Looking back to go forward: a comparative engagement with International Retirement Migration in the Global South

Caroline Oliver, University College London

Abstract

Understanding International Retirement Migration (IRM) in the Global South requires reconciliation with the uneven experiences of the first wave of intra-European IRM. As the process of IRM and scholarship has extended further around the globe, this chapter revisits fieldwork in the Costa del Sol area of Spain conducted with retirement migrants from 1999-2014 by applying insights from recent, critical scholarship in the Global South. Drawing out similarities between practices 'then and there' with other contemporary research in the Global South 'now and elsewhere', I show IRM has specific manifestations and diverse effects, but shares some similarities. Reciprocal learning from IRM in all its guises forces a stronger reckoning with how it generates economic dependence on foreign investment, and bears tacit cultural and psychosocial impacts, through the establishment of distant and unequal sociabilities. The chapter considers emerging possibilities for alternative futures and arenas for research.

Key words: retirement migration, Spain, financial crash, economic dependency, sociabilities.

Introduction

In the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017:174) asks, 'What if Europe, rather than being the solution to the problems of the world, were itself the problem?' Should Europe rely on its own experience alone, or could understanding of its issues benefit from the experience of a much wider world? This chapter considers those questions in arguing for an accumulative approach to International Retirement Migration (IRM), where the uneven experiences of the first wave of intra-European IRM might be better understood by applying understandings of contemporary IRM processes in the Global South. Such an exercise helps clarify to what extent iterations of IRM in the Global South are a fundamentally different process to their counterparts in Europe and also illustrate new insights into old sites. The chapter revisits my own writing on IRM in Spain (based on ethnographic research periodically between 1999 and 2014) through the lens of developing scholarship on IRM in the Global South. The analysis is situated in an account of IRM in the Costa del Sol, an area transformed from fishing and agricultural villages in the 1960s to a hub of international and residential tourism. Inspired by the perspective of comparative urbanism to begin the conversation, my analysis is held in dialogue with findings from the non-European world to generate reciprocal learning and indicate areas of future consideration in the field.

Positionality: IRM scholarship and comparative learning

Early work in the field of IRM focussed mainly on the migration of older people from Northern and Central European countries to the Mediterranean region. Certainly in the late 1990s when I began my doctoral work, IRM to Spain was a proliferating mobility form within Europe, representing a relatively unresearched subject (King, Warnes & Williams 2000, O'Reilly 2000). IRM was increasing due to the growth of the 'grey pound', cheaper international travel and, by then, several decades of mass tourism in the Mediterranean. To some extent, it represented an extension of the process of domestic retirement mobility, whereby from the post-war years, older people chose to retire in other locations in their own countries, attracted by their amenities (e.g. the South coast in England, or retirement communities in Florida or Arizona in the United States). The extension of this to migration abroad, particularly within Europe, was facilitated by the clear economic benefits of doing so in an era of globalization, especially since property was more affordable. Therefore from the outset, the growth of IRM was tied strongly to the international real estate market.

Yet, as scholars have demonstrated, the motivations for IRM are not purely economic. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) identified that this form of migration is driven primarily by lifestyle factors, where migration was not just about gaining better value but is also about seeking a better way of life. My own work showed that for retired people moving to Southern Spain, IRM enabled a pursuit of specific cultural imaginaries of ageing (Oliver 2008). Moving abroad helped to furnish identity transitions of retiring workers in late capitalist society, whereby mobility was an important contributor to retirees' life projects. Migration was understood as facilitating an escape from perceived less satisfactory approaches to ageing in the homeland and achieving a better lifestyle. The process opened up a repertoire of imagined places and 'others' (other British people around or in the homeland, or local Spanish people) for articulating their ageing identities (ibid.).

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed changes in both IRM as an object of study as well as in the scholarly tools used to interpret those processes. On the one hand, IRM has grown and diffused globally within a changing neoliberal and globalizing economy. New overseas markets have been developing in South East Asia, Central America, and Africa, often expanding from existing touristic or professional mobility forms and evidencing a global interconnectedness of ageing (Benson 2013, Benson and O'Reilly 2009, Botterill 2017, Hayes 2018, Schweppe this volume). Often context rich, the studies of IRM in the Global South have identified distinctive and place-specific features of the process. Yet these developments have occurred within shifts in broader scholarship of the social sciences, where there has also been a re-evaluation of the problematic locus of theory production as within Euro-American contexts. For example, Ananya Roy (2009, p. 820) urges that to overcome the

dominance of Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge, 'the centre of theory-making must move to the global South'.

In this chapter, I revisit my own research site by drawing inspiration from urban scholars' consideration of the global diffusion of common processes (such as gentrification) through comparative perspectives. According to Harris (2008), comparative urbanism entails a recognition of both the global spread of processes, but also the ways in which such processes are affected by the geographically and historically specific manifestations and diverse effects of them, as influenced by countries' unique cultural histories, social hierarchies and economic bases through which those processes manifest. As Harris (2008) argues, the approach helps interpret additional 'waves' of a process when considering the 'same' process within locations in the global South (in his case, gentrification). Applying this perspective to IRM, I revisit earlier research and fieldwork conducted in Spain in the light of scholarship of IRM in the global South. This helps in recognizing common aspects, for example by understanding IRM as an intensified and expanded set of processes with similar dynamics that were already apparent within Europe some time ago. Yet it also avoids the assumption that it is a simple replication and projection out from 'heartlands' in the Global North, indicating instead how similar processes still differ and require our frameworks to be sensitive to the contexts in which those processes occur (ibid.)

In engaging in such reflection, we can also learn from sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017). He maintains that in moving beyond Eurocentric frames, two prerequisites for learning from the South are needed; the first being to clarify 'what kind of South or Souths are to be engaged in the conversation' (2017, p. 175). In this regard, he urges for further consideration of the relations of the geographically peripheral South inside Europe, referring to relations with Greece, Portugal, Spain etc. (ibid.) The second step is to recognise that the future is non-European, but this requires Europe coming to terms with its past. It entails a fuller reckoning with awareness that although historical colonialism has ended, neo-colonialism has continued new forms of unequal relationships – from military intervention to land grabbing to development policies. Part of the exercise of learning from the South therefore involves more scrutiny of the global operations of European enterprise.

Bringing all of the above together, I use Santos' two arguments in reverse order. First, I revisit IRM in Spain, by drawing on scholarship on IRM in the Global South which more fully questions the economic ramifications of reliance on foreign consumption of real estate and services involved in the process. Used overtly as a development strategy in the Global South (Toyota and Thang 2017) within earlier incarnations of IRM in the Southern fringes of Europe, regional economies have nevertheless also been structured to have a high degree of dependency on foreign investment, an issue that has

not fully been recognised in the existing scholarship. Especially in the wake of the devastating impact of the 2008 global financial crisis in Southern European countries, such awareness needs to be more fully embedded in our scholarship. The second – and related theme – considers the implications of these dependency patterns in terms of hierarchical relationships. Here, I consider how economic dependency can also be related to the cultural imaginings of the other that have been identified as key to (especially age-based) self-conceptions of lifestyle and retiree migrants in general. This cultural distance is evidenced too in counter-hegemonic responses from within receiving societies to retired populations from overseas (as I discuss later in this chapter and see Botterill 2017, Hayes 2018). I argue that both themes are important in structuring the subtle unequal relations in IRM sites, and are integral to the understanding of the cultural referents available in such practices to inform a particular vision of mobility within IRM. Ultimately too, they institute both subtle and not so subtle practices of superiority and exploitation as integral to IRM.

Drawing out similarities between practices 'then and there' with research on IRM in the Global South 'now and elsewhere', the chapter shows therefore how similar processes occur, with place-based inflections. Through building reciprocal learning from those experiences, we may be able to imagine alternative and more equitable forms of IRM, as I turn to in the third section of the chapter where I explore future potential responses and research possibilities.

Inequalities: economic dependence

> Neoliberal policies are the driving force of urban inequalities damaging cities in the Global North, and yet global and local economists constantly promote these same policies as the best way to achieve economic growth in other parts of the world (Zaban 2020, p. 3122).

Driving down the motorway through the Eastern area of the Costa del Sol in the evening, one is greeted by glistening lights and the impression of a bustling, success story of coastal tourism. Yet Andalucía, the broader autonomous region of Spain in which it is located remains one of the poorest in Spain. Following the 2008 global financial crisis it had one of the highest percentages of the population living in severe material poverty in all Spanish regions (Alvarez-Galvez 2019). Key to the region's development has been an overwhelming reliance on the real estate and tourism sectors for income, entailing a dependence on 'wealthy foreign visitors: tourists and lifestyle migrants' (Jover and Díaz-Parra 2020, p. 3045). According to Navarro-Jurado et al. (2019, p. 1792) the Costa del Sol is 'a prime example of an urban growth machine in a semi-peripheral region of late capitalism'.

The region's reliance on foreign permanent and seasonal visitors can be understood as similar in motivation to the broader patterns exhibited today in IRM worldwide. Given that IRM is, unlike many other migration flows, characterised by consumption rather than production (Oliver 2011)

many governments are keen to capitalise on foreign investor's purchasing power, in both real estate and commodities associated with the process. Recent scholarship on IRM in the Global South has shown that particularly in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, IRM is seen as a key aspect of an economic development strategy (Toyota and Xiang 2012). It exhibits somewhat specific characteristics in that in many of these other locations, the state itself becomes an entrepreneur for elder care and there is a more conspicuous retirement industry led by business operations concerned with the relocation of foreign retirees (Toyota and Thang 2017). Janoschka (2009) notes how within Latin America for eaxmple, much of the IRM market is managed by banks and global investment pools. Thus national governments of receiving countries and 'big players' of the real estate market lure retiree migrants as high value consumers to marketed developments (ibid.). Welcomed explicitly or not by policies and practices of governments and real estate markets in the global South, lifestyle migrants are able to capitalize on a 'relative affluence' of their position in a global economic hierarchy (Benson & O'Reilly 2009, Hayes 2018). The welcome they receive by governments and business is emblematic of the double standards applied to migration from wealthier countries. Special visa categories (e.g. see Hayes 2018) and overlooking of misdemeanors on tourist visa are just two examples of how they are favorably treated as Bauman's 'tourists' rather than 'vagabonds' in global mobility regimes (Oliver 2011).

Understanding IRM in these terms, I revisit IRM in Spain, perhaps hitherto viewed as the successful forerunner to other models, to understand the longer-term experience of this economic model. During my earlier periods of fieldwork (in the late 1990s and early 2000s) I witnessed an atmosphere of growth fuelled by rapidly expanding land and housing prices gathering pace. At this time, there was strong demand in the global economy for real estate from overseas tourists and residential tourists, which was supported by regional governments' incentivization of foreign home purchasing (Holleran 2017). During this period, prior to the 2008 global financial crisis, the Spanish economy was regarded as one of the most successful in Europe, narrated with the slogan '¡España va bien!' – 'Spain's doing well' (Fernández Ordóñez 2014). The 'Spanish miracle' saw unprecedented growth, increase in employment and in families' wealth, as well as a reduced public deficit (López and Rodríguez 2011, 5). The optimism was evident in the village in which I conducted fieldwork, which underwent a rapid transformation. A new motorway was built, aided by European regional development funds and there was heavy investment in construction of new housing and commercial properties linked to tourism. At the entrance to the village, a plush hotel and new commercial centre was built, evidence of the wider construction boom and investment in the region. Confidence was palpable among Spanish residents where I was conducting research, who benefited from selling plots of inherited land for impressive profits and refurbishing their old *cortijos* (farmhouses) for

rental or sale. In reality, the model depended on a huge tourism and construction bubble, with the speculative model of capitalism fuelled by aggressive borrowing, encouraged by the EU's accommodating monetary policy (López and Rodríguez 2011, pp. 5–9).

The dependence on mass tourism and construction, including foreign investment, however had been already instigated by a 'development at all costs' strategy instigated by the Franco dictatorship during the late 1950s (ibid.). Indeed, until the late 1960s the town where I conducted fieldwork in the Axarquía region was a small village. It was inhabited by around 5,000 people and dependent on fishing and agriculture. In 1959, local youths uncovered a cave system of high archaeological value, drawing national interest and putting the town on the tourist map. As tourism grew, the population has more than quadrupled, and this includes many foreign residents. The first foreign community was established by a Canadian man, Ken Brabant, who purchased 35,000 square metres of olive groves to build the area's first urbanization, attracting Canadians, Americans and snowbirds from other nationalities to the town (Bardsley 2011). His company became the biggest employer in town, in 1973 employing around 500 local people. The same company, later taken over by the minority shareholders, completed around 1500 houses. These urbanizations were run according to Spanish law by a 'community' executive committee of residents. This has led to a high degree of self-organizing among foreign residents, and the community now includes many retirees living there permanently who provide activities such as lecture, music, film clubs, a library, bridge etc. As I explore later, such urbanizations set up a particular residential arrangement and expected patterns of sociability, including a 'tight-knit' foreign community living both geographically and socially apart.

In Spain, the success of tourism and construction gathered speed and in 2002-2007 there were more visas granted for construction in Spain than in France and Germany combined (Miralles i Garcia 2011). However the 2007-2008 global economic crisis saw the bubble burst; supply exceeded demand and many new units in mid-construction were left unsold (see also O'Reilly 2017). In 2012 and 2013, the units of the commercial centre in my fieldwork village lay empty, while within the wider region, whole urbanizations were left abandoned mid-build. It was estimated that by the end of 2010, in Spain there were still between 800,000 and 1.5 million new houses for sale, as well as land prepared for development but left uncompleted (ibid.) This rendered companies incapable of paying back loans, while access to additional sources of capital dried up. In addition, residential tourism markets became subject to complaints about political corruption following illegal urbanization of greenbelt lands, where local governments had permitted change of uses from rural land to developable urban land (ibid.)

In the aftermath of the crash, to some degree the same strategy is being repeated. As in IRM in the Global South, the real estate sector looks to foreign buyers and investment as a means of recouping losses. Since 2011, the region has experienced even greater foreign investment in construction and real estate, with construction of new developments seen as a solution to unemployment; in 2016, 15.4% of house purchase transactions were from foreign buyers (Jover and Díaz-Parra 2020). Research suggests that investment is spreading inland too, affecting cities like Seville (ibid.). Having undergone already the shock of the financial crash, the region is also subject to the unfolding impacts of Brexit, which changes the status of British populations from European mobile citizens to third country nationals. It has important implications for overwintering snowbirds or second homeowners, who now find that they can only stay in Spain temporarily. By 2019, the number of intra-European migrants was 25% lower than it was in 2011, and an enormous 37% decline of British migrants, indicating less demand for Spanish real estate (Stücklin 2019). This compounded reductions in mobility already seen as a result of the economic crash itself (Huete, Mantecón & Estévez, 2013).

Research shows the negative impacts of strategies of relying on foreign investment on local residents in the long term, such as pricing out local actors (Janoschka 2009) and the encouragement of precarious employment scenarios (Navarro-Jurado et. al. 2019). Others indicate local exclusion especially from sites of historical value (e.g. see Jover and Díaz-Parra (2020) on gentrification in Seville, or Navarro-Jurado et. al. (2019) on touristification and gentrification in Málaga historic centre). Considering such situations comparatively, it is clear to see some echoes of the Spanish strategy within IRM developments in the Global South. In Thailand, for example, Toyota and Thang (2017) note that foreign retirees have been seen as the solution to an oversupply of high-end housing developments, where real estate companies sought to recoup some of their losses in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crash. Likewise, within the Costa del Sol, the understanding of tourist and second home sales as a solution in the Costa del Sol, though ostensibly economically profitable, did not 'reflect a sustainable development plan or take into account the environmental and social impact' (Navarro-Jurado et al. 2019, p.1788). Moreover, the reliance on tourism led growth promoted precarious working that did little to address the unemployment affecting young people in the region. I saw this first-hand as in 2012, the Spanish family with whom I had lodged during my previous fieldwork became dependent only on seasonal rental income from their *cortijo* (farmhouse) and short-term, low value contracts for cleaning swimming pools.

In the next section, I consider some of the further ramifications of these observations. What are the implications of the model of economic dependence on foreigners through IRM for social relations, and what overall learning about IRM can be gained by comparing with countries undergoing similar,

yet different processes in their own contexts? My analysis highlights the subtle and symbolically laden implications of the economic dependency on foreign buyers that tourism, IRM and the related real estate sector depend.

Cultural and psychosocial ramifications: what South are we talking about?

Scholarship of IRM in the Global South has made much more explicit the geometries of power shaping IRM, demonstrating how such flows are supported by and reproduce privilege and global power inequalities (Benson 2013, Croucher 2009). Within this scholarship, there has been something of a clarion call for more overt consideration of the broader frameworks within which individual movements occur. This entails not only awareness of the ways in which foreign investment-oriented development disadvantages local residents, but consideration of the impacts of the structural conditions, and particularly the specific, contextual histories and postcolonial legacies through which lifestyle movement occurs. It entails attention to how 'imaginings of destination and understandings of migration contain colonial traces' (Benson 2013, p. 316) and how these traces, or sediments of long established historical and geopolitical arrangements continue to inform contemporary relationships (O'Reilly 2017).

Within IRM in the Global South, there are differences in the power relationships evident in earlier incarnations within Europe, especially since the relatively privileged financial situation and enhanced purchasing power noted as integral to the process are exacerbated by the dynamics of race, ethnicity, nationality and at times, gender. The historical relative power of countries like the USA or United Kingdom and interpretation of whiteness in non-Western contexts mean migrants in the Global South are immediately received into higher echelons of society, regardless of their pre-migration status in sending countries (Benson 2013, Botterill 2017). There are also important gendered and sexualised dimensions of whiteness as a marker of status within IRM in the Global South. Some white men from affluent countries in the Global North seek intimate relationships with women from less well-off, low-income countries based on a transactional exchange of longer-term care and financial security for local women (Botterill 2017, Jaisuekun and Sunanta 2016). Fechter's (2016) research indicates that this is not the case for women; her work on female mobile professionals from Europe and North America shows how they inhabit rather an uncomfortable visibility as 'white bodies' in an Asian environment.

This more overt recognition of (racialised) privilege from scholarship of IRM and lifestyle migration (LM) in the Global South is useful however for revisiting IRM in the Global North. This is especially relevant as Santos (2017) calls attention to the subtle 'underground' (and at times overground) colonial prejudices directed from the core to southern European countries of Greece, Portugal and

Spain. He argues that the economic crisis reawakened colonial dynamics operating structurally within Europe, whereby the fault of the crash was located within negative characteristics of the Portuguese, Spanish and Greek as lazy, unproductive and corrupt. Yet, he points out, such dynamics of privilege have a longer historical dimension:

> The truth is that there have always been two Europes and often two Europes inside each country (Catalonia and Castile in Spain, northern and Southern Italy, etc.) This duality is more entrenched in European culture than we might think, which may explain some of the difficulties in addressing the current financial crisis. What on the surface seems to be addressing a financial or economic problem is, at a deeper level, also a cultural and socio-psychological problem (Santos 2017, p. 176).

This is relevant to understanding the cultural dynamics of IRM in Spain. First, as Holleran's (2017) analysis of experiences of residential tourism in Spain before and after 2008 shows, it is very easy for ostensibly 'equal' relational dynamics to revert to those dualistic frameworks of Northern Europeans vs Southern Europeans. Holleran shows indeed that while many semi-permanent residents espoused ideals of pan-European cosmopolitanism, these were shed quickly following the debt crisis, revealing instead an 'us vs them' mentality. Experiencing massive reductions in loss in property values, extensive legal battles and conflict with local governments, Holleran (2017, p. 218) demonstrates that residential tourists, 'often took issue with the popular Spanish crisis narrative of transnational contagion of problematic banking practices and focused their criticism on cultural shortcomings, particularly a 'Mediterranean mentality' towards work, probity and thrift'.

Holleran's (2017) example shows therefore how unequal cultural dynamics are not reserved for later waves of IRM but continue to operate structurally and often not far from the surface within first waves of IRM. On the level of individual migrants, this unequal relationship may not be ostensible. Scholars of IRM and LM have demonstrated for example how migrants' privilege is relative and in reality, some exist in precarious financial situations (O'Reilly 2007). Therefore, despite a broader structural privilege embodied in their freedom to move and obtain benefit from cheaper property and commodities, some are, in individual cases, also structurally marginalised. Botterill (2017) for example explores how some ageing British emigrants in Thailand have struggled with pensions frozen at the rate when they left, and face limited or no affordable state services for health care. Moreover few individuals retiring abroad would conceive themselves in overtly privileged terms, especially as some self-consciously rebuff stereotypes of themselves as the colonial dominators (Oliver 2008). When IRM is to destination countries with developed economies (like Spain) such an assertion might also be considered regressive.

Nevertheless, if one scratches beneath the surface, research demonstrates there are traces of privileged attitudes evident within many IRM encounters in the Global North. On one hand, this is a self-conception demonstrated through the abundant use of the term 'expat' or expatriate rather than immigrant within the communities of retirement migrants (and equally as 'tourist' rather than immigrant within Spanish ones, as observed by Huete & Mantecón 2012). The 'expatriate' terminology is common parlance among retirees, and in local newspapers and magazines. It is somewhat explained by the fact that many come to IRM from global mobile professional careers, where relations with locals were often based on more ostensible privilege. Yet migrants' imaginaries of locals also commonly demonstrate a continued projection of orientalist traits and 'otherness' upon their hosts (referring to Edward Said's (1978) work on 'Orientalism' which showed how scholarship on the Middle East projected stereotypes and 'otherness' on the Islamic world). For example, early experiences of foreign settlement in the areas from the 1960s depicted migrants as 'pioneers' entering into the relatively undeveloped 'simple' areas (Oliver 2008, p. 51). Elizabeth, the first migrant to live in my fieldwork site lived in one of the most desirable historical properties. Her status in the village at that time was high; she was addressed with the prefix 'Doña' to indicate privilege, a status also included in her niche stone in the cemetery after her death. The experiences of foreign developers of the first urbanization project also project a timeless temporality upon the area, describing it in a book of the process as a 'sleepy little town' before the *extranjeros* (foreigners) arrived. This sits in contrast to a portrayal of the 'modern' character of these newcomers *inter alia* as 'the young visionary' and 'inventive entrepreneur' (Bardsley 2011, p. 2).

Historical precedents for such relationships also arise through the long-standing British presence in Spain that existed prior to tourism. Britain had a significant industrial presence in Spain, for example in their ownership and development of the Rio Tinto mines in Andalucía in the late nineteenth century, their role in developing transport networks for agricultural exports as well as their military presence in Gibraltar. Spain was a port of call for Northern Europeans on the Grand Tour, and notions of 'the Spanish character' influenced writers such as Laurie Lee. Santos points out that historically, stereotyped assumptions about the 'character' of people from Southern European countries developed in these early travel narratives established during the Grand Tour. He (2017, 177) explains:

> What is striking about these narratives is that they ascribe to the Portuguese and Spanish exactly the same features that the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers ascribed to the primitive and savage people of the colonies. Such features ranged from precarious living conditions to laziness and lasciviousness, from violence to friendliness, from disregard to cleanliness to ignorance, from superstition to irrationality.

Narratives of early British settlers in Spain influenced later cohorts, and even among those moving to very modern tourist apartment blocks, there remains expressions of strong individualistic attitudes of newcomers as 'pioneers' and fascinated by the culture of 'the other', consumed through gaining knowledge about Mediterranean lifestyle, culture, history and food. These accounts resonate with features identified by Hayes (2020) within the self-conceptions of North American migrants to Ecuador, whose protagonists understood themselves as 'adventurers' in an unfamiliar culture and land. At times, within my own research in Spain, explicit nationalist tropes of superiority were employed, which pitted a putative Spanish relaxed and laidback attitude (*mañana – tomorrow*) against a more productivity driven go-getter Northern European image (Oliver 2008). Although in a post working phase time of life the relative advantages of such characteristics were redrawn, to support migrants' step away from a capitalist rat race, it nevertheless had patronising tones. At other times, there were explicit culturally racist elements evident, where for example one woman spent a long time in an interview explaining to me how she suspected her Spanish cleaner was a thief.

Even where explicit colonial and superior perspectives are rejected, research nonetheless shows that there is often a large social and linguistic distance between host and receiving societies within IRM relationships. For example, among British people in Spain, it was commonplace to defend against 'expat' or negative nationalist stereotypes (e.g. as 'Brits abroad) by considering themselves as cosmopolitan 'guests' in Spain (Oliver 2008). Impressions of the other were framed within a framework of cultural fascination, such as in the historical, harmonic cohabitation of the three religions of the book (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) in the region during the Al Andalus period. Nevertheless, migrants' claims of their cosmopolitan orientation is made towards the British residents' own national communities, and is shown in Oliver and O'Reilly's (2010) analysis as a device that reproduces class distinctions among themselves. In other words, presenting oneself as integrated and having knowledge of the area through history and tradition was a means of accruing symbolic and cultural capital among the British. This meant local places and people became something of an object of study to furnish their own identity claims, cementing Spaniards' distance as a cultural 'other' (Oliver 2008, pp. 144-149). This is compounded by the practical manifestations of social and cultural distance too in the rather limited engagement with state services. For example, Calzada (2018) shows that many British people use Spanish health and social care only 'as a last resort', preferring to fall back on their own networks or voluntary associations (Oliver 2017).

Yet the distance between foreign and local populations is also supported from within receiving societies. Studies in IRM in the Global South show for example that various counter-hegemonic monikers are given by receiving country populations to foreigners to keep them at arms-length and

show them as outside local norms. For example, the labels 'gringos' in Latin America, or 'farang' in Thailand are used to denote a person of European ancestry and associated with whiteness (see Hayes 2018 and Botterill 2017). Within Spain too, the term *'extranjero'* (foreigner) is used, but also a more pejorative term of *'guiri'* is given to denote an outsider from non-native Spanish speaking backgrounds, who is subject to ridicule.

Moving on: 'degrowth' and intercultural encounter in IRM

The picture portrayed thus far is a rather familiar read. Revisiting IRM in Spain through a comparative lens highlights that it is a process commonly associated with economic dependency, structural privilege and social distance. There are obviously positive aspects of the process, evident in the economic benefits for receiving societies arising from foreign residents' consumption, payment of taxes, employment of people, as well as pride associated with cultural heritage, and the obvious benefits in health and wellbeing to migrants themselves. Yet a comparative reading shows that inequalities are cemented deeply in the process. At the same time, I would like to warn against a too overly deterministic approach of IRM solely in those terms. I employ this final section to suggest some indications of how IRM might transcend these inherited relationships and structures, moving beyond its consumerist foundations and disrupting inequalities and cultural distance. I identify two areas of further investigation: one on 'degrowth' movements, identified in Spanish scholarship on tourism in the Costa del Sol and one on intercultural encounters (using some unpublished examples from my own research and see also Oliver 2008, 50-54).

The first promising theme is the existence and growth of social movements premised upon a notion of 'degrowth' in the region. The notion of degrowth involves a paradigm shift where, as Navarro-Jurado et al. (2019, p. 1790, citing Hall (2009)) points out, the central values are 'quality of life instead of the quantity of consumption [...] satisfying basic human needs, fairness, a participatory democracy, respect for human rights, a sense of community and coexistence, the reduction of the dependence on economic activity and an increase in free time'. Developing from within a Southern peripheral perspective of local Spaniards mobilising against large scale foreign capitalist investment (such as Qatari-owned businesses building marina complexes and skycrapers in Málaga) this may be a key area where alliances can be forged with foreign residents who are in pursuit of 'the good life'.

As I have shown, retirement migrants themselves are implicated in the growth process, but many are (perhaps somewhat ironically) concerned about the impacts of unbridled development on the 'paradise' around, especially in light of obvious environmental shocks, such as devastating floods in Southern Spain in recent years. Motivations to live in Spain are, for some, driven for some by a somewhat nostalgic yearning for community, and so foreign residents can find themselves dismayed

at the change and development they witness around them. For example, in an early publication (Oliver 2002) I referred to Ed, a painter who had taken refuge from a village in the South East of Britain that he described as full of commuters and estate agents, but who then became disappointed at the extent of subsequent development. He established a group known as the neighbours (*Vecinos*) to preserve 'the traditional values of the community, the customs, the tradition, the style, the architecture and the underlying conflict with the need for change' (Oliver 2002, p.175). The protests to the *ayuntamiento* (local government) were foreigner-led, but nevertheless meetings were attended well by both Spanish and foreign residents in equal measure, pointing to a possible coalescing of interests in addressing some of the excesses of (residential) tourism growth.

This points to a second area of potential disruption to existing arrangements identified in the previous sections, by considering the transformative potential of intercultural encounters between distant populations. Scholarship on this topic, emerging from social and cultural geography, recognises the potential transformative impacts of close habitation and regular encounter to overcome distance embedded within relationships across difference. It explores how within increasingly multicultural and superdiverse contexts, aversion to the stranger can be overcome through 'encounter', and civility generated through everyday forms of sociability (e.g. Amin 2012). Although encounter between migrants and receiving society populations has been a wide topic of study, it has rarely been considered within the contexts of IRM, where limited attention has been specifically paid to the dynamic micropolitics and intimate moments of cultural exchange, in favour of more attention to migrants' perspectives and experiences. In this regard, Bender's and Schweppe's (2021) detailed ethnographic analysis of Thai women and foreign men's encounters in bar districts is insightful, elucidating the different perspectives and scripts playing out through informal conversations and shared sociabilities (like playing board games) within the bars.

A key problem however in focusing on encounters and their potentially transformative nature in IRM is that there is a low level of daily interaction (Huete & Mantecón 2012). This is especially because genuinely shared social space is rare. Surveying the British population in Spain over a twenty-year period of research, O'Reilly (2017, p. 139) points out the 'low expectations and low opportunities for meaningful social, political or economic integration' of British migrants in Spain. For Spaniards too, interactions are generally tinged by a perception of these residents as foreigners as tourists and 'visitants' (Huete & Mantecón 2012, p.165). Even when living side by side as neighbours, interviews with Spanish people revealed they had fairly limited communication with foreign neighbours (Oliver 2008, p.148-149). Exchanges were friendly and frequent, but were often superficial, and negotiated through signs, gestures and over-dependence on frequently used Spanish words (Oliver 2008, p.149). Language difficulties were compounded too by different customs, histories and use of space.

Some younger British lifestyle migrants had deeper engagement through intermarriage, having younger children or working, which opened up opportunities through shared use of spaces like playgrounds and schools. Yet for retirees, access to shared space was more limited and arguably intercultural social relationships not sought, especially as cultural traditions around retirement were divergent (Oliver 2008). There were also arguably fewer obvious opportunities and expectations for romantic relationships than in other IRM contexts (see Bender and Schweppe 2021).

An arena where intercultural encounters was possible among retirees and Spanish people was within religious spaces, although cultural distance was still evident here. Within my research site, the British were predominantly Protestant Christian in orientation, in comparison to the Spanish dominant Catholic denomination. As such, they worshipped in separate, parallel spaces; the British protestant community held its services within the Spanish Catholic church at different times and was populated then by only foreign populations (Oliver 2008). Spanish religious participation was rather consumed as spectacle, for example as foreign audiences watched the glorious displays of the *Semana Santa* (Holy week) and Saint's day processions, but rarely joined the subsequent community celebrations afterwards (ibid.). This said, some migrants held a Catholic orientation, and this invited opportunities for a more genuine encounter and communal experience within shared space. Some (limited) opportunities for encounter were facilitated too within an ecumenical centre called *Lux Mundi*. This was established by a Spanish pastor in 1973 with bases in two locations in the East and Western Costa del Sol as a site for foreign residents and visitors of multiple denominations to come together, including Anglican, Lutheran, Baptists etc. It evolved to respond to the needs of those from other countries and beliefs as the Spanish centre director explained to me in 2012,

> On the religious side, we know the centre is the bridge between the Roman Catholic Spanish church and all the churches that are established here. With tourism coming, there are more and more churches here. We are in contact with 16 churches […] Our purpose is to try and do things together. We feel that by giving the ministers and the people of the congregation the opportunity to meet others, all these barriers of divisions and separations start to come down […] we contribute as much as we can by bringing people together.

Though frequented mainly by foreign residents, Lux Mundi was distinctive in being a Spanish run charity organisation. A social club was held at the centre, and it also arranged day trips, a care service, a computer surgery and language classes at different levels of proficiency. Those attending were also encouraged to attend a programme of church services run in different denominations in the local Spanish Catholic church, including for example a Taizé prayer meeting (where the focus is on prayer and meditation). The service featured incantations in both English and Spanish and

provided an occasion for the centre's singing group, comprised of foreign retirees to contribute to the service, but notably by singing songs in Spanish. I attended the practice sessions, where I observed the leader of the singing group, Tom, correcting people's Spanish accents in the songs, because few spoke Spanish well. Afterwards, Tom explained to me that at times, when contributing to the services that the foreign singing group might even outnumber the (Spanish) congregation, but nevertheless the occasions felt special as one of few occasions of genuine coming together. At the end of the practice, he reminded the group members not to wear anything too flashy to the service, 'as we don't want to look like performers,' emphasising the event as a joint encounter and shared experience.

Within the centre, a priority was language teaching to improve intercultural encounter. Lux Mundi orchestrated occasions for mutual understanding as the centre provided both Spanish and English classes. The Spanish classes were run for foreign residents by the centre director and her husband, as she explained,

> The Spanish also, we understand the one of the terrible problems of the English-speaking people who live close by us is that they don't practice Spanish. Where? If you go to a local restaurant and [you find that] local people want to practice English. So we're not a school, we explain to them that we are not special teachers, we are just volunteers. But we try to give them confidence and vocabulary to be able to manage in their day.

The centre also offered conversational English to Spanish school children, with voluntary contributions from English members. One retired man, Bob, helped out in these classes, and also provided support to the Spanish centre director by 'turning her Spanglish into good English'. He explained:

> I have no qualifications to teach in this. But I do feel that I am helping people and that's important, that *I* have to get something out of it. I need to feel that I am contributing something. It's the ethos of Lux Mundi that people contribute.

Bob's latter sentiment, that 'I need to feel that I am contributing something' is important in exploring possibilities for upsetting the socio-economic and historical patterns of distance. Studies of IRM communities suggest that there is strong appetite for collective action, but among retirees this is generally directed at voluntary work and peer-led care among their own ethnic groups (see Oliver 2017). It could however find expression through other forms of collective action locally, given the right conditions, structures and support.

At present therefore, identifying degrowth movements and seedbeds of intercultural encounter indicate some distant, but possible and hopeful avenues for at least starting to address the negative economic, environmental and social consequences of IRM for the region, but they are certainly more exception than rule. Huete & Mantecón (2012, p.165) point out, although there is some evidence of increasing political involvement of foreign populations in the coastal towns, engagement is mutually superficial. They observe ruefully that local, regional and central governments 'will have to be capable of implementing integration policies more active than festivals and occasional meetings' to be able to activate and capitalise on any potential this engagement and intercultural encounter might have.

Conclusion

Within the chapter I have used critical scholarship on IRM in the Global South as a tool through which to reflect on the first waves of the process, by revisiting earlier fieldwork on the Spanish Costa Del Sol. Such an approach requires attention to how the broader process of IRM has specific manifestations and diverse effects, but nonetheless shares some similarities. In particular, looking anew at IRM in Spain particularly in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis and applying scholarship on economic development within the region, shows some of the dangers inherent in dependence on foreign investment, of which IRM is an important part. A sharper focus on the impacts of this historical pattern of sociabilities, suggests too there are some common outcomes in inequalities in relationships and cultural distance, as seen in IRM in the Global South. Writing at the end of 2020, the longer-term disruptive effects of both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic on IRM and tourism in the region underline further the instability and risks of using IRM as part of economic growth models. Nevertheless, in the wake of the pandemic, IRM is likely to remain; one might even speculate that there may even be increased demand for lower cost retirement living in destinations abroad. It behoves scholars of IRM globally then to explore the (albeit limited) avenues that may exist in order to create more equitable futures of populations implicated in these processes. What efforts might lead such populations to forge more common ground and sustain shared projects? What, if any, are the spaces in IRM for collaborating and collective practice? Looking back and looking forward, these I suggest are the urgent focus of investigation within future scholarship.

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Author bio:

Dr Caroline Oliver is Associate Professor in Sociology at University College London's Institute of Education, working in the fields of Sociology, Anthropology and Migration Studies. Her research expertise is on migration, state responses to migration and intersectional identities across the life course. Over the previous twenty years, she has researched on a range of topics, including

retirement migration, family migration and the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. Caroline is a member of the Centre for Sociology of Education and Equity (CSEE) whose members work to promote high quality sociological research for the public good. She is the deputy director of UCL's new BSc undergraduate degree in Sociology.