitimate immigrant status, appealing to a *right of inheritance* (Malgesini, 2005). The returnee, as Viladrich and Cook-Martin (2008) so rightly say, seeks full integration, which contrasts with Spain’s classification of their labor (manual jobs and informal services). This can cause increased frustration, since the feeling of social devaluation and loss of status is exacerbated. However, self-perception as a returnee can also constitute a source of claims or lead to greater perseverance in establishing oneself as a subject with full rights.

There is another set of representations which, unlike the previous ones, do not rely on membership on the basis of blood or cultural assumptions to justify migration, and instead are based on cosmopolitan justifications, in relation to a *cosmopolitan habitus*. According to Wagner (1990), *cosmopolitan habitus* are formed

in populations that have been trained to live on an international scale: early learning of two or more languages, cosmopolitanism of the family environment, stays abroad and so on. The respondents included in these cosmopolitan justifications have engaged in various international experiences prior to settling in Spain. Gerardo (39, engineer with post-graduate degrees, Madrid, February 2009) engaged in internships in the United States and Spain before deciding to emigrate to this country. Andrea (33, small textile businesswoman, Valdemoro, March 2008) spent nearly four years in the United States. Other respondents have made short trips or stays, such as Carlos (32, musician, Madrid, July 2008), who spent three months in New York and another three in London. Or Lucrecia (33, clerk, Madrid, October 2008), who lived in Belgium for four months before moving to Spain.

The discursive universe of these subjects is akin to a representation of Argentinean immigrants as *foreigners*. The Spanish literature on migration, both academic and bureaucratic, distinguishes between immigrants and foreigners. The latter are treated differently in terms of legislation. There is a distinction between those with a General Regime residence permit (corresponding to the category of immigrants) and those with a Community Regime permit (special treatment for Europeans and their immediate families) (Riesco, 2010)<sup>3</sup>.

The representation of immigrants as foreigners—a sort of world citizens—foreshadows more open migration projects, which do not rule out the possibility of emigrating to a third country. In these representations, migrations are confused with travel, constituting ways of discovering, traveling and acquiring experience. Several of the respondents with cultural capital referred to the importance for them of the possibility offered by Spain—with a strong economy at the time when they migrated—as a place of residence enabling them to travel around the world. Trips through Argentina were also presented as possibilities that opened

<sup>3</sup> As a result of previous migrations to the country, the Argentineans interviewed may legally belong to either of the two categories. What is analyzed here is the symbolic operation they perform to justify their migrations, which does not necessarily correspond to their legal status in Spain.

up after migration, and they have taken the opportunity to discover tourist destinations designed “*for export*” (such as Iguazú, Perito Moreno and La Boca). The trips described by the respondents provided an excuse to refer to the places they knew. Thus trips, like other leisure activities, became opportunities to show the specific difference of status, insofar as they represent a means of accumulating cultural and symbolic capital.

The cosmopolitanism of these sectors of the cultivated middle-classes therefore justified migration on the basis of the legitimacy of culture (trips and visits to the museums and monuments of European countries, the headquarters of *legitimate culture*) moving symbolically away from the figure of the economic migrant. But this positioning also foreshadows other potential shifts to more promising places in order to find the most suitable settings for insertion in the job market and society that match their expectations. When one of the respondents, Carlos, was asked about his future plans, he answered allegorically “Besides, I do not care where I go back to...if I have to go and live in Mexico City, or New York or London...or Berlin as long as the city can give me what I need musically” (Carlos, 32, musician, Madrid, July 2008). For Carlos, returning would not mean returning to Argentina, the place from which he emigrated when he went to Spain, but rather leaving Spain, where he has been unable to find a niche for himself in the musical field.

Using this type of discourse, agents can imagine multiple migrations to different parts of the world, as long as these places offer them areas into which they can be inserted in keeping with their expectations. As another respondent said “Today I am here, and tomorrow I could be...I’m not one to...rule out any possibilities...And if they tell me I have an opportunity elsewhere, and it’s also good for the boys [her children] I’d leave” (Andrea, 33, small textile businesswoman, Valdemoro, March 2008).

Finally, within the elaborations regarding immigration status, some were found concerning the figure of the *immigrant* as an alien, which reflect the role assigned to it by the society of destination. Non-E.U. immigrants are paradigmatic of this type of social

classification. The connotation of externality—*extra* or *non*-community—assigned to them by the legal and social configurations of Fortress Europe, constitute, for those classified under this system, a problem that is subject to public intervention (Gil, 2010). The immigrant would be subordinated to work, placed in the category of *provisional*, marked by *national exclusion* (or from the European Community, given the category of extra-E.U. immigration) and his hypothetical return would be contained in the very notion of *immigrant* (Sayad, 2010). The assumption of migrations from these discursive constellations tends to create further splitting of the migration experience in the respondents. As one respondent said: “My mind is there [in Argentina]” (Mario, 33, bricklayer, Madrid, July 2008).

Within this type of discourse, it is possible to envisage migration projects which, in regard to the host society, do not go beyond the desire to work, earn some economic capital, and be able to return to the country of origin in the future: when they retire, when they have accumulated enough savings to purchase a house or set up their own business. However, this categorization also creates further tension and discomfort: “I’m suffering,” “I haven’t found my way,” “sometimes...I don’t know, it’s often happened to me, maybe I miss home. I have dreamed...I have woken up thinking I’m at home in Argentina and when I open the door I realize that I haven’t, and the thing is that...I do not know what...I...I do not know, I’m confused inside. I haven’t managed to fit in yet,” says Mario. Moreover, maintaining these migration projects over time tends to take place in isolation and loneliness, both in relation to the local population and Argentineans themselves, as can be seen from the following: “Well... I had more friends among foreigners than among Argentineans. That’s the thing about [Argentineans]...we do not stick together” (Mario).

### *Class Membership: The Tricks of Self-deception*

Another way migrants are classified is related to the *class membership* which they are assigned to and at the same time promote.

Migrants develop strategies to build and redefine their positions in the social space at destination after the migration experience. To this end, they use various symbolic strategies, as seen below: stretching the boundaries of class distinction which the subjects imagine regarding class status, using belonging to the middle-classes as a reference; the metonymy of a fraction of the whole class over the middle-classes as a whole; and cultural and moral superiority as a membership criterion.

To avoid subjectively moving down a class—which many middle-class respondents had already suffered in their social space of origin—migrants try to position themselves in an intermediate region of the Spanish social space, even if this requires the transfiguration of the ends and the stretching of class boundaries. Certain studies of Argentinean social structure point out that the middle-classes tend to have a trichotomized vision of society: there are the very rich, the very poor, and the middle-class in the middle. In Ruth Sautu's research, the image that the middle-classes had of other classes in terms of proximity or remoteness was as follows: 56 percent of the sample felt closer to the lower than the upper class; a third regard itself as equidistant from both, while 12 percent felt closer to the upper class. Those who felt close to the upper class did so for cultural reasons, economic aspects being the only thing that differentiated them: "the only advantage of the upper class for the middle-class was its consumption (which tends to be conspicuous) and its possessions" (Sautu, 2001:52).

On the basis of this representation, the agents interviewed try to imagine the Spanish social space as less discontinuous, relying heavily on their unawareness of Spanish class systems. They therefore use different indicators to prove that, despite migration, they are *in the middle*: the fact that in Spain, less skilled jobs (waiters, factory workers, sweepers and so on) are comparatively less devalued; the perception of the existence of guaranteed minimum living conditions (due to the lower cost of living and access to consumption); indirect salaries (particularly social security benefits until the crisis that began in 2008). These images become evidence to support these perceptions. As another respondent said: "If you have a job in a factory, or whatever, in



the polygon...and you're happy with that, as many Spaniards are, you're okay...In other words...you can just about make ends meet" (Daniel, 33, craftsman, Parla, April 2008). Since factory work is also engaged in by Spanish workers, it legitimizes those positions, freeing them from the stigma they would have if they were only occupied by immigrants. According to this kind of discourse, Spain has a broad middle-class that even includes sweepers, waiters and workers.

Moreover, although *unawareness* largely reinforces this type of representations that shape one's attitude towards migration and Spanish social classes, it can also lead to situations of *bluffing*, caused by misrepresenting one's native status indicators. Thus, for example, although the subjects experience improvements in their living conditions and purchasing power in Spain in relation to the level they had in Argentina, after a time they realize that these achievements do not suffice to belong to the Spanish middle-classes. Subjects are assigned to multiple systems of social class distinction whose terms they do not fully understand, unless they expose themselves to many different social situations on the basis of which they can compare their own classification systems themselves (which they bring from their own social space of origin) with Spanish classification systems. Patricia (38, pastry cook, Aranjuez, April 2009) talked, as a result of the difficulties she experienced in interacting with the native population outside work, about this kind of dissonance regarding the classification systems in the countries of origin and destination. Thus, despite securing good jobs in Spain, she and her husband, who works as a chef at a major casino, and having been able to adopt the consumption patterns of the Spanish middle-classes (new car, plasma TV, holidays in large hotel complexes on the Spanish coast), Patricia harshly concludes: "When it comes to interpersonal relationships,...we're pretty much as lonely as a cloud. Spaniards are very closed." Their material gains have not allowed them to become fully incorporated into what are identified as the Spanish middle-classes. The following excerpt from the interview reflects this tension between belonging to the middle-class in the social



space of origin and those that refer—from the respondent's perspective—to the social space in the country of destination.

In relation to our habits, what we have, our type of life...and what we've always been used to, we live well as Argentineans according to Spanish culture and what Spaniards are used to, we subsist. I cannot say that we are what the Spaniards regard as middle-class. I think we're lower class. Compared with what we are used to, we are middle-class ... By our standards, we're fine, we're comfortably off financially. Why? Because we are used to living with less [in Argentina], so here we are practically rich. But not for the Spaniards ... For the Spaniards we are nothing more than flunky employees (Patricia, 38, pastry cook, Aranjuez, April 2009).

The classificatory differences expressed by this respondent express the clash between belonging to the middle-classes in her social space of origin and destination. They constitute a source of tension as time goes by and she and her husband try to expand their networks of social capital with Spaniards. The interpretation of the empirical material sheds light on the various symbolic strategies developed by respondents to resolve the tensions involved in belonging to particular class, as analyzed below.

### Blurring Class Boundaries

The perception of some respondents of the Spanish social space as less discontinuous than the Argentinean one—which is more class-based—reflects a certain adjustment to the positions achieved after the migration experience. The change, through emigration, of the system of classifications to which they belong, is a way of reacting to the mismatch they had already suffered in Argentina. By stretching the intermediate region of the social space to make it practically coincide with the broad *social integration zone* (Castel, 1997), some subjects in Spain find relief from the stress of being constantly classed below their expectations.

The following excerpt from the interview with Facundo (34, cook, Madrid, July 2008) shows some aspects of his pre-migration mismatch. This respondent mentioned the pressure to which he was subjected in Argentina, as a result of being constantly challenged: because he did not have a college education, being racially stigmatized for being “too dark”<sup>4</sup> and because he inserted himself into places where he did not belong: a migrant from the provinces in the Federal Capital<sup>5</sup> and a car salesman in Puerto Madero<sup>6</sup>. Whereas in Argentina he felt he was subject to severe class discrimination (there “you are what you have, you are what you wear”), in Spain he has found an intermediate space between the social extremes, where he feels more comfortable.

Something else that really struck me [in Spain], was the thing, the fact of saying “I’m a good waiter or a good street sweeper, and if I want, I can do that for fifty years.” And beyond the personal expectation you may have, the setting gives you the opportunity to make a living. In other words, if you want to progress, you can, but if do not want to, you can make a living where you are ... But I think that happens there [in Argentina] far more often. First of all, the thing of saying, “If you don’t have a degree in something, forget about getting ahead, because everyone will keep rubbing it in your face” ... I can’t handle that stuff over there, which is one of the things that keeps me here ... It happens here too, there are ghettos here too. Here you go to Serrano<sup>7</sup> and it is...but the space between one extreme and the other is much broader and beside those who are at one extreme and those who are at the other think differently ... but here there is something that I think everyone shares, which is, “Well, let’s enjoy life a bit more, we don’t have to be so metaphysical” (Facundo, 34, cook, Madrid, July 2008).

<sup>4</sup> A reference to dark skin color, possibly due to having indigenous ancestors, although the respondent was not aware of such ancestry.

<sup>5</sup> The opposition between the Interior and the Capital has connotations regarding the social classification of individuals, and has historically operated on the basis of Sarmiento’s (1990) opposition from “civilization and barbarity.”

<sup>6</sup> An area of intense urbanistic speculation since the 1990s, a symbol of the social polarization caused by neoliberalism in Argentina.

<sup>7</sup> A street in Madrid with luxury department stores.

This type of representation ignores the symbolic struggles inherent in the Spanish social space, and can be maintained provided that its point of reference is the place achieved in Spain, rather than the one he would have if he had stayed at home, as if time could selectively stop to trace that kind of impossible trajectory. This maneuver also needs, as analyzed earlier, to be supported by the unawareness or lack of acknowledgment of the social differentiation mechanisms existing in the Spanish social space. However, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to maintain this unawareness as time goes by, and the agents gradually feel the effects of being assigned to certain social positions, which enables them to contrast the positions they have (here) with those they had (there), as discussed in the following sections.

### Cultural Resistance I: Metonymic Strategy

The metonymic strategies the authors observed in their respondents consist of taking the part for the whole. This enables them to only consider those with *cultural capital* as belonging to the middle-classes, omitting those who belong to other fractions, such as the petty bourgeoisie with economic capital (small businessmen). This move enables agents to manipulate the differentiation criteria that are most favorable to their capitals, in order to be included in the middle-class, despite having experienced a sharp drop in social class on their insertion into the lower strata of the Spanish social structure. Likewise, on the basis of this strategy, they can afford to exclude *others*—Spaniards, for example—from belonging to the middle-classes as a way of responding to the social devaluation after migration.

Having some educational and cultural capital in Argentina could, despite the social and wage devaluation of recent decades, keep agents in their middle-class positions through the possession of university degrees operating as *titles of nobility* (Bourdieu, 2011). However this situation changes in the Spanish social space where, due to complex processes of homologation, qualifications are not recognized, meaning that subjects are marked by processes of acute disqualification in their jobs (Jiménez, 2013).

The testimonial of one of the interviewees (Inés, 63, psychologist, Madrid, June 2008) accurately reflects the mismatch experienced by middle-class individuals, especially older ones, with a long history in the social space of origin and a certain amount of cultural capital, on their insertion in the social space at destination in positions with a lower occupational, salary and certainly social status. As can be seen from the following excerpt, the respondent expressed this dissonance with strong classism, possibly reflecting her frustration at being relegated to an unskilled job in a major marketing company.

As time goes by, I say to my daughter, “I want to live here, I live better here, but I want to bring over my friends from there” ... I find I am increasingly unable to put up with the people [here]. I do not know, maybe, deep down, they are saying, “Well, considering where you work.” They are shitheads. Very mediocre people, in general. Because over time, I have thought that the thing is that I used to live and work with middle-class people. People in our middle-class have a middle-class social and educational level. Here, I find myself with middle-class people, in the economic sense, but they are not middle-class, they are lower-class. But economically, because of what they have, they are middle-class, but in fact ... And I find people very mediocre, and it makes me angry, because I say, “With all they have, with the money they have, why are they so stupid, for heaven’s sake?” It makes me so angry. Why? because even if we are so poor, we have a better level. And we still have a better level ... And here I feel... people who have completed high school, who have... Some of them even have university degrees and yet they are oafs! They are oafs! They do not even, I dunno, they do not even have manners, I dunno ... and they are limited, they are limited, as though they had not had access to formal thought. You argue, I do not know if this happens to you, they do not understand arguments, they do not follow your reasoning (Inés).

In the wake of their failure to insert themselves into the middle-class in Spain, the injustices perceived by members of the service-based middle-class—owing to the fact that, despite their merit and years of investment in school credentials, they will be unable

to obtain the expected remuneration or recognition—are magnified as a result of migration. As seen earlier with Sautu (2001), members of the Argentinean middle-classes hold the belief that the only thing that differentiates them from the upper classes is economic capital and conspicuous consumption, since they share the same cultural capital. Moreover, for the middle-classes, according to Wortman (2003:39), “cultural capital appears as both a symbol of identity and a strategy of difference. The possession of objects is thereby ruled out as an attribute of identity.” Immigration status merely exacerbates these tensions which already existed in the social space of origin regarding the upper classes. Respondents may apply this difference to the Spanish middle-classes, particularly when their knowledge is not even valued as cultural capital incorporated into the workplace, and they feel extremely devalued.

### Cultural Resistance II: Cultural and Moral Superiority

The display of certain cultural and moral superiority as a means of resistance to social devaluation is another of the strategies devised by respondents. In the empirical material, the persistence of negative stereotypes towards the Spanish has been detected, linked to the recent migration histories of the two countries. Some of these stereotypes are: “Typical Spaniards are all the same” (Alicia, 37, publicist and coach, Madrid, September 2008); “just look at how they speak English! Even people who have studied English, literally they have medieval pronunciation”; “this is the first world because there is money, nothing more ... Here there is a lot of money but no culture” (Hernán, 44, chemical technician, Madrid, June 2008); “have you seen how the Spanish regard food? They think food is sacred” (Gerardo, 39, engineer with post-graduate degrees, Madrid, February 2009), and so on.

This feature, which is presented as a form of revitalized stigmatization which many respondents expressed about Spaniards, fits into the analysis by Norbert Elias (2003) concerning the relationship between established groups and outsiders. According to Elias, “The movement of rising and falling groups and the dia-

lectic of oppression and counter-oppression of the ideas of glory of an established group, devalued by those of a group who were formerly outsiders, raises and transfers their representatives to the position of a newly established group” (Elias, 2003: 238).

The signs of cultural and moral superiority observed in the empirical material may constitute a kind of revival of ancient prejudices that operate in the migration context as a defense mechanism, since migrants remained in a subordinate position following the migration experience. Thus, as though it were an *investment*, those who are now outsiders revive old stigmas and prejudices regarding Spanish immigrants to Argentina in the past, which are reinforced by very strong collective fantasies in the society of origin, and reactivated in the migration context.

This strategy has been presented as a recurrent feature in the empirical material in the various groups, but is clearly expressed by Susana, one of the respondents belonging to the lower middle-class. Susana studied at a teacher training college in Argentina, although she hardly ever taught, since she was a secretary at a notary’s office for most of her working life. Despite this, her discourse appeals to cultural goodwill and asceticism, to culture as salvation, as shown by the following excerpt from the interview.

That is what saves us, isn’t it? Inner life ... Here people would commit suicide if they went through what we [Argentineans] went through. There are many Spanish people here who have no, who only know how to eat ham, ham and more ham...It’s the only thing they talk to you about...I was in one of the [jobs]...and I met all kinds of people, and in the conversations, there came a time when I would be eating, and I would have food coming out of my ears, with everyone talking about food ... If these people went through what we went through [in the 2001 crisis], they would commit suicide. Whereas we are always more interested in cultural things, let’s see this, let’s visit that, or find some activity or something to do that saves us. That helps us a lot... and the education we have ... It is as if [they] had their stomachs here in their heads...we could not, there was nothing to think about...just food (Susana, 63, telephone operator, Madrid, June 2008).

The ideal image of *ourselves*, held by the members of once powerful nations (Elias, 2003), whose relative superiority—as in the case of Argentina in relation to Spain, at the time when the Spanish emigrated there—has left a strong mark on the representations of Argentine immigrants interviewed. In cases such as that of this respondent, images of ourselves are expressed as cultural and moral superiority, and may be symptomatic of the class mismatches they suffer: due to their failure to achieve the coordinates—lifestyle, consumption levels, and so on—of the Spanish middle-classes, subjects take refuge in the old Argentinean glories: culture and education, the lifesavers of the impoverished Argentinean middle-classes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In short, these two modes of cultural resistance (I and II) are presented as a defense of the most incarnate aspects of the middle-classes, as a sort of safeguard of their class condition as a set of intrinsic properties. The cultural capital incorporated “is possession which has become being, a property turned into a body, which has become an integral part of the ‘person’, an *habitus*” (Bourdieu, 2011:215).

In the sectors of the Argentinean middle-classes that have historically deposited their expectations of upward social mobility in investment in schooling, cultural aspects become a badge of membership of the middle-class, whose definition is obviously a subject of dispute. This has led to economic capital being ruled out as an attribute of identity. The discourse of these respondents (Inés and Susana) reveals a set of attributes (which have to do with dispositions) that should be possessed by those belonging to the middle-classes: “manners,” a certain “social and educational level,” “knowing how to argue,” being “educated,” “inner life,” and so on. These attributes and dispositions are identified as part of the (ideal) *us* who, despite being “poor” are “a cut above” as Inés says. In contrast, they construct the image of *them* (also ideal, but with the opposite sign), as “oafs,” “with money,” who only think about “food,” and are “limited, they have no formal thinking.” Oddly enough, this ideal image constructed regard-

ing the Spaniards as *nouveaux riches* borrows elements from the gargantuan values attributed to the Argentinean working classes. These gargantuan values, according to Margulis, Urresti and Lewin (2007:32) consist of “the festive values of spending and consumption, the great destructive binge, whether in scarcity or abundance.”

The combination of the two classification schemes analyzed—immigration status, and class membership—is evident in these mechanisms of cultural resistance. Because the ideal “us” is the result of two processes of social devaluation: a certain national belonging in a migratory context (belonging to a semi-peripheral country, subordination due to immigrant status), with class membership (impoverished downgraded middle-classes) in contrast with the Spanish *nouveaux riches* at the time analyzed. These two classifications converge on the definition of damaged identities (Goffman, 2006), which seek a way to protect themselves through the various symbolic strategies analyzed in this paper.

### *Final Reflections*

The representations agents have of their possibilities, partly linked to their class distinctions in regard to their immigration status and class membership analyzed in this article, may influence agents’ trajectories. Initial migration projects are evaluated on the basis of the perception of the potential enabled by the migration situation, as well as the constraints of the migration experience (for example, distance from the resources with which they were familiar at origin).

The discursive elaboration analyzed in this paper as symbolic strategies indicate the way subjects position themselves in relation to their migration projects. Thus, someone who regards himself as a *retournee* (with inherited rights) may have more definite views on settlement strategies than someone who perceives himself as an *immigrant*, as a guest who has to return to his country. Similarly, if class distinction regarding class membership is regarded as



a constraint—as a result of experiencing downward mobility—a person will not, perhaps, have the same disposition as a person who, instead, alters systems of class distinction in his favor, by seeing, for example, more space between the extremes.

Likewise, class distinctions in these two systems, immigration status and class membership, are stressed by the contrasts established between the places of origin and destination. This tension stems from the fact that migrants belong to two systems of social differentiation that award them different social values and different positions. As Pries (1998) points out, transnational migrants move between two worlds, simultaneously positioning themselves in the systems of inequality in the origin and destination countries. But in these simultaneous positionings, they attempt to take advantage of the gaps created by unawareness: their own ignorance of the systems of social classification in force in the country of destination, and others' misconception of them, since they are identified with a mythical representation of Argentinean migrants.

Thus, handling unawareness enables migrants to manipulate their own social identity, just as families, clans and tribes manipulate the genealogy and names that designate them (Bourdieu, 2011). Thus, in regard to the social position occupied in the place of origin, they may omit (or stress) forms of belonging that stigmatize (or reappraise) them in the new context, regarding affiliations, class origins, places of origins and so on. As for their position in the country of destination, they can ignore the classification systems that place them below their expectations, using unawareness for as long as they possibly can, by ignoring or failing to acknowledge the parameters of distinction and social classification existing in the Spanish social space in order to play strategically with the representation of their social value.

However, this handling of indeterminacy works best when: a) these moves have a time limit and are effective in the migrant subjects initial introductions of themselves and b) these letters of introduction are used with Spaniards, who are less informed

about the labels operating in the Argentine social space. Regarding the former, the effect of the gradual immersion in different fields of activity in the Spanish social space (occupational, emotional, relational, residential, educational and so on) that drive recognition of class distinctions in the target country has been suggested. As for the latter, future research should explore the hypothesis of the extent to which this issue affects the formation of links with the locals (Spaniards), and contributes to a certain reluctance on the part of Argentinean immigrants to interact with other Argentines in the immigration context (low incidence of collective associations).

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