

ARGENTINE MIGRATION TO AND FROM SPAIN: OLD AND NEW CAPITAL IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE

MIGRACIONES ARGENTINAS DESDE Y HACIA ESPAÑA. NUEVOS Y VIEJOS CAPITALES EN EL ESPACIO SOCIAL TRANSNACIONAL

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ABSTRACT

Argentine migration presents a unique case in mobility and immobility studies. Capital inequalities require individuals to define their projects of permanence or migration in the context of mobility regimes. Following Bourdieu, we examined inequalities of opportunity in the distribution, revaluation, and depreciation of mobility capital(s) amongst Argentine migrants to Spain at particular historical moments in the past 20 years. We conducted 60 semi-structured interviews with Argentine migrants to Spain with experience of different types of (im)mobility. A multisite (and transnational) methodology allowed us to analyse participant discourses and experiences. The findings show that the (im)mobility of participants was not only economic; it was also contingent upon family circumstances and the possession and control of other forms of capital.

KEYWORDS: Argentine migrants, social class, social selectivity, migratory trajectories.

RESUMEN

En los estudios sobre (in)movilidad, las migraciones argentinas se presentan como un caso singular. La desigualdad de capitales influye en los individuos para definir sus proyectos de permanencia o migración, lo que se superpone con la selectividad de este flujo en los regímenes de movilidad. Siguiendo las aportaciones de Bourdieu, analizamos la desigualdad de oportunidades en la migración. Para ello, indagamos la distribución, revalorización o depreciación de los capitales. En este artículo proponemos el análisis de 60 entrevistas semiestructuradas a migrantes de origen argentino hacia España que han experimentado diferentes tipos de (in)movilidad en los últimos 20 años. Se siguió una metodología multisituada, que nos permitió conocer los discursos y experiencias desde un enfoque transnacional. Los principales resultados muestran que la (in)movilidad de los argentinos entrevistados no se debe estrictamente a razones económicas, sino que está conectada con acontecimientos familiares y con la posesión y control de ciertos capitales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Migraciones argentinas, clase social, selectividad social, trayectorias migratorias.

INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of Argentines crossed the ocean to Spain during the *brain drain* of the 1960s, the exile of the 1970s, the *hyperinflation* of the late 1980s, and the *corralito crisis* of the 2000s (when bank accounts were frozen and withdrawals were blocked). These migratory waves have been the subject of considerable scholarly interest: authors have examined, inter alia, the causes of current Argentine emigration to Spain, its composition, the nature of subsequent labour integrations in the destination country, and the impact of the *Spanish Great Recession* on migratory trajectories (Caccopardo *et al.*, 2007; Actis 2011; Jiménez 2011; Esteban 2015; Cassain 2018; Rivero 2019; Herrera 2022).

Many Argentines who moved to Spain followed in the footsteps of their ancestors. During the Great Migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those with the requisite resources often moved in the opposite direction (Devoto 2003; Texidó 2008). This particular flow is especially interesting to think about the processes of mobilities and immobilities involved in these migrations. Argentine migrants may have dual citizenship thanks to their ancestry, and this characteristic makes them interesting to study. This case study makes it possible to compare the effectiveness of migrants' capitals in (im)mobility processes. Classic capitals of Bourdieusian theory (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) combine with *national capital* (or ethnic, legal, depending on the authors) and *mobility capital* to configure both the possibility of migratory movement and the anchors in the destination society. The transnational social space that includes Spain and Argentina configures a historical migratory system that makes these movements possible.

The selectivity presented by this flow in *mobility regimes* (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), overlaps with the inequality of capitals of the subjects and their families to define their permanence or migration projects. Consequently, capital shapes individual, family, or community migratory projects. Migration often reflects family strategies of social reproduction, impacting or perpetuating power and status (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Levitt 2010). At the same time, migration is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by gender, age, and social origin (Anthias 2007).

Using Bourdieu's (1998, 2011) theorisation of social class, the present study examines Argentine migration to Spain. It considers trajectories such as return, reemigration, and (non-)return, highlighting inequalities in terms of distribution, capital revaluation, depreciation, and status deterioration. The central question is as follows: What types of capital (either singly or in combination) are most effective in facilitating different mobility trajectories? To address this, we proposed the following hypothesis: Migration, (non-)return, and reemigration are determined by various forms of capital.

Our analysis is based on 60 semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experienced different types of (im)mobility at key socio-historical moments in the past 20 years. We adopted a multisite methodology allowing us to analyze in depth the discourses and experiences of Argentine migrants from a transnational perspective; enhance our understanding of the causes, patterns, and effects of international migration for different geographical scales; and identify underlying social processes (Beauchemin, 2014).

Due to unique socio-historical circumstances and the scale of the phenomenon, Argentina's migration experience differs from that of other countries (e.g., where remittances, the restructuring of local economies, and emigration from rural areas are more pronounced; cf. Caccopardo *et al.*, 2007; Cerrutti & Maguid, 2011; Actis, 2011). However, despite being a relatively selective flow, Argentine migration is a significant component of Global South–North shifts, particularly expanding transnational labour markets. The findings of the present study show that the (im)mobility of the Argentines we interviewed go beyond economic reasons to encompass family circumstances and the possession and control of certain types of capital.

MIGRATIONS OR MOBILITIES?

International migration studies have been influenced by the *mobility turn*, where space is understood to be a web of social relations with extra-physical (or material) dimensions characterized by multiple types of movement (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007). Scholars who subscribe to this concept analyze networks, relationships, flows, circulation, and non-fixed places, challenging the notion of space as an essential element of social processes.

The mobility turn has made it possible to denature sedentary common sense (Malkki 1992). According to Recchi and Flippo (2019), "Mobility is used as a concept that helps widen the scope of migration research" (p. 134). Sedentary bias in international migration studies has assumed a normativity that questions the movement of people (Castles 2010), based on the fact that migration constitutes an anomalous phenomenon, a heresy that questions first the state order, and secondly the economic order (Sayad 2008; Korzeniewicz and Morán

2009; Mezzadra and Nielson 2014). The study of migratory dynamics can be enhanced if we observe and try to comprehend multiple movements based on dissimilar motivations.

In the present study, we examine migration as a form of mobility from a transnational perspective.

As Van Hear (2018) has rightly pointed out, since the 1990s there has been a shift from the normalisation of mobility, to the uncritical celebration of mobility. After the recognition of transnational relations between those who leave and those who stay, which form transnational social fields (Faist 2000; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), we move on to the rediscovery of “immobility” or “permanence” as an important phenomenon to be considered alongside mobility (Wagner 2023). Our analytical proposal is inscribed in the latter process, considering the relationships between those who migrate and those who remain in the same family group, according to different capitals. Selectivity in migration flows is not just a resource issue; it also implies the capacity to manage the relationship between mobility and immobility, according to which types of capital can be accessed within different class fractions (Franquesa 2011; Van Hear 2018).

CAPITAL AND TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE

Scholars have adapted Bourdieu's ideas to study international migration (Sayad 1977, 1989; Pries 1998; Garzón 2006; Wagner 2007; Erel 2010; Jiménez 2010; Van Hear 2018). Bourdieu developed an original middle-range theory to study various spheres of social practices conceptualized as fields (Lahire 2005), deploying a view of space that focuses on structures and relations between social positions. We built on Bourdieu's ideas—using social field and social space interchangeably (Baranger 2004)—to interpret the nature of Argentine migration to Spain in the past two decades, showing how a transnational social space between the two states has developed.

The concept of the *field* differs from that of the network. Portes and Böröcz (1992) described networks as “microstructures that sustain migration over time” (p. 24). They can explain selectivity; for instance, poverty, unemployment, and low wages in the society of origin may provide motivation. While networks concern interactions between actors, fields are associated with structural relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1995). The configuration of transnational social fields is not limited to interactions between migrants and their families; they are sustained by structural dynamics, namely, state and supra-state regulatory frameworks, the configuration of labour markets, the evolution of school systems, and so on.

From this perspective, the migrant is positioned not only in their destination (i.e., the space of destination) but also in the social structure of the place of departure (e.g., symbolically and in terms of status; Goldring 2002). Social space is defined by the relationships between social positions, which are the result of capital distribution (Bourdieu 1998, 2011). Capital can be used to examine the relationship between domination and social stratification (Bourdieu 1998; Castién 2004; Savage *et al.*, 1992). It can also be understood to be a form of social power subject to transmission (inheritance) or reconversion (Bourdieu 1998). These resources are produced in the migrants' institutional frameworks of origin and may therefore need to be reconverted or translated at the destination point (Jiménez 2011).

Bourdieu (1998) distinguished four types of *capital*: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Bourdieu (1999) argued that the first three function as the fourth, symbolic capital, when they receive recognition. *Economic capital*, which refers to income, property (rural or urban), shares, and so on, is of particular interest because its accumulation is regarded as central to successful migration, either by the migrants themselves or their dependants—who benefit from it in the form of remittances (Guarnizo 2004; Portes 1995). *Cultural capital* has been treated more heterogeneously: studies on skilled migration (which can take the form of a brain drain) have highlighted the professional integration of highly educated people into destination economies as a driver of migration and structural mismatches in migrants' countries of origin (e.g., between educational credentials and commensurate jobs—see Martínez Pizarro 2010; Pedone and Alfaro 2015).

A relatively new sociological type has also been identified: the graduate with no future, whose cosmopolitanism and capacity to travel and study abroad have a transnational orientation based on the extensive use of social networks (Mason 2013). Notwithstanding these capital endowments, this type is regarded as part of the global precariat (Van Hear 2018).

Scholars have studied the role of school and educational investment (i.e., institutionalized cultural capital) in sustaining individual or family migration projects (Franzé 2001; Pedreño and Castellanos 2010). Cultural capital (*embodied* or *institutionalized*) can play a significant part in enabling migrants to insert themselves into the destination society (Weiss 2006; Erel 2010; Jiménez 2021). Homologation in receiving societies (in educational or professional institutions) tends to protect native qualifications from foreign ones, potentially devaluing migrant cultural capital, though it may also be valorized in some instances (Bauder 2003; Erel 2010; Wagner 2007, 2023).

Social capital is a “set of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of relationships ... belonging to a group [whose connections] are not limited to geographical space and involve material and symbolic exchange” (Bourdieu 2011, p. 221). It is worth noting that Putnam’s theorisation of social capital has supplanted Bourdieu’s in migration studies (Erel 2010). It has been central to the study of networks, norms, and trust, all of which facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Although social capital theories have been ascribed great explanatory potential, several authors have criticized them for not taking sufficient account of gender and class relations in the constitution and use of networks (Anthias 2007).

The consolidation of a global regime of migration governance stratifies movements in novel ways (Mezzadra 2005; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Clavijo and Gil Araujo 2021; Domenech 2023). For example, post-Maastricht Treaty (1991) citizenship regulations have constituted a proxy for migration governance, complementing less legitimized criteria such as race, religion, or class (Blanchard 2025).

In this context, dual citizenship allows many descendants of migrants from previous flows (*ius sanguinis*) to position themselves globally (Korzeniewicz and Morán 2009; Harpaz 2015). Migrants or potential migrants exploit ancestral citizenship strategically and flexibly to access better living conditions, welfare systems (which facilitate citizenship), or to move around freely (Cook-Martin 2013; Blanchard 2025). What is more, ancestry is a form of family capital that is transferred intergenerationally (Mateos and Durand 2012), a process eased by the possession of cultural, social, and economic capital (Blanchard 2025).

Other forms of capital have been identified by migration scholars: national capital (Garzón 2006; Hage 2000), ethnic capital (Mateos and Durand 2012), and juridical capital (Gonzalez Bernaldo and Jedlicki 2012). The first of these refers to one’s access to citizenship in the destination country, one’s degree of integration into the labour market, and one’s cultural proximity to those groups that hold power. The extent to which immigrants are linked to each of these three elements means that certain groups are positioned more favourably than others, being perceived as *less immigrant* (Hage 2000). Erel (2010) asserted that knowledge of the destination language, accents, or having light skin are resources that can be converted into national capital to legitimize one’s belonging. This capital is closely related to *symbolic capital*, which manifests in social situations that consolidate the nationality of migrants’ origins in the form of ethnicity (Bourdieu 1999; Pedreño 2005), giving rise to prejudice and stigmatisation (Alhambra Delgado 2018; Garzón 2006).

Mobility capital is based on Bourdieu’s social capital: the use of space is not socially neutral, since, within certain types of capital, people can accumulate or produce strategies of social differentiation through spatial displacement practices (Capote and Fernández 2023; Moret 2020). Other studies have highlighted the increase in intercultural competencies, networks (social capital), and language learning or professional training that occurs in cases of successive migration (Miyar Busto and Muñoz Comet 2018).

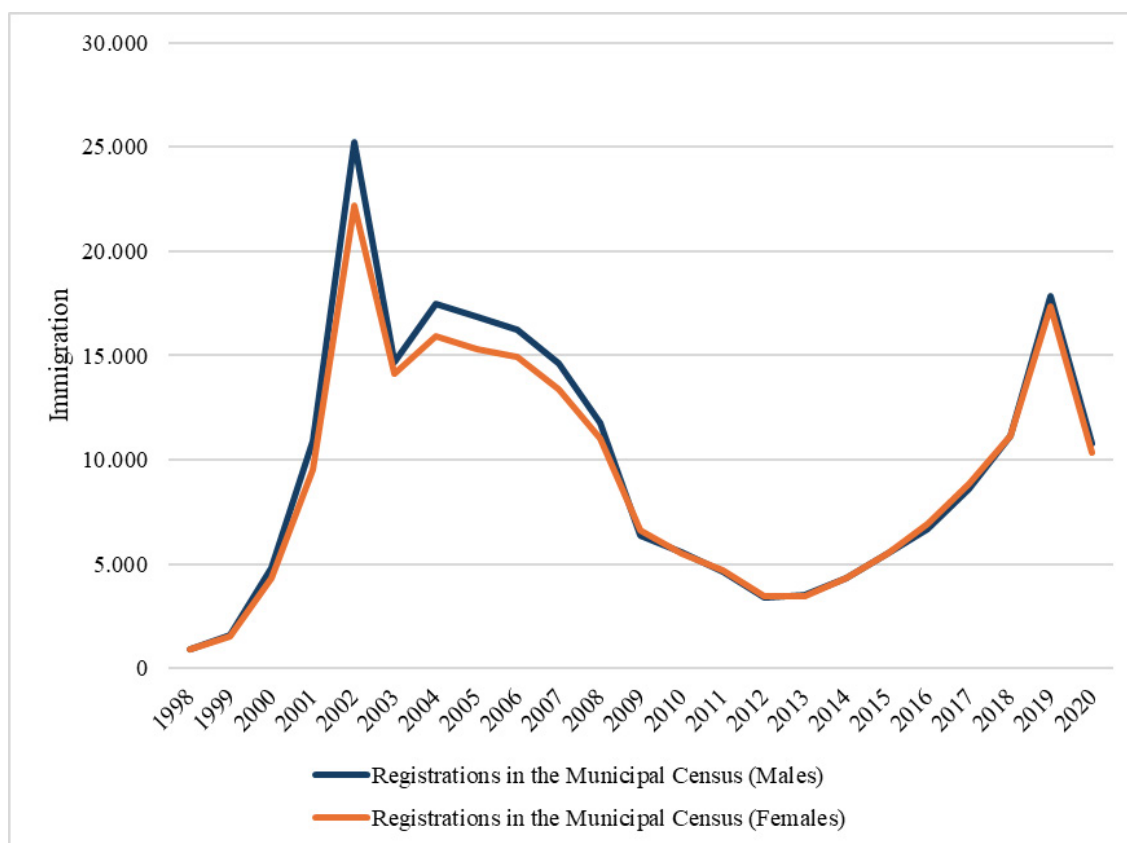
The present study identifies the forms of capital (old and new) used most often by Argentine migrants, how they are combined, and how they are accumulated and reconverted post-migration.

THE DYNAMICS OF ARGENTINE MIGRATION TO SPAIN

Argentine migration to Spain has increased exponentially and selectively during the first decades of the twenty-first century. In this section, we indicate fluctuations in this process using three temporal markers: the *Corralito crisis* (2000–2008), the *Great Recession in Spain* (2008–2015), and *Argentina’s new inflationary crisis* (2015–2018). Next, we used data from the Municipal Register of Inhabitants (collated by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE]) to trace the evolution of Argentine male and female migration to Spain (Figure 1).

Since the end of the twentieth century, Argentine migration to Spain has reached unprecedented levels. Most migrants chose to emigrate to improve their social position or to avoid becoming downwardly mobile (Jiménez 2011). Figure 1 indicates that migratory flows tend to be highly sensitive to economic cycles (Massey and Espinosa 1997; OECD 2007), with the deterioration of Spanish society and economy creating new migratory cycles in turn (Domingo and Sabater 2013; Torres 2014). For example, the Great Recession in Spain saw an increase in reemigration, albeit not on a large scale (Cachón 2012).

The post-recessionary period in Spain (2011–2014) was accompanied by the implementation of austerity policies (Méndez et al. 2015), followed by a mild economic uptick that lasted until the global health crisis triggered by COVID-19. This acted as a new pull factor, though the contraction of the Argentine economy in the form of the new inflationary crisis and the rise of the right in 2015 led many to (re)consider reemigrating to Spain and other destinations.

Figure 1. Argentine Migration to Spain, by Sex (1998–2023)

Note. Source: Statistics of Residential Variations (EVR in Spanish; INE) and own elaboration

Male and female migration was fairly well balanced between 1998 and 2018, with a slight lean towards men at the beginning of the twenty-first century; this continued for the next 10 years until 2009, and the advent of the Great Recession in Spain. During the following years and up until the COVID-19 pandemic, female migration tended to equal male migration. These changes provided certain clues as to the behavior of migratory flows in relation to wider events, including reemigration (during the Great Recession) and new emigration to Spain from the inflationary crisis of 2018 to the present.

The migration of Argentines, considered by several authors to be a structural and trickle-down phenomenon in recent times (Mira Delli-Zotti and Esteban 2003), is a socially selective event, especially in the most recent stages. Restrictions on access to foreign currencies and inflation in the home country limited migratory options. Nevertheless, as we show herein, different resources are needed for migration; economic, cultural, social, and national capital(s) play an important role in mobility trajectories.

According to Gabrielli et al. (2019), Korzeniewicz and Morán (2009), and Wagner (2023), global inequalities impact migration mobility. Researchers analysing passenger databases have highlighted mobility patterns that differ according to distance, seasonality, and directional flow. Latin Americans travel more within their continent; indeed, in the case of Argentina, the average distance travelled is comparatively very low. By contrast, Argentines report longer-distance movements and more individual tourism patterns (Gabrielli *et al.* 2019). This explains in part why migration is selective amongst Argentines. However, as Actis (2011), Caccopardo et al. (2007), and Esteban (2015) have shown, it is a heterogeneous flow, with diverse familial, social, and geographic origins and educational levels.

DATA AND METHODS

This study examines Argentine migration to Spain over the past 20 years based on migratory trajectories, capital mobilisation, and reemigration, return, and non-return experiences. Transnational space can be studied through multisite research on migrations, connections, relationships, and phenomena (Falzon 2016), an approach based on the assumption that circumscribing such practices has become increasingly difficult. We adopted a multisite design (consisting of the destination society and the society of origin) to understand how

participants attempted to transcend national boundaries (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992). The overarching objective was to construct relationships between different locations and explain their continuity (or otherwise).

We gathered and collated empirical data between 2008 and 2019 during fieldwork in Spain (participants' place of destination of the interviewees) and Argentina (participants' country of origin). Participants were recruited using the non-probabilistic *snowball sampling* method. This takes advantage of social networking (Vallés 1999), enabling individuals to recruit their acquaintances for studies such as the present one. Each participant was interviewed once in depth during the period. Participants were selected according to common criteria: (a) date of migration to Spain (between 1998 and 2006), (b) age (over 18 years old), (c) gender parity, (d) heterogeneity of legal situations, and (e) middle- or working-class backgrounds; and specific criteria: (a) experience of voluntary return mobility (going back to Argentina after 2007 when the *Great Recession* began), (b) experience of reemigration to Spain (i.e., those who had experienced reemigration should have stayed in Argentina for at least one year's duration (i.e., post-return), and (c) experience of remaining in Spain after emigrating (and no other form of mobility).

In-depth interviews allowed us to gain insights into participants' perspectives, perceptions, and motivations (Corbetta 2007); 60 Argentine male and female migrants who emigrated to Spain in the early 2000s as a result of the *corralito crisis* participated. Twenty-nine had decided to return with the arrival of the *Great Recession*, and 31 did not; that is, they chose to remain immobile in the destination country, experiencing sedentarisation over time. Seven out of the 29 returnees reemigrated to Spain a few years later.

Our analysis was based on Jiménez (2021) and Sayad's (1977, 1989) systemisation. We took into account the variables of origin: (a) social class, (b) age or biographical moment, and (c) gender; and the variables of destination: (d) integration into the segmented labour market, and (e) completion of studies.

We also used Benza's (2014) schema, classifying participants according to their class of origin: 13 small entrepreneurs (small shopkeepers employing fewer than five people and possessing relatively more *economic capital* than the other groups); 28 professionals and technicians (who therefore possessed more *institutionalized cultural capital* than the other groups); and 19 non-manual or manual employees (who possessed less capital than the other groups; Table 1).

Table 1. Argentine Social Class Fractions by Historical Moments

Social class fraction	<i>Corralito crisis</i> (Argentinian bank freeze) 2001-2008	<i>Great Recession in Spain</i> 2008-2015	Argentina's inflationary crisis 2015-2018	No. of cases
Small business owners (+ <i>economic capital</i>)	- Salarization - Credits for small businesses	- Flexible mobility and possession of <i>mobility capital</i> - Returns to Argentina	- Implementation of the female entrepreneurial habitus - Migratory circulations of younger individuals increase <i>mobility capital</i> - Reemigration	13
Professionals & technicians (+ <i>cultural capital</i>)	- Homologation of degrees (differences according to age) - Credential usage value	- Privileged sedentarization - Diverse strategies of return by age and gender: a) Assisted return programmes b) Cosmopolitanism of young people c) Disadvantaged youth (return)	- Precarious transnational workers (men) - Economic decapitalization and difficulties of labour integration (women) - Privileged sedentarization	28
Working class manual and non-manual employees (lower level of <i>economic</i> and <i>cultural capital</i>)	- Informal sector of labour market - Tend towards social integration zone - Moral integration strategies (good worker)	- Difficulties in accumulating or reconverting mobility capital - Selective return flow: only some non-manual employees	- Reemigration not experienced - Precarious sedentarization	19
				60

Note. Data derived from field research.

RESULTS

(Im)mobility Strategies of Small Business Owners

Participants in this class were active entrepreneurs who were well equipped to move through transnational social space, having the economic resources (e.g., shares, properties, and businesses) to do so (Benza 2014). They were, therefore, able to position themselves well in the countries of origin and destination, depending on the historical moment. This fraction's first migration took place in the context of the *corralito crisis*. Some progressed in a staggered manner from informal jobs to salaried jobs (e.g., in the service sector) after settling in Spain; although *economic capital* is easily transferable in the migratory context, a period of time to activate this was necessary. Esteban, who had a small business in Argentina, managed to set up another one (a kiosk) in Aranjuez; employed initially as an installer for a gas company, he was able to obtain a loan and the necessary documentation to set up a new business.

Around 2008 (the first year of the *Great Recession* in Spain), Argentine *small business owners* returned to their home country, adapting to a new labour and family context by unlocking more of their *economic* and *national capital*. Their advantageous position allowed them not only to move freely between the two countries but also to make more carefree decisions regarding the permanence or temporariness of their stay in Argentina. These migratory trajectories were conditioned in part by the sociohistorical events that motivated people to return to Argentina, namely, the push and pull factors of the *Great Recession* (in the destination country) and the "Winning Decade under Kirchnerism" (in the country of origin), respectively. We saw this in cases such as that of Gabriela, who returned to Argentina with her family in 2013 when her income began to decline, only allowing her to cover basic expenses such as food, the mortgage, and clothing. Argentina offered more opportunities, but she had to manage the family inheritance and numerous properties (i.e., rental garages and two houses). Gabriela and Esteban challenge the classic definitions of migration, where individuals are placed dichotomously under the categories of permanent or temporary migrants (Pizarro and Ciarallo 2021). As their stories made clear, return should not be conceived of as a closed and definitive issue; the possibilities of mobility remained open, at least for some.

Reemigration differed according to age group and biographical moment in several cases. Adult women over 40 years old, such as Paula, were able to resume their entrepreneurial habitus, which had been suspended when they emigrated to Spain and returned to Argentina. They were able to consolidate their *mobility capital* (Capote and Fernández 2023) through the accumulation of experience and skills and maintain or even improve their economic status in Spain: Paula, for example, managed to consolidate her Argentine food business and differentiate herself socially. Some immigrants try to overcome the forced incorporation into certain job niches by setting up a business on their own, in a complex process that can be understood within the framework of the ethnic economy (Arjona and Checa 2006).

Although some young participants possessed the capital of their parents' social class during adolescence, those who experienced reemigration during those years moved into lower-class fractions (*non-manual* and *manual workers*), starting their working lives in a completely different sector to the one expected. Despite being able to count on her family's *economic capital*, Alba (Paula's daughter) began her professional life in the hospitality industry. Her trajectory, which was marked by temporariness (i.e., the provisional nature of the family's stay in Spain), offers an example of *migratory circulation*: "journeys between social positions defined by structural conditioning factors and by the dispositions acquired by migrants throughout their movements between different social fields" (Cortes 2009, as cited in Pizarro and Ciarallo, 2021, pp. 31–33). It also suggests the setting in motion of the capacity for agency, the mobilization of resources, or movement in geophysical space. The possibility of circulating within two social spaces presupposes the possession of class resources that can be leveraged to create and maintain material, social, and symbolic ties.

The previous cases demonstrate inequality in the use of resources during migration. Ancestry (i.e. *national capital*) offers abundant potential, especially when reinforced by economic capital. In the present instance, this combination allowed small business-owning Argentines to improve their social position both at home and in Spain.

(Im)mobility Strategies of Professionals and Technicians

Those who held professional and technical jobs and/or had university or technical education credentials were categorized as the fraction richest in *cultural capital*. They stood out by possessing intangible resources linked to *institutionalized cultural capital* (through credentialization or degrees) or *embodied cultural capital* (through experience and previous work practice), which are carried with oneself and are gradually transferable

(unlike *economic capital*). Participants in this group left Argentina with a degree (university or tertiary) in hand, and the knowledge they acquired at work allowed them to make their way in the destination society and overcome (im)mobilities encountered in transnational social space.

During the *corralito crisis*, some members of this fraction found temporary relief from unemployment, wage devaluation, family pressure, and the failure to find placements in line with their training by migrating. Once in the destination country, several found low-status jobs, allowing them to make useful contacts and acquire knowledge of specific areas of activity. For example, Juan Pablo worked in the construction industry for two months as a bricklayer alongside a friend who was already living in Spain, doing jobs that bore no resemblance to those he had performed back home. He was then able to find work as an architect—his original profession—for a construction company in Malaga.

Many of the fraction found employment in Spain by using their credentials, initiating lengthy processes involving the homologation of degrees and transforming their *institutionalized cultural capital* into capital with exchange value (rather than use value, to employ a Marxist differentiation) in the labour market. Some re-valued their knowledge by mobilising their *embodied cultural capital* for its use value. This was more common in the private sector, where institutionalized cultural capital is prized (albeit not at the salary level). For example, the knowledge Lorenzo had acquired after more than 20 years' work as a mechanical engineer was enough for him to be able to start working without having any formal educational credentials homologated.

Some of this fraction chose not to return during the historical events in question (*Great Recession* and the *new inflationary crisis in Argentina*), settling in Spain with no intention to move again. The possession of *cultural capital* combined with *national capital* positioned these groups more favorably and granted advantages such as being able to decide, with a certain degree of freedom, when, how, and where to move again (or not to).

Adolescent migrants were most likely to experience sedentarization in Spain. There were three principal reasons: (a) they were able to build a solid network of social relationships, (b) they were able to increase their human capital, and (c) they were able to learn to work in culturally diverse contexts, giving them a greater capacity to adapt and relate to people of different national origins (Miyar Busto and Muñoz Comet 2018). For example, Marina obtained a high school diploma and began her university studies in political science and public administration in 2008 with a scholarship awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Education. She also participated in academic exchanges during her studies, accumulating *international capital* in the process (Wagner 2023), thanks to her *national capital*.

Some of this fraction chose to return or reemigrate, demonstrating that situations of (im)mobility do not constitute separate categories; people can transition from one state to another at different points in their lives (Bargeon et al. 2013). During the *Great Recession* in Spain, the *professional and technician* participants employed a greater range of return strategies (depending on age group and gender), combining different types of capital for particular purposes.

Males who returned at an advanced age (over 50 years old) combined *institutional cultural capital* (accredited qualifications in both states) and *national capital*, making use of Argentine programmes that favoured their integration into the labour market. Lorenzo, for instance, took advantage of an assisted return for scientists and researchers programme (RAÍCES), which reconnected returning Argentine professionals with the national business and scientific communities (Rivero 2019).

Intermediate-age participants (i.e., those between 29 and 39 years) and without family obligations are similar to the most economically advantaged class fraction (*small business owners*). They maximized their language skills, knowledge of cultural resources, or *international social capital* (Wagner 2007), exploiting migratory opportunities not through necessity or urgency but strategically. Such was the case with María, a young woman who worked as a set designer on various theatre productions. She was able to obtain freelance or part-time work in the same sector in Spain by taking advantage of transnational social and labour ties; regular trips back to her country of origin allowed her to continue to explore job opportunities there.

Those under the age of 25 who emigrated as part of a family project encountered greater difficulties when they returned because they lacked solid networks of labour contacts, faced delays in the validation of their Spanish degrees, and encountered issues with the structural and circumstantial functioning of the Argentine labour market. Some considered activating their *mobility capital* and reemigrating to Spain (e.g., to avoid forfeiting their social position).

In cases of reemigration to Spain, *professional and technician* participants were differentiated by sex, age, and capital. Males over the age of 50 utilized their *incorporated cultural capital* in tandem with the social capital they consolidated as emigrants (and their dual-citizenship passport), initiating a third stage of mobility.

Participants like Ernesto (a senior construction technician) chose to become precariously situated transnational workers despite the cost involved (accepting jobs in countries such as Algeria and living far away for extended periods), remaining symbolically and emotionally connected to their families in Spain.

Female participants of all ages who experienced a third mobility also experienced significant economic decapitalization, difficulty integrating into their occupational niche, and problems revalidating their educational credentials when in Spain. This suggests that not all capital is equal or reconvertible. Yvonne (a laboratory technician) and Valeria (an administrative assistant) integrated into a lower-class fraction (*manual workers*) when they took on low-paying, precarious jobs in the informal hospitality sector (e.g., selling Argentine food at local markets) or in caregiving (for the elderly/children), despite possessing *national capital*. While dual citizenship and connections positioned certain fractions more advantageously, neither served consistently as a shield against social inequality nor as an instrument of mobility.

Several participants bore out Wagner's (2023) contention that "capitals circulate, accumulate, but can also be devalued" (p. 53). Limited or poor availability of *mobility capital* resulted in greater social isolation amongst the most vulnerable sectors of the various fractions. Finding oneself in less valued occupations, the inability to validate educational qualifications, and residential segregation impacted the value of capital held by the poorest within the same social class; this had a knock-on effect on networking and social climbing (Palma Arce and Soldano 2010).

(Im)mobility Strategies of Manual and Non-Manual Workers

Compared to the other two fractions, the third group analysed in this research falls within the lowest social fraction of Argentine migrants, with a much lower level of economic and cultural capital. These cases focused their efforts in Argentina on investment in education (secondary and tertiary) to move up the social ladder. They also occupied hinge jobs between the working class and the middle class, facilitating upward mobility. The subgroup of non-manual employees (administrative and trade workers) stands out for having less bargaining power for benefits in the labor market. By contrast, the subgroup of manual employees (cleaning, agriculture, and care) is generally associated with low or unskilled positions or worse conditions (Benza 2014).

After migrating during the *corralito crisis*, *non-manual* and *manual* participants became more dispersed and less integrated. Some progressed socially, having accumulated or leveraged some of their capital. Elena was able to acquire Spanish nationality as a result of the extraordinary "normalization of foreign workers" policy of 2005, through which migrants received work and residence permits. Elena found employment at a car dealership during the real estate bubble, when salaries in the sector were above the national average.

Before the *Great Recession* in Spain, ethnic entrepreneurship and the valorization of trades (e.g., baking) facilitated the accumulation of capital and access to the secondary labour market. Participants with stagnant itineraries but with *national capital*—by ancestry or residence (Mateos and Durand 2012)—found that in Spain they could integrate into welfare systems such as health and education, enjoying levels of consumption comparable to those of the Argentine middle classes. We have seen how ancestral citizenship could be used to access better living conditions or welfare systems. Meline and Sandra showed that, despite finding themselves in often precarious situations (working, respectively, in a warehouse in the agricultural sector and in McDonald's), they were able to remain in a *zone of social integration* (Castel 2010) and fulfill their expectation of maintaining their middle-class status. The *blurring of class boundaries* (Jiménez, 2011) was experienced primarily by the relatively poorest fraction, the members of which perceived Spanish social space as less discontinuous than its Argentine equivalent. The fact of having a formal job may have led some participants to believe that in Spain, "life is much more dignified" than in Argentina. Some of the less-advantaged participants (who had no *national capital*)—for instance, Francisco, who had a high school diploma but no previous work experience—occupied the most precarious jobs and were subject to forced sedentarization. Such cases demonstrated that *global mobility regimes* (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) still depend heavily on passports, visas, and residence permits (Urry 2007), regardless of the possession of other forms of capital (*embodied* and *institutionalized cultural capital*, *social capital*, and so on). Undocumented participants (e.g., Francisco) were forced to settle or, in some instances, move to other regions of Spain to avoid surveillance or attracting the interest of the authorities, therefore experiencing *limited mobility* (Bloch *et al.* 2009). Indeed, some scholars have averred that immigrants have no capacity for movement, either because they do not have work permits or are not Spanish nationals (Gutekunst *et al.* 2016).

Sedentariness is best examined in the context of new modes of exploitation and social inequality (Salazar and Smart 2011). Possessing *national capital* along with other types of capital (in particular, *cultural capital* in

the form of validated degrees or technical knowledge and *social capital* in the form of support networks and assistance in seeking employment or accessing *economic capital*) significantly facilitates mobility and living conditions in the social space of the destination country.

Some *non-manual employees* (primarily those in commercial occupations) were able to return to Argentina during the *Great Recession* in Spain and find in their new mobility an escape from sustained periods of unemployment and general precariousness. Participants' accounts were heterogeneous, however. These returnees, who were characterized by their age (between 29 and 39) and lack of family responsibilities, bore similarities to *professional and technician* members of the fraction, who were relatively rich in *cultural capital*. Some types of work made it possible to raise capital on the hoof to invest in training or travel. Damián (a sales assistant) and Laura (a secretary) migrated to Spain so they could then travel across Europe, explore various places, and return to Argentina twice a year. Here, the accumulation of *mobility capital* (access to economic resources, administrative status, travel planning skills, and so on) taught them "how to move between spaces." Participants who began their return after assuming family responsibilities had more difficulty adjusting their expectations to reality and integrating quickly into the labour market, thus indicating that family circumstances were determining factors in the social position of individuals.

The arrival of the *new inflationary crisis* in Argentina (after the shift to the right in 2015) was not enough for the less advantaged class fraction to contemplate moving again. This suggests that working-class participants were less able to accumulate *mobility capital* or take advantage of it by converting it into other types of capital. For example, participants who completed their vocational training in Spain could not validate their degrees upon return. Leonardo failed to homologate his higher vocational training in computer science in Argentina and pondered reemigrating to Spain as a way out of his predicament.

CONCLUSIONS

Rethinking international migration in terms of transnational social spaces is a challenging enterprise. Contrary to the sedentarism paradigm and methodological nationalism, migrants resort to migration as a social mobility mechanism in a versatile way, experimenting with the opportunities presented by different locations. Migrants possess certain starting capital, then accumulate *mobility capital* and, in some cases, *national capital* (when they become residents). It should be noted that (im)mobility is contextual: in some cases, roles are distributed within families (e.g., mobile and sedentary members); occasionally, and paradoxically, some members may remain in the destination country after a considerable amount of *mobility capital* has been accumulated.

Argentine migration has become more complex and diverse in recent decades, as the present study attests. We identified different fractions of the Argentine middle and working class amongst our sample and, using Bourdieu's analytical tools, established how they have used their capital in cycles of migration between Argentina and Spain over the past two decades.

Small business owners who migrated during the *Corralito crisis* with sufficient *economic capital* to invest in the destination country were decapitalized in the early 2000s but quickly returned to the fold, launching various businesses in Spain (Cachón 1989) and later reviving old ones in the country of origin. This fraction evinced the least rigid migratory trajectories. During the *Great Recession* in Spain, they exploited the opportunities that still presented themselves. Having accumulated more capital (including *mobility* and *national*), they reemigrated to Spain when Argentina descended into the *new inflationary crisis* as part of the process of *migratory circulation*.

By contrast, those middle class participants who possessed relatively more *cultural capital* upon migration (i.e., *professionals and technicians*) were more restricted in their mobility, partly due to issues with homologating qualifications, which requires a greater investment of time than setting up a small business, and partly due the fact that different professional bodies impose barriers that make it difficult for migrants to integrate (Erel 2010). Nevertheless, the majority of participants in this fraction managed to avoid niches in the secondary labour market and developed their careers according to their expertise. We have classified this behavior as privileged sedentarization, as it does not involve professional de-skilling.

Mobility trajectories differed according to gender and age. Some participants returned under the auspices of Argentine programmes, and some independently. Younger participants were divisible into those with a cosmopolitan disposition (as a result of the accumulation of *mobility* and *national capital*), which opens the door to new mobilities, and those who were decapitalized and who returned to Argentina to begin the migratory process anew. Participants who reemigrated to Spain at the onset of the new inflationary crisis did so to insert themselves into transnational labour markets, which sometimes involved third countries. This strategy also reduced geographical distance with transnational family members who remained in Spain.

Finally, participants with lower levels of *economic* and *cultural capital* deployed various strategies to insert themselves into the secondary labour market in Spain. They faced the greatest obstacles when attempting to leave the informal sector, including neglect and precarious sedentarization, and integrating into the Spanish welfare system. This fraction's capacity for movement was limited within *global mobility regimes*. Some participants were able to return to Argentina during the *Great Recession* in Spain, but none remigrated at the onset of the *new inflationary crisis* in their country of origin.

The unequal possibilities we observed in this comparison of trajectories—that play strategically with the structure of opportunities in the transnational social space formed by Argentina and Spain—suggest that during the migratory experience, resources are configured to reorient the itineraries.

Although starting capital was important, migrants managed to accumulate, reconvert, and reorient other kinds of capital during their migratory trajectories. A singular case is that of *national capital*: the acquisition of Spanish nationality, which, far from prefiguring a rootedness to Spain, facilitates new migrations, either in the form of return or to new destinations in the European Union. *Mobility capital*, a novel component of the Argentine migratory experience, combines old capital (e.g., economic and cultural) but not linearly. In some cases, it was easier for small business owners to make successive migrations (for which they were equipped). The *cultural capital* of *professional and technical* migrants was valued in terms of cosmopolitan lifestyles and the contribution it made to integration into transnational labour markets.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors of this article declare that they have no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced this work.

Authorship contribution statement

Cecilia Inés Jiménez Zunino: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review.

Daniela Herrera Rubalcaba: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review.

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