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Spanish Professionals in Mexico City: Narratives on Work and Labour Markets*

SUMMARY

Using qualitative information, this paper studies the labour experiences of a group of skilled Spanish migrants in Mexico City. The paper identifies two types of migrants amongst the interviewed Spaniards: TNCs transferees and “migrants in the middle” (“those who are neither low-skilled migrants nor high-skilled migrants”; Conradson and Latham, 2005a). This somehow challenges assumptions about skilled workers, by showing the multiple work trajectories and experiences of highly qualified and educated workers. The article also stresses that the labour mobility of those in the middle is more horizontal and less conventional than the more typical career-path mobility of TNCs transferees. Furthermore, it is argued that labour mobility is not only related to educational background or performance in Mexico’s labour markets, but also to non-economic reasons (e.g. extensive use of social networks). Of special interest for this study are relations at the workplace as they represent a “contact zone” where “difference” is constantly encountered and negotiated (Yeoh and Willis, 2005b). For the interviewed Spaniards, workplace relations are substantially (and unexpectedly) different from those in their home country. This causes tension and problems that may affect their intentions to remain in Mexico.

KEY WORDS: skilled migration, labour markets, labour trajectories, Mexico City, Spain

Partially as a consequence of global economic integration and the explosive growth of information and communications technology (ICT) in recent years, skilled migration is on the rise (Findlay and Stewart, 2002). However, literature on skilled migration only represents a small part of the total number of migration studies. Perhaps this is because unskilled manual workers represent the majority of the international migrants in aggregate numbers, with the highly educated being relatively few in comparative terms.

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Their low number implies that skilled migrants might be socially and statistically “invisible” (yet their economic and social impact in many developing countries is far from being irrelevant; Salt, 1988; Peixoto, 2001).

Literature on skilled migration has traditionally followed two research lines. Brain drain ranks first in skilled migration literature (see, for instance, the classical studies of Grubel and Scott, 1977; Cortés, 1980; or more recently Meijering and Van Hoven, 2003). In these studies, the movement of skilled people is generally from less developed countries to those more developed. The underlying assumption is that the poorer countries lose skills (and thus potential for development) through migration. Yet recent research proposes changing the concept from brain drain to brain exchange or brain circulation, which suggests that there is no such break between destination and origin. These concepts somehow imply that mobility and circulation are substantial parts of the lives of skilled migrants, which incorporate different places into their migration circuits or spaces (Ong, 1999; Pellegrino, 2001), even if this is sometimes associated with precarious labour conditions and/or possible problems of adaptation to destination countries. The concept “high tech *braceros*” (Alarcón, 2000), which refers to the temporary agricultural program for hiring Mexicans in the 1960s, sums up this perspective of work and legal instability. In many cases, the origins of this sort of migration are not economic, but their roots are to be found in links that the political and economic elite in developing countries have with core countries. For instance, there is a strong tradition for Latin American elites to study at US universities.

A second type of research on skilled migration revolves around mobility within transnational corporations (TNCs). In contrast to migration due to brain drain, migration in this case occurs within the institutional framework of these companies. In the 1980s and early 1990s, studies on migration within TNCs concentrated on the movement of qualified workers from corporate offices in central countries to affiliated companies or factories in less developed countries (e.g. Salt, 1988; Findlay, 1989; Beaverstock, 1991). In these countries, managerial and technical staff from headquarters is in charge of supervising and coordinating specialized tasks (e.g. Mendoza, 1994, on European professionals in German companies in Spain). This line of analysis is certainly influenced by the World Systems Theory and the New International Labour Division (see Fröbel, Henricks and Kreye, 1980). However, subsequent studies explored migration within TNCs from a more complex perspective, overcoming rigid frameworks of interpretation by emphasizing other aspects such as the relevance of the company’s internal markets (e.g. researching the labour trajectories of skilled workers in the framework of complex migration routes between central headquarters, regional offices and/or factories). In principle, migration is an inter-company transfer and implies upward labour mobility for the transferees (e.g. Findlay et al., 1996; Iredale, 2001; Beaverstock, 2002; Beaverstock, 2005).

From our point of view, the literature on skilled migration shares two assumptions. First, that migration is understood under a core-periphery scheme. For technical and managerial staff working for TNCs, the countries in the “periphery” are considered to be places of temporary migration, leading to an eventual promotion in the host country. For “brain drain” studies, migration is always unidirectional towards more developed

areas (see for instance Hardill and MacDonald, 2000, on nurses into the UK; Voigt-Graf, 2003, whose research analyses the migration of teachers from Fiji to Australia and New Zealand; or Meijering and Van Hoven, 2003, on Indian professionals in Germany). Second, work is the main (and frequently the only) reason for those with specific skills to migrate.

Recently, the transnational approach has somehow challenged traditional views on international migration. This approach argues that, due to the increased circulation of people, goods and ideas, migrants create fluid, transnational spaces, which have been defined as both a social terrain that reflects migrants' bi-culturality and a fragmented, diffused geographical reality (Rouse, 1991; Kearney, 1995). In these social fields, trans-migrants take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Faist, 2000; Beaverstock, 2005). Even if the bulk of empirical studies on transnationalism has focused on unskilled migration mainly into the US, some studies have stressed the relevance of the transnational framework to analyse the highly-skilled (e.g. Tarrus, 1992, described the construction of everyday spaces of professionals working for the European Union institutions between Brussels, Paris and London; or Ong, 1999, on flexible citizenship amongst Chinese businessmen whose personal spaces are articulated between different countries, but their everyday practices correspond exclusively with those of the West).

Likewise, recently, the relevance of the non-economic factors (e.g. everyday practices) that organise particular patterns of global movement for skilled migrants has been recognized (e.g. Yeoh and Willis, 2005a; Conradson and Latham, 2005a). Furthermore, Conradson and Latham (2005a) reckoned that relatively little work has been conducted on migrants in the middle, who are neither "low-skilled migrants" nor "high-skilled migrants". In this regard, along the same lines, Clarke (2005: 308) notes that "writings on transnationalism tend to focus on either the high end of the labour market (high-skilled economic migrants) or the low end (low-skilled economic migrants). And so they neglect a significant proportion of the world's transnational population: people in the middle, often motivated to cross borders by non-economic concerns". Certainly, a variety of people can be found under the heading of "skilled migration": migrants that pertain to the education (and science) sector such as students, scientists, scholars and researchers; migrants that belong to the business sector (e.g. engineers, information technology experts, managers), and also migrants in the banking industry (e.g. experts in risk analysis, portfolio managers, strategists and others; Solimano and Pollack, 2004).

Finally, the studies on skilled migration have increasingly adopted a gender perspective (Hibbins, 2005; Iredale, 2005; Kofman and Raghuram, 2005; Nagel, 2005; Purkayastha, 2005; Raghuram, 2005; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh, Huang and Willis, 2000). This increasing literature on migration and gender reflects change in female migration trends, namely, female workers migrating autonomously. Certainly, the role of women in the context of skilled migration has been invisible because it was assumed that this type of migration was exclusive male, and wives simply followed men through family re-grouping. In many cases, international migration imposes a change in gender role in

which women are expelled from the labour market and “re-educated” to certain family values. Plainly stated, these accompanying women cease to enter the labour market as they are channelled towards domestic tasks (for instance Yeoh and Willis, 2005a, on Singapore women in China). The reasons for these changes are to be found in legal and gender barriers that make joining the labour force in the host country difficult (see Purkayastha, 2005, for Indian women in the USA). However, rather than observing these women as mere passive agents, the literature stresses the active role of accompanying women in migration decision-making, as well as in negotiating strategies within family, social and even labour spheres.

Set in this context, this paper studies the labour experiences of a group of Spanish skilled migrants in Mexico City. Considering the variety of skilled migrants (as seen in Solimano and Pollack, 2004; Clarke, 2005), this research identifies two types of migrants amongst the interviewed Spaniards: TNCs transferees and “migrants in the middle”. The paper somehow challenges assumptions about skilled workers, by showing the multiple work trajectories and experiences of skilled workers. Furthermore, the paper argues that labour mobility is not only related to educational background or performance in Mexico’s labour markets, but also to other non-economic reasons (e.g. extensive use of social networks). Of special interest for this study are relations at the workplace as they represent a “contact zone” where “difference” is constantly encountered and negotiated (Yeoh and Willis, 2005b). For the interviewed Spaniards, workplace relations are substantially (and unexpectedly) different from their home country. This causes tension and problems which may affect their intentions to remain in Mexico.

Spanish migration to Mexico

International migration into Mexico is irrelevant in total numbers, but it has been very important historically and is symbolically relevant in terms of Mexico City’s world city status. According to Census data, the 492,617 foreign-born immigrants in 2000 constituted only 0.5% of the Mexican population (INEGI, 2007). Interestingly enough, a large part of those born in a foreign country are relatives of former Mexican immigrants in the US. By nationality, the registers from the Migration National Office (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*; data collected by Castillo, 2001), show that Spaniards were the second largest foreign group and the first amongst those with a residence of 10 years or more in the country (Table 1).

Even if this is an uneven pattern, Spanish migration has never stopped since independence in 1821 (for instance, under the Porfirio Díaz government in the 1876-1911 period). This trend reversed dramatically during the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath (1910-1920). Another conflict, the Spanish Civil war (1936-1939), provoked a massive exile of refugees, with an impressive number of 25,000 refugees accepted in Mexico during the government of Lázaro Cardenas (Bonfil Batalla, 1993; Lida, 1997). Afterwards, Mexico gained a good reputation as a destination for other groups of refugees (mainly from Central America, Brazil, Chile and Argentina), who also fled from the dictatorships that came into power in the 1960s and 1970s in the Americas (see, for instance, Casillas and Castillo, 1994; Lida, 2002; Yankelevich, 2002).

Table 1: Foreign population in Mexico, by nationality and migration status (1996)

	<i>Temporary migrants*</i>	<i>Permanent immigrants**</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
United States	43,412	21,159	64,571	24.7
Spain	27,564	33,478	61,042	23.3
Germany	8,713	4,637	13,350	5.1
Canada	3,870	5,279	9,149	3.5
China	2,556	6,158	8,714	3.3
France	5,727	2,951	8,678	3.3
Japan	4,988	2,084	7,072	2.7
Argentina	5,051	1,863	6,914	2.6
Italy	4,057	2,780	6,837	2.6
Great Britain	3,534	1,986	5,520	2.1
Cuba	3,291	2,209	5,500	2.1
Colombia	3,195	899	4,094	1.6
Lebanon	1,703	2,370	4,073	1.6
Guatemala	2,359	1,318	3,677	1.4
Chile	2,428	1,129	3,557	1.4
El Salvador	2,479	821	3,300	1.3
Switzerland	2,139	986	3,125	1.2
Venezuela	2,347	630	2,977	1.1
Peru	2,382	565	2,947	1.1
Nicaragua	1,913	680	2,593	1.0
Other	21,744	12,012	33,756	12.9
TOTAL	155,452	105,994	261,446	100.0

* FM-2 permit holders. Migrants with at least five years of residence in the country or married to a Mexican national. This permit has to be renewed annually. The data do not include the foreigners on FM-3 permits, who are considered temporary legally residents in the country.

** FM-1 permit holders. Permanent immigrants must renew their permits every five years.

Source: Castillo (2001)

On the other hand, linked to a process of expansion of Spanish firms in Latin America, a sizeable flow of highly-qualified migrants have arrived to Mexico since the 1980s. This process of the expansion of TNCs relates to the substitution of the model of import substitution industrialization (ISI) by a more “open” economy that is based on free trade, exports, privatization of the public sector and foreign investment (Parneiter, 2002). In this way, Mexico City, as well as other large Latin American cities, has fully integrated itself into the global market (Sassen, 2000; Aguilar, 2002). Related to the peak of foreign investment, many transnational companies have relocated technical and managerial staff to less developed countries, as is the case with many Spaniards in Mexico.

Unfortunately, Mexico’s official data are not of great help in quantitatively assessing the relevance of these inflows, since data are not broken down by economic activity in the case of foreigners. Furthermore, skilled labour migration into Mexico has not been studied in the literature so far. Reasons for migrating amongst these Spanish professionals obviously differ from the previous political-driven movement. However,

regardless of their reasons for migration, the successive flows of Spaniards to Mexico have had a clear impact on the economy. In fact, the Spanish immigrants who arrived in the country at the beginning of the 20th century were active in creating firms, some of which nowadays constitute large well-known holding companies (for instance, the Gigante supermarket chain, the Modelo brewer, or Lala, a dairy products group; Noceda, 2005). At present, associated with the investment of transnational companies, the Spanish capital plays a key role in sectors such as phones, hotels, banks, real estate agencies and electric companies, with the total Spanish gross investment rising to 3,691 million Euros in 2004 (Relea, 2005).

Methodology

This article is based on qualitative data from extensive fieldwork in Mexico City that was carried out from May to October 2005. Specifically, a total of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Spanish immigrants in Mexico City were conducted. Although the migrants were contacted opportunistically, we interviewed men and women in nearly equal numbers, as well as different types of skilled migrants (i.e. managers or technicians in Transnational Corporations, and businesspeople and professionals in public companies; Table 2). The interviews that were carried out either in Spanish or Catalan were preceded by a questionnaire to collect labour and migration trajectories.

Due to the lack of reliable official statistics, a snowball sampling technique was used. Participants were assured that the interviews would be treated confidentially and pseudonyms would be used in the academic publications resulting from the research. Most interviews were carried out at the workplace, although some were held at interviewees' homes or at cafeterias, at their request.

The 30 in-depth structured interviews, which lasted an hour on average, were structured along three lines: work, social integration and geographic issues. Through the interviews, it was possible to discuss questions about reasons for having migrated to Mexico, intentions of stay, opinions about Mexico's labour market (e.g. views on workmates, professionalism, responsibility, discrimination at work), everyday experiences in Mexico City (e.g. living standards, everyday spaces, images of the country and the city before and after moving to Mexico) and links with the home country.

As Nagel (2005) pointed out, skilled migration is far from being homogeneous. That is to say there is a great diversity of experiences amongst skilled migrants because of sex, age, education or socio-economic circumstances. Likewise, we found that the interviewees' profile was heterogeneous, with the exception of their educational and professional profile, which was obviously high. All those interviewed had at least undergraduate studies, and they were either entrepreneurs or worked in managerial fields. Their length of residence varied extensively. For some of them, their stay was clearly temporary, but this was not the case for others. Finally, whereas women tended to be single (living alone or with other people), men were more likely to be married (with or without children, either with Mexican or Spanish partners).

Table 2: Profile of the interviewed Spanish immigrants

N.	Sex	Year birth	Last entry Mexico	Place of origin in Spain	Current work	Marital Status
1	M	1976	1999	Barcelona	Businessman	Married (2 children)
2	M	1961	1994	Barcelona	Restaurant chef	Living with partner (no children)
3	M	1968	1997	Barcelona	General Director, Mexican company	Married (2 children)
4	F	1976	2001	Terrassa (Barcelona)	Sub-director, Spanish company	Married (no children)
5	M	1967	1997	Barcelona	General Director, Spanish company	Married
6	M	1967	1999	Barcelona	University lecturer	Single
7	F	1974	2000	Barcelona	Executive manager, Mexican company	Single
8	M	1978	2004	Beasain (Guipúzcoa)	Grantholder in Basq Government Office in Mexico	Single
9	F	1955	1992	Iznajar (Córdoba)	NGO lawyer	Single
10	M	1950	2001	Bilbao	Retired/Consulting Spanish company	Married (2 children)
11	M	1976	2004	Bilbao	Consulting, Spanish company	Single
12	M	1966	2001	Alicante	NGO area director	Single
13	F	1969	2004	Barcelona	Businessman	Living with partner (no children)
14	M	1960	2004	Barcelona	Manager, French company	Living with partner (no children)
15	F	1975	2002	Sestao (Vizcaya)	United Nations area co-coordinator	Living apart together (no children)
16	M	1973	2004	Barcelona	Head of area, Spanish company	Living with partner (no children)
17	M	1962	1997	Barcelona	Businessman	Married (one child)
18	F	1973	2001	Bilbao	United Nations area manager	Single
19	F	1976	2000	Badalona (Barcelona)	Area manager, Mexican company	Single
20	F	1971	1997	Madrid	Manager, Mexican company	Married (no children)
21	F	1963	2003	Girona	Executive assistant	Married (two children)
22	M	1977	2005	Tarragona	Import-export manager, Belgian company	Single
23	M	1951	1986	Barcelona	Businessman	Married (two children)
24	M	1979	2004	Madrid	NGO manager	Single
25	M	1965	1993	León	University lecturer	Living apart together (no children)
26	M	1960	1984	Barcelona	Entrepreneur	Married
27	F	1976	2001	San Sebastián	United Nations area manager	Living with partner (no children)
28	F	1978	2004	Baracaldo (Vizcaya)	United Nations area manager	Single
29	F	1955	1982	Tolosa (Guipúzcoa)	United Nations administrator	Single
30	F	1971	2004	Madrid	University lecturer	Single

Source: Fieldwork in Mexico City (May-October 2005)

The empirical material of the interviews is analysed in the next sections. First of all, the article shows the similarities and differences amongst the migration processes of the two groups of skilled migrants that were found during fieldwork: TNC transferees and “migrants in the middle”. This analysis is done in the light of their different socio-demographic characteristics and their contrasting intentions of stay. Secondly, the paper focuses on work trajectories. Following the division of the skilled migrants into two groups, the article stresses that the labour mobility of those in the middle is more horizontal and less conventional than the more typical career-path mobility of TNCs transferees. Finally, the article revolves around views on Mexican labour markets. Even though critical opinions on Mexican labour culture are reported by almost all interviewees, the transnational corporation employees express clearly negative views on the lack of company ethos amongst their Mexican workmates. Younger migrants during earlier stages of their careers are more willing to accept these differences concerning work relations, because their decision to migrate is embedded in personal considerations.

Migration rationale: job promotion, adventure and beyond

Even if reasons for migrating to Mexico are diverse, and depend, to some extent, on the interviewed individuals’ characteristics (sex, age, etc.), and/or their previous professional activity in Spain, two groups of people can be clearly differentiated according to their labour market trajectories. The first group is composed of expatriates who came to Mexico under temporary well-paid jobs arrangements, some of those being entrepreneurs. For this group, migration is synonymous with job promotion, since this move generally came along with greater responsibility, more decision power, autonomy and better economic conditions (plus accommodation) in the host country. Those contacted for this research that fell under this scenario included 12 men who, upon their arrival to Mexico, were between 35 and 50 (see Table 3). Juan, who holds two masters degrees in Finance and Business Management from private Spanish universities, told us his reasons for moving to Mexico:

“I came here (Mexico City) for work since I wanted a more autonomous project, where I could develop myself professionally. And this goes hand-in-hand with leaving Spain. It has been very fulfilling.” (Juan, 32, manager in a transnational Spanish company)

It is relevant to point out that no woman was found in this category. This may be due to the fact that women and men have contrasting views on work. Generally speaking, men place a greater value upon higher labour mobility than women (plus their involvement in labour markets is generally better, especially concerning wages). Thus, when deciding to migrate, heterosexual couples tend to give preference to men’s careers. Kofman (2000) also suggests that, in the male-dominated world of financial and producer services, women are not given the chance to opt for overseas jobs, since these decisions are mainly made within male networks.

For this group, the time of residence in Mexico varies substantially, from one to twenty years, the average being five. It was found that a small portion of the transferees decided to leave the transnational corporation for which they worked when they arrived

in Mexico to set up their own businesses. Indeed, those who have resided for a longer period of time rarely think about returning to Spain in the near future. Other personal circumstances, such as marrying Mexican nationals or children born in Mexico, as well as business success are relevant in the decision to stay for longer periods. Eventually, stronger identification with Mexico (and more critical stances on Spain) is seen within the discourse of this last group. Generally speaking, however, expatriates are in Mexico for less than five years and consider their experience of working and living outside Spain to be temporary, related to the decisions of the company.

Table 3: Profile of the TNC transferees and “migrants in the middle”

	<i>TNC transferees</i>	<i>“Migrants in the middle”</i>
<i>Sex</i>	Male	Male and female
<i>Age</i>	35-50	25-35
<i>Marital status</i>	Married (co-habitation) and children	Single or with partner (no co-habitation)
<i>Education</i>	University degree	University degree
<i>Stage in career</i>	Intermediate	Early
<i>Reason for emigration</i>	TNC transfer	Various reasons
<i>Intentions of stay</i>	Temporary (maximum 5 years)	Open
<i>N</i>	12	18

Source: Fieldwork in Mexico City (May-October 2005)

As in other geographic contexts (for example, Willis and Yeoh, 2000), we can also observe that the wives of married men “accompany” their husbands on their job tracks, leaving their positions back in Spain. According to the information provided in the interviews, these women do not search for a job. If they do so, they have difficulties finding work due to legal requirements for a work permit or because the jobs that are available to them do not fulfill their expectations. Contrary to the their husbands’ careers, migration to Mexico for them represents a “break from work” and, consequently, a “return to the home”, according to the opinion of Yeoh and Willis (2005). José’s narration shows to what extent the Mexican experience has slowed down his wife’s career, making her the “holder” of family values.

“Personally, there was a very important factor, and it was that... We have a son and when in Spain my wife and I saw him one hour a day (...). Although it sounds a bit macho, I believe that children should be with their mother as much as possible, and this can be done here (...). My wife used to work for an advertising company in Barcelona. We had a very limited family life. Our child had a nanny who looked after him all day long. I don’t think this is ideal. Evidently, over there it couldn’t be done differently because that’s the way it is. Here, instead, my wife doesn’t work. She dedicates her time to our children. At the beginning it was hard for her because quitting work is hard, but now it is very fulfilling. She can dedi-

cate herself to our children. What she is doing is a sacrifice, but I think it is good for the family.” (José, 37, general director in a Spanish company)

In contrast, the second group is mainly composed of men and women under 35 years of age who came to Mexico under less formal arrangements. These Spaniards also have university studies, but, back in their home country, they had joined the labour force with temporary, poorly-paid jobs once they finished their graduate studies. In this way, working abroad gave them an opportunity for better labour conditions. Besides, they wanted to make a change in their lives and longed for new experiences and horizons. There is a particular subgroup within this group that arrived to Mexico under the umbrella of public organizations, such as international cooperation agencies, trade chambers or universities (e.g. through Spanish scholarships; see Table 3). These individuals fit the definition of migrants in the middle, as understood in both terms of socio-economic and class position in their country of origin (Clarke, 2005; Conradson and Latham, 2005b).

Their intentions to stay are generally open. They knew the date of arrival but not the time that the “adventure” would last. The following narrations exemplify this. Marta, a 29-year-old woman from Barcelona, said that her trip to Mexico marked a “turning point” in her life. She had just finished her studies in Spain, but her job was not rewarding. Under these circumstances, Marta decided to visit her brother who had been working in Mexico for two years.

“Basically, the reason was that my brother was living in Mexico. It was a turning point because I had finished my postgraduate studies and I wanted to change jobs. My only brother was living in Mexico... and I had recently broken off a relationship that had lasted many years... so it was a fresh start for me. I never imagined living in Mexico. I came to see my brother for a summer...and that summer has lasted five years.” (Marta, 29, head of cultural affairs at a Mexican university)

This interview clearly emphasizes the relevance of social networks in the decision to migrate, as well as the importance of non-professional relations and events that lead to long-term settlement. Although these interviewed Spaniards may have arrived in Mexico with no clear intentions of staying, once settled in the country, opportunities in the labour market arise as individuals weave social networks and access information about jobs (mainly through informal channels). This is in line with the Conradson and Latham (2005b) study on young migration to London. They conclude that the young migrants are relatively well-educated and come from relatively wealthy backgrounds; moreover, that their reasons for moving to the city lie in what the experience offers in personal as well as economic terms.

Upward labour trajectories

The analysis of Spanish labour trajectories clearly indicates that, with no exceptions, the interviewed Spaniards have experienced upward labour mobility in Mexico, in terms of a more skilled job, greater responsibility, wages and/or long-term (or even permanent) work contracts. For some “migrants in the middle”, this mobility is associated with a “real” incorporation into the labour market, since some interviewees only had

part-time unstable low-paid jobs back in Spain. This is especially true for young individuals who are in the early stages of their careers. For instance, Catalina expressed herself with these words:

“Finally I’ve got an eight-hour job (in Mexico). There (in Spain) I used to have several jobs to get by. Here you’re at an economic level that is not the one you had there... you live in a bubble. You’ve got a standard of living different from that previous one in Spain. There I just survived and here I have a good standard of living. *Allí sobrevivía, aquí vivo bien.*” (Catalina, 29, area manager in an international organization)

Apart from work stability, Catalina highlights her salary, which is a relevant aspect for most interviewed Spaniards. In this regard, wages for the interviewees are higher in absolute terms in Mexico and this means a more comfortable life style. Furthermore, this is not accessible for them back in their country of origin because either labour market conditions are more rigid or young professionals have less work opportunities, or for both reasons. Regarding this, Christian says:

“Here (in Mexico) you can move jobs easily. I’ve changed twice in the time I’ve spent in Mexico (six years). At Mexican universities, there are plenty of opportunities for research. I had the possibility to go back to Spain, but it was a two-year contract. What would I do afterwards?” (Christian, 38, University lecturer)

Although the Spanish university system may be private, Christian points out that the Spanish labour market is rather rigid. This opinion is shared by Clara who is employed in a publishing house, “in Spain, you get a permanent job, and you don’t let it go”. Similarly to other interviewed Spaniards, Clara arrived to Mexico through a Spanish fellowship, after finishing her MA. “I applied for this fellowship. I was interviewed, and Mexico came out as a possible destination. This suited me. I wanted to have international experience, since I studied foreign trade and economics. This was a one-year fellowship. My idea was to stay for one year and then return”. Right now, Clara, 34, is married to a Mexican citizen and has applied for the Mexican nationality.

Flexibility, wages, an improved economic position, as well as work stability are reasons quoted in all the interviews when assessing labour experiences in Mexico. This is especially true for young people who are at the early stages of their career. Working abroad implies not only the possibility of obtaining job promotion, but also – especially in the case of the younger Spaniards – an opportunity to develop themselves professionally, greater labour stability and better wages.

On the other hand, TNC employees who are at intermediate stages of their careers also experienced upward labour mobility, especially in terms of more responsibility and wages. This vertical career-path mobility is accomplished within the company’s labour market, as described in Salt (1988) or Beaverstock (1991). This was the case of Lluís. He used to work in an intermediate position in Barcelona, but he came to Mexico as a manager for a transnational corporation. In his own words, “I am my own boss. I am number one in the company. I do what I think is right”.

Finally, upward mobility in Mexico does not relate exclusively to migrants' educational or occupational endowments, but also to non-economic considerations, such as the extensive use of social networks. For instance, Marta, 32, told us in the interview that she found her previous job as a manager of one of the most important Mexico City festivals at a party ("I met the director of the Festival at a party. We were dancing, and he asked me if I spoke English. Then he offered me the job as the coordinator of the international programme of the festival. Here things are easy. No doubt about that"). Quite similarly, Christian said that his current University job was offered at an informal dinner after a conference. These "coincidences" (or "being in the right place at the right time", in the words of Victor, 45, businessman) stress the importance of social networks in helping find jobs. Certainly, a party to which a top manager of the Mexico City administration attends or an "informal" dinner after an academic conference are restricted milieus. These testimonies also reveal highly informal aspects of the Mexican labour market in which top managers may offer jobs freely to people whom they feel are suitable. However, this is not to say that all the opinions on Mexico's labour market are equally positive, since comments on Mexico's labour culture are also negative or in some cases very negative.

Values in conflict, contrasting labour cultures

Maybe because their migration is "channelled" through the company's headquarters, the expatriates are very critical about Mexico's labour culture. This is the case of Joan who heads up the customs office of a transnational company. Apart from coordinating the office, he is in charge of looking for new clients ("a hard task", according to Joan). In his own words:

"I'm much better off here if you ask about my salary. However, the labour conditions are much worse than in Spain, more precarious. There is no business reliability. You cannot trust people. For me, it is rather stressful to do my job, especially because I recently arrived in Mexico and I do not understand the Mexican labour culture very well." (Joan, 28, Managing Director of the Mexican trade office of a Belgian company)

Similarly, Salvador, General Director of a Mexican office of a Spanish transnational, says that "we always desire someone who understands us". With these words, this manager captures the reasons for which this company prefers a non-Mexican top manager. Salvador explains this is because "many companies have had bad experiences with Mexican general directors who took advantage of their position within the company, to do other type of "business" (...). The rule is to hire Spanish general directors for Spanish companies' (Salvador, 37, Mexico's General Director of a Spanish company). Likewise, Oriol, who decided to make a move in his career within the French transnational where he has been employed for almost 20 years, also agrees on the different work standards between Mexico and Spain.

"Relations at work are very different in Mexico [compared to Spain] [...] People work in a different way, and you cannot rely on them. Their commitment with the enterprise ethos is very low. And most people are short-sighted. But when you get

it, that is it. You ask something and the reply is always ‘right away’ [*ahorita mismo*]. But one week goes by and nothing has changed, and when you confront them their answer is ‘I’m so sorry. I’ll do it right now’. And again one more week goes by without the job getting done... And they are never on time, nobody, workmates, friends.” (Oriol, 45, Head of Human Resources in a French company)

Later during his interview, Oriol seemed to have more nuanced opinions, since he also related that transnational companies and their employees are similar everywhere. In this sense, the lack of enterprise ethos does not apply for the highly-skilled Mexicans who have obtained their degrees mainly in private universities or in the USA, and their performance at work is satisfactory. Those holding intermediate positions, probably because of their relatively low wages, are less motivated employees though.

Yet all these quotes stress that the workplace is actually a “contact zone” (Yeoh and Willis, 2005b), or even “an area of confrontation”, revealing that everyday encounters and everyday experiences are the battleground where sameness and difference are negotiated. Perhaps because of these negative opinions regarding the Mexican labour culture, most of the expatriates would prefer their stay to be temporary. In this regard, the interviewees reckon that a long stay in Mexico may be negative for their careers in future. As Manel said, 32, Director of a Mexican company, “If you stay for a very long period, your CV becomes more Mexican, and this is not good”.

Even if critical opinions about Mexican labour culture are also found amongst the “migrants in the middle”, their views on work are not isolated from general considerations in reference to living in Mexico, which is generally seen in positive tones. They also value a more relaxed work environment and appreciate the chance to improve their careers in Mexico. As an example:

“I like my job in Mexico. I have to deal with people who don’t seem interested in their jobs. But I try to take it easy. I’ve learned to relax and let things flow. Otherwise, I’d have gone crazy (...) The work atmosphere is nice and I occasionally see my workmates for a drink. It’s fine by me.” (Unai, 29, NGO manager)

Conclusions

From a qualitative perspective, the analysis of Spanish qualified migration to Mexico shows the diversity of experiences, perceptions and opinions in as far as work and the labour field in Mexico City is concerned. The interviewees clearly state that they have multiple motivations to work in Mexico, although two fundamental reasons may be outlined: (i) better labour prospects, including higher wages, job promotion and/or labour stability; and (ii) the challenge of living in a foreign country with all its implications.

In addition, the personal situation of each individual (married, single, etc.) eases or, on the contrary, hampers the migration processes. Of all these personal circumstances, we should take note that no woman was found amongst the transnational transferees or the entrepreneurs. In fact, all men working for transnational companies arrived “accompanied” by their wives (and children in some cases). In contrast, the majority of the wo-

men interviewed, who had decided to migrate in an autonomous way, were single at that moment. Indeed it seems that companies do not take into account the possibility of transferring women to complicated destinations, such as Mexico City. Once in Mexico, the interruption in their careers and the “return to the home” are, in some cases, positively appraised by their husbands, as it allows them a greater amount of spare time (for instance, for child-rearing or leisure activities).

As for their intentions of stay, many interviewees intended their migratory experience to be a well-defined, clearly delimited, perhaps temporary stage of their lives. Afterwards, they acknowledge that Mexico offers satisfactory labour opportunities, which are hard to find in their country of origin. Nevertheless, the decision whether to remain does not revolve only around labour opportunities, but also includes (negative) views on Mexican labour culture.

Regarding their careers, all those interviewed experienced upward labour (and social) mobility. The evidence demonstrates two ways to enhance labour mobility in Mexico, depending on the type of migrant: (i) the TNC transferees who experience upward labour mobility within the company due to their work-related abilities and social networks; (ii) for those migrants in the middle, mobility is understood in both labour and social terms, by virtue of the status that migration affords, and also because of their national origin. This mobility is more “horizontal” and less conventional than the vertical career-path mobility of TNC transferees. In this regard, the characteristics of the Spanish labour market, and specifically for the young (only 40% of the Spanish university degree holders access a job related to their studies; Jiménez Barca, 2005), might push the more “audacious” to look for labour opportunities abroad.

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Španjolski stručnjaci u Ciudad de México: priče o radu i tržištu rada

SAŽETAK

U radu se istražuju radna iskustva skupine kvalificiranih španjolskih migranata u Ciudad de México uporabom kvalitativnih podataka. Među intervjuiranim Španjolcima identificiraju se dva tipa migranata: premještenici unutar TNC-a (transnacionalnih korporacija) i »migranti u sredini« (»oni koji nisu ni niskokvalificirani ni visokokvalificirani migranti«; Conradson i Latham, 2005a). To donekle dovodi u pitanje pretpostavke o kvalificiranim radnicima pokazujući mnogostruke radne putanje te iskustva visokokvalificiranih i obrazovanih radnika. U radu se također naglašava da je radna mobilnost »migranata u sredini« više vodoravna i manje konvencionalna od mobilnosti kvalificiranih premještenika unutar TNC-a. Zaključuje se i da radna mobilnost nije povezana samo sa stupnjem obrazovanja ili radom na meksičkim tržištima rada nego i s neekonomskim razlozima (primjerice široka uporaba društvenih mreža). Odnosi na radnome mjestu posebice su zanimljivi za ovo istraživanje jer predstavljaju »kontaktnu zonu« gdje se oko »razlika« stalno sukobljava i pregovara (Yeoh i Willis, 2005b). Za intervjuirane Španjolce odnosi na radnome mjestu bitno se (i neočekivano) razlikuju od onih u njihovoj domovini. To uzrokuje napetost i probleme, koji mogu utjecati na njihove namjere da ostanu u Meksiku.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: kvalificirana migracija, tržište rada, radna putanja, Ciudad de México, Španjolska

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Profesionales españoles en la ciudad de México: narrativas sobre el mundo laboral y el mercado de trabajo

RESUMEN

A partir del análisis de información cualitativa, este artículo estudia las experiencias laborales de un grupo de migrantes españoles calificados en la ciudad de México. El artículo identifica dos tipos de migrantes entre los entrevistados: personal transferido en el ámbito de corporaciones transnacionales y “migrantes en el medio” (“aquéllos que no son migrantes de baja calificación, pero tampoco altamente calificados”; Conradson y Latham, 2005a). De esta manera, al mostrar múltiples trayectorias laborales y experiencias de trabajadores con altos niveles de educación, se cuestionan algunos supuestos dominantes en la literatura sobre migración calificada. Así, el artículo subraya que la movilidad laboral de los “migrantes en el medio” es más horizontal y menos convencional que la del personal calificado de las transnacionales. También se plantea que la movilidad laboral ascendente no sólo es resultado del nivel educativo del migrante o de su desempeño en el mercado laboral mexicano, sino que existen otras razones no económicas (por ejemplo, el uso extensivo de las redes sociales). De especial interés para este estudio resultan las relaciones en el lugar de trabajo, ya que representan “zonas de contacto”, donde la “diferencia” se confronta y se negocia de forma permanente (Yeoh y Willis, 2005b). Para los españoles entrevistados, las relaciones en el lugar de trabajo son, en muchos casos de forma no esperada, muy diferentes con respecto a España, lo cual provoca tensión y problemas que pueden afectar las intenciones de permanencia de los entrevistados en México en el futuro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: migración calificada, mercados de trabajo, trayectorias laborales, ciudad de México, España

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