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Global Subcultures: The Case of Spanish Corporate Expatriates

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Abstract

In the not very extensive sociological and anthropological scientific literature dedicated to corporate expatriates, it is frequently argued that expatriates create a subculture of a global character. This article centers on researching the presence of such a subculture among Spanish corporate expatriates. The research undertaken here utilizes a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews, gathered over a period of six months, the selection of which was based on strategic criteria derived from the available quantitative studies on corporate expatriates. The analysis of the interviews suggests the presence of common cultural patterns among the Spanish corporate expatriates and the corporate expatriates of other nationalities, including the creation of enclaves, the tendency to create significant relationships with other expatriates, and, among others, the persistence of a certain distance from the culture of the host country. The study also finds that the weight of the nationality, region, or city of origin in the accounts from the Spanish corporate expatriates indicates that these non-global criteria continue to be key in the configuration of their identity.¹

Keywords Cosmopolitanism; Corporate expatriates; Globalization; Subculture.

An important tendency in the cultural distinction of the elite in the information society is to create a lifestyle and devise spaces directed at unifying their symbolic surroundings all over the world, with which they replace the historic specificity of each locality.

Manuel Castells (2000, p. 450)

Within the social sciences, there has existed a persistent tendency to identify cultural formations with a specific political and territorial unit. In the scholarly tradition of “methodological nationalism” (Fine 2007, pp. 17-21), it is the nation-state that forms the principle unit of analysis. The process of globalization is changing this orientation, however, and is contributing to the identification of cultural formations that go beyond the limits of the nation-state. This change is possible because cultures are no longer seen as bounded entities and are instead considered fluid realities. Some authors speak about “traveling cultures” (Clifford, 1997), in which people construct cultures within which they live through the thousands of interrelations that they experience in their daily lives.

It has been suggested that the emergence of subcultures of a global character that go beyond the traditional limits of the nation-state are sustained by cosmopolitan collectives. Among these collectives are subgroups of individuals who share particular experiences and characteristics, such as the world travelers of “backpacking tourism” (O’Reilly, 2006; Paris, 2012); youth subcultures (Nilan & Feixa, 2006) at the extreme end of popular culture; and the transnational, capitalist elite (Robinson, 2004; Sklair, 2001). One collective that is especially interesting is that of the “expatriated” (Hannerz, 1990), in that they represent, *a priori*, truly cosmopolitan values.² This article will be centered on one specific type of expatriate, those who leave their country as part of their job, for a corporation or international organization.

There is a body of studies on the subculture of corporate expatriates, though these ethnographies tend to be quite fragmented and dispersed. Such studies served as the basis for this research study, the objective of which is to look into the presence and characteristics of a common subculture among Spanish corporate expatriates. For that, semi-structured interviews were carried out to test the existence of a structure of meanings, practices, and a material culture among Spanish expatriates.

Corporate Expatriates

The term expatriate has historically been used to describe Westerners—be they colonists, artists, missionaries, or any other type of person with a specific mission—who find themselves living in a foreign country (Cohen, 1977, p. 6). As such, corporate expatriates constitute a specific sub-type within a broader category. Corporate expatriates can be defined as employees of big, transnational corporations or of international bureaucracies (in many cases, Western)³ who voluntarily—although habitually compensated with significant improvements in their job conditions—move to a country different from their country of origin for an extended period of time. The duration of the stay is normally agreed upon with the employer, and the employee typically has the option to return home in a reasonable amount of time when they so decide; in the worst case, the employee can terminate the work relationship and return home. In general, corporate expatriates are “privileged emigrants” as a function of their purchasing power and treatment—as much by the company that transfers them as by the authorities of the host country.

It is difficult to quantify the number of employees who could be categorized as international expatriates. According to the International Labor Organization, in 2005, approximately 3% of the 2.867 billion workers on the planet, or some 86 million workers, were “economically active migrants,” 54 million of which in rich countries (Therborn, 2012, p. 246). Obviously, only a small proportion of the 86 million would be corporate expatriates. And while there are no official, direct data to measure the number of corporate expatriates, according to a recent report by the consulting firm Finacord (2014)—which uses international databases—in the year 2013, there were 50.5 million expatriates in the world, of which 73% were individual workers, 8.8%, students, 3.7%, expatriate retired people, 1%, corporate

expatriates, and 12.8%, the non-working children and spouses of expatriates. That is, there were half a million corporate expatriates around the world, which would constitute 0.02% of all workers in the world. In the case of Spanish expatriates, there is no official count, either. An approximation is offered by the Spanish Expatriation Forum,⁴ for whom “the number of Spanish expatriates grew in the last 18 months by 45%, comprising a population that surpasses 4,000 individuals” (AESPLA, 2011, p. 6). That figure would represent, roughly speaking, 0.02% of the active Spanish population, a figure that is congruent with the figure for corporate expatriates around the world.

With respect to the characteristics of corporate expatriates, in 2013, the National Foreign Trade Council in the United States surveyed 1,511 expatriates around the world, from which the following profile emerged: 80% are men and 20% are women⁵; 84% are married, and their ages are distributed as follows: 17% are between 25 and 34 years old; 29%, between 35 and 44 years old; 29%, between 45 and 54 years of age; and 20%, between 55 and 64 years old. The surveys also revealed that 49% of those interviewed come from North America, 22%, from Europe, and 13%, from Asia and the Middle East. The United States alone accounted for 42% of all the expatriates surveyed. This is not unexpected, however, as in 82% of the cases, the central headquarters of the companies for which these expatriates work or worked are located in the United States. (In second place, is Europe, where 10% of such companies are headquartered) (NFTC, 2013). However, other studies with even broader samples point out that the percentages and proportions of expatriates’ nationalities vary considerably from one country to another (HSBC Expat, 2012).

The characteristics of the Spanish expatriates are only gathered in various reports drafted from an important business school and an international consulting firm (Álvarez Novoa & Gómez López-Egea, 2008; Álvarez Novoa et al., 2011; Gómez López-Egea, 2005). In the firm’s report from 2008, 510 expatriates were interviewed, of which 144 were foreigners stationed in Spain and 366 of which, or 71%, were expatriates of Spanish origin, stationed elsewhere in the world (Álvarez Novoa & Gómez López-Egea 2008). In the firm’s report from 2011, 451 interviews were done, but the breakdown of the numbers of foreigners working in Spain and the number of Spanish expatriates working about was not provided (Álvarez Novoa et al., 2011). Therefore, we will take the data from the 2008 report because it provides an approximation of the profile of the Spanish expatriate, given that 71.8% of that sample was Spanish corporate expatriates.⁶ According to this same report, 72.4% of the expatriates were men, and 26.8% were women; 56% of the expatriates were married. With respect to the people who accompanied them, 44% expatriated alone. Half of the expatriates had university degrees, and 92.5% claimed to be fluent speakers of English (questions about Spanish were not asked). Finally, 73.9% declared having another European country as their destination. Another report, from 2009, also drawn up by a business school, reflects the results of a survey of 174 Spanish expatriates (Espinosa Romero, 2009). In this survey, 75.45% of the expatriates were men, and 25.55% were women; 40.50% were married, and 49.8% expatriated without being accompanied by their families. Additionally, 61% of those surveyed had a university education, and 51.8% had post-graduate studies. Finally, 33% of respondents said they did not know the local language, while 66% affirmed that they did.

The Subculture Characteristics of Corporate Expatriates

A culture can be broken down analytically into three broad elements: its structure of meanings, the practices that take place within it, and the mechanisms associated with those practices. The structure of meanings is composed of an appraising and a normative framework, which generates a collection of roles and some myths and ideologies that specify them. The practices reflect the rituals and lifestyles constructed and reconstructed through

interactions. Finally, the mechanisms are the objects on which that culture is projected and objectified (Carrithers, 1992; Jenks, 1993; Kuper, 1999). If we want to speak about the corporate expatriates in terms of a subculture, it should be possible to identify within it a structure of meanings, a series of shared practices, and some common mechanisms that arise from the interactions of its members and from the networks that they create beyond their countries of origin. In this synopsis, the related scientific literature and available evidence will be examined.

There is a certain amount of academic literature on expatriates, though it is fragmented and centered mainly on the management of the expatriate workers, especially their selection, training, and the problems referred to as “adjustment,” that is, their adaptation to the culture of the country to which they have been assigned (Boncori, 2013; Lazarova, 2015; Mirabal Martínez & Zapata Rotundo, 2009; Pascual Faura, 2006; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2005). We find, therefore, abundant literature on the means of managing expatriation but few sociological or anthropological reports on expatriates themselves.⁷ As Hugo Gaggiotti affirms:

Except from anthropology, there is no scientific literature that has studied the phenomenon of executives and managers of multinational companies sent to work outside their country. Despite the evident spatial dimension of this phenomenon, there are no empirical studies from other disciplines generally interested in mobility, or in the social dimension of the space that are not linked to the management of companies. (2006)

Richard Sennett (1998, 2006) describes four basic personality characteristics of workers sought by big, global corporations: flexibility and the ability to separate from the past, acceptance of disorder and fragmentation, the mental flexibility to solve problems, and the capacity to work on teams of short duration. These are traits consistent with the abilities solicited for expatriate candidates in the manuals on management, to which must be added what are called “communication and intercultural management skills” (Gaggiotti, 2006; Lin et al., 2012). One study done by an important business school and an international consulting firm reported the following conclusions:

According to survey respondents, the factors most valued by companies for the selection of workers to be expatriated are technical knowledge and experience (4.2)⁸ and the consideration of their professional career (3.9). Next, by order of importance, one finds other aspects like the capacity for cultural adaptation (3.8), leadership ability (3.7), and negotiation skills (3.5). The two factors with less consideration on the part of companies in order to select future expatriates, according to the companies themselves, are previous international experience (3.3) and the family circumstances (2.9). (Álvarez Novoa & Gómez López-Egea, 2008, p. 7)

From this ranking of ideal characteristics of the expatriate, as outlined by human resources departments, there arises a subtle, polymorphic culture, although perhaps not as unified as one would think. Some authors affirm that the context in which expatriates operate is key:

In Asia, North Americans, Germans, French, British, Dutch, Australians, Canadians, and Russians frequently see themselves as part of a sole multinational subculture. One [might normally consider] an American expatriated in Holland to be from a different culture, and the differences between the United States and the Netherlands are highlighted, but when they work in Asia, an American and a Dutchman are prone to feel that they are more or less from the same culture and part of the community of Western expatriates relative to the local community. (Hipsher, 2008, p. 71)

In other words, corporate expatriates are perceived to constitute a uniform collective in non-Western environments, at least from the point of view of an analyst, while the internal diversity is highlighted when the expatriation occurs within Western countries. Some authors suggest the necessity of overcoming this colonial perspective since it produces a distorted vision of the reality of the expatriates themselves (Fechter & Walsh 2012).

With respect to practices, one distinctive feature is mobility (Birtchnell & Caletrío 2014), with the airplane as a metaphor and the hotel as the enclave (Friedman, 2003). The airplane constitutes the best representation of a mobility popularized by the capitalist system (Anta, 2013), within which the expatriates work, and the airport and the concomitant hotels are the so-called “flow space” (Castells, 2000). The corporate expatriate lives in a local environment but from a mobile position. The local person will take a plane in order to take a vacation or to visit a relative, in what constitutes a sole, meaningful experience, while the expatriate lives the movement as routine and the settling in the territory as an interlude between trips.

When corporate expatriates live in a local environment, far from their countries of origin, case studies affirm that in work contexts, they tend to interact with Western-educated locals, whereas in their free time, they maintain close relationships with other expatriates of similar cultural origins (Beaverstock, 2002). Some of these studies show that expatriates tend to have limited relationships with locals and that they tend not to know the local language (Fechter, 2007)—though this may not be unexpected within communities that use English as a lingua franca. In a manual directed at future expatriates, one can read about the communication problems that an American businessperson who wants to live and work in Europe may encounter:

The differences begin with the language. The 15 countries in the European Union share 11 official languages. To those, one can add close to 50 minority languages, such as Catalan and Flemish. Fifty million people in the European Union speak one of those minority languages as their first language. And each one of those languages has a distinctive cultural background. *No one expects an American businessperson to speak any of these languages, except English, but they expect him or her to be sensitive to the different ways of thinking and behaving.... Those who are native English speakers, including the Americans, have the right to feel fortunate because English is the language of international business.* (Adams, 1998, chap. 3, emphasis added)

The relationships of expatriates are shaped in transnational networks that operate through entities rooted in the trans-local (Beaverstock, 2005). Put another way, expatriates tend to have relationships with the locals who are closest, culturally to the work environment and, during non-working hours, with other expatriates. Their relationships with other expatriates are developed and strengthened through networks affixed in the local environment but with an international projection that allows the expatriates to maintain and increase their global network of contacts. One example of this would be the clubs and establishments for expatriates (Beaverstock, 2011). There are ethnographies that show the strategies undertaken by expatriates to recreate a home far from their homelands, to create their own enclaves (Lauring & Selmer, 2009; Porter, 2009; Sanchez, 2005); the expatriate enclave within the host community is referred to as “gold cage” or “bubble” (Fechter, 2007). In the same way, there are studies on the role of the wives of corporate expatriates, since the majority of expatriates are men, and most of them are married or have a partner, which reflects the important role expatriate wives play in the creation and maintenance of a social network among corporate expatriates (Lauring & Selmer, 2010).

Despite their privileged position in the host country, expatriates do not necessarily enjoy a secure situation. Vered Amit-Talai (1997) shows that the expatriates on the Cayman

Islands did not have a consolidated position and often affirmed that their stay there put them in “limbo.” Their jobs in their countries of origin were not guaranteed upon their return, and, furthermore, the network of contacts among the Cayman expatriates was not taken as a given. This implies that some expatriates live in a culture in which they have to deal with a high degree of uncertainty given that neither their work nor their social relationships are assured. In light of this, some authors assert that expatriates construct a “security zone” in which otherness is defined in a limited way that often disregards the history and the geography of the surroundings they inhabit. This allows the expatriates to do business independently of their location, operating from a neoliberal logic (Hindman, 2009).

It is important to note that the experience of Western expatriates is not the only expatriate experience. Corporate expatriates from non-Western nationalities show different adaptive strategies in host countries than Western expatriates do. An example of this difference can be found in the experience of Japanese expatriates in the United States (Yamazaki & Christopher, 2007). Despite differences in the corporate expatriate experience, however, it remains the case that the greatest number of transnational corporations is from Western countries, and expatriate management teams are recruited, generally speaking, from among members of Western cultures—which does not necessarily mean from citizens of the corporation’s country of origin but rather from those who have been educated in the global management culture they share.

Finally, in relation to the material culture associated with the corporate expatriates, there are many publications in the form of manuals and books that help and support the expatriate (Adams, 1998; Hachey, 2010; Kohls, 2001; Kontrimas, 2006; Reuvid, 2009). They also have magazines like *Global Living Magazine*, *Expatriate Living for the International Lifestyle* in London, *Expatriates Magazine* in Paris, *Expatriate Lifestyle* or *The Expatriate* in Malasia, or magazines centered on a specific expatriate collective, like *The Expatriate*, focused on African expatriates. There are also expatriate web communities like www.expatriates.com, www.expats-blog.com, www.expatnetwork.com, or www.internations.org. Moreover, we can add to that the international economic and business literature that is found connected to this subculture.

Objectives, Hypothesis, and Methodology

The general objective of this research study consisted of analyzing the existence of a subculture typical of Spanish corporate expatriates and identifying a differentiating identity and lifestyle of that group. In light of this objective and of the available scientific literature, the following hypotheses were established: The first sustains that expatriates tend to create enclaves and meaningful relationships more with other expatriates than with the local population of the host country. Second, expatriates tend to both perceive themselves as other and to create a certain degree of identity as a member of a separate collective. Third, we hypothesize that certain, distinguishing lifestyles are created and that the expatriates often end up feeling settled in their positions as expatriates. Finally, expatriates tend to magnify the differences and problems with the culture of the country of residence compared to the culture of their country of origin and that of the collective of corporate expatriates.

In order to reach the objectives outlined and verify our hypotheses, a qualitative, methodological strategy was designed that would allow us to get beyond the restrictions associated with the quantitative precision of a collective like that of Spanish corporate expatriates. As a technique, 29 professional Spanish expatriates⁹ were interviewed in depth over a period of six months (Appendix, Table 1). The selection of the direct informants followed intentional and strategic criteria to guarantee, firstly, an adequate diversification of

the sample and, secondly, a reasonable saturation of the final discourse (Vallés, 2002). The interview script was organized around five thematic macro-axes: social relationships and enclaves, self-perception and identity, lifestyles, cultural problems and clashes, and settlement in the resident country.

As part of the criteria, it was established that all expatriates interviewed should be corporate expatriates who had been living outside of Spain for more than one year. Those interviewed included expatriates that had lived or had been living outside of Spain from anywhere from one year to 15 years. Moreover, and starting from the analysis of the available secondary data outlined in previous sections, the study also included the criteria that (1) women should account for at least 20% of those interviewed in order to account for the average female presence among corporate expatriates shown in previous studies and (2) 80% of the expatriates should have a minimum of university education. As such, of the 29 people interviewed, 22 were male, and seven were female; (women represented 24% of the individuals interviewed). In addition, 28 individuals (or 96% of those interviewed) had post-graduate degrees, either a master's degree or a doctoral degree.

Thirdly, in the available quantitative studies reviewed, half of all expatriates were married or in a relationship and lived abroad with their families. In this study, 55% of the sample was married or in a stable relationship, and their children lived with them in the host country. Finally, it was established that the socio-economic profile of the expatriates should be equal to or superior to that of the country of origin. Among the interviewees for this study, the socio-economic profile was variable, but in general it was upper-middle class. The salaries of the expatriates interviewed were at least double that paid to locals for an equivalent job in the host country. Almost all of the interviewees had social benefits, whether they included a house paid for by the company or corporation, health insurance, private security, a company car, or a communications expense account paid for by the corporation or institution.

With these strategic and intentional criteria, we sought informants that fit the different profiles characterized by international corporate expatriates according to what the available quantitative studies show so as to be able to later facilitate the comparison with other studies of the corporate expatriates of other nationalities.

Analysis of Results

The interviews were given in order to investigate the perception of the expatriates regarding the five proposed macro-axes themes: social relationships and enclaves, self-perception and identity, lifestyles, cultural problems and clashes, and settlement in the host country. The principle results of the interviews are shown below.

Social Relationships and Creation of Enclaves

In the first place, it must be pointed out that the majority of the interviewees confirmed that they maintained cordial relationships with the local population of the host country. However, said relationships were usually limited to the work environment and tended to be based on protocol and formality. Along general lines, the interviewees claimed two main justifications for such limited relations with locals: The expatriates asserted that when residing in countries with greater cultural distance (with respect to Spanish people), the local people did not want to have relationships with the expatriates. The interviewees also cited the fear of rejection by locals along racial or ethnic lines:

I am a foreigner, though I am a first-rate foreigner for being from Europe. The people with whom you have daily, regular, and domestic contact, in general, treat you well, assuming you don't open your mouth and speak in Spanish or have a

typically Spanish last name that is shared with Latino people.... If you are Latino, they are going to treat you differently, not always well, of course, but sometimes more warm-heartedly. As for specific problems in my relationships with North Americans who are not of Afro or Latino origin, for now, I've only a few, always related to my last name—they treat me like an illegal immigrant—and for having spoken Spanish. (Male, 52 years old, residing in the United States)

[Sigh] Relationships with the Japanese are of three types: non-existent, based on protocol, and invisible. They don't see us as someone to integrate into the community. At least that is my experience and that of my workmates. If you get together with them it is for business or protocol, company parties, meetings, and other such things that are very important there. (Male, 53 years old, residing in Japan)

When, on the other hand, the cultural distance between the expatriates and the host country is less, the interviewees typically affirmed that there was not so much difficulty making friends. However, it is worth noting that any difficulty in interacting with the locals was typically justified more by the attraction the expatriates felt towards their compatriots or others from similar cultures than by an outright rejection by the local population:

The truth is that in this country, the difficult thing is not making friends; people at work are very welcoming, and they quickly want to include you in their group of friends, but when it comes to *saudade*, as they say here—which means homesickness or longing for something—you try to look for a bit of your culture, to look for Spanish women or men, Italians, French people, or people closer to your culture, [if] only to speak about the news from your country, tell anecdotes with your own, celebrate holidays. (Female, 27 years old, residing in Brazil)

The relationships with people from [here] are very good, but they are not like those you make with other compatriots or Europeans. (Male, 33 years old, residing in Peru)

The norm, therefore, among the expatriates interviewed, was that interpersonal relationships of friendship and comradeship are tied to individuals with greater social and cultural proximity. Therefore, the interviewees hold that interpersonal relationships based on friendship tended to be forged in social spaces linked to the country of origin, in this case, Spain, to the European continent, or even more broadly, to Western culture:

Entertainment and the way of mixing in this micro-world is with the other European expatriates, and of course, [with] Spanish people; there aren't many, but some; some came after the crisis, sent here by their companies, while others are immigrant entrepreneurs, and a few...have been here since they were born but are of Spanish origin. (Woman, 44 years old, residing in Australia)

In [the] Emirates, social life is limited to your expatriate mates; with the local community you do not have a social life, save some exceptions that are business dinners or lunches. Moreover, if you are a woman, less. (Woman, 29 years old, residing in United Arab Emirates)

The principle function of the relationships between expatriates is mutual support. As one expatriated person residing in Brazil explained: "We give each other advice and have fun together. A little piece of home" (Woman, 27 years old, residing in Brazil). The idea of re-creating a home away from home was frequently mentioned. The places where those social relationships materialized, for the most part, were in private homes or entertainment establishments such as bars or restaurants, sometimes run by or owned by a Spanish emigrant. Also mentioned with frequency were interactions through social networks and instant messaging groups.

Self-Perception and Identity Construction

In relation to self-perception, it should be stressed that the way others see the expatriates (Bonache et al., 2016; Young, 2007) is present in many of the narrations analyzed. Many expatriates asserted that they were perceived as foreign by the local population, inhabiting the role of tourist or immigrant—even, some confided, as illegal immigrant. And, in many cases, the expatriates' perceptions of themselves aligned with the resident population's perception of the expatriates, who began to see themselves as "*guiris*,"¹⁰ tourists, and immigrants:

You are always a foreigner in the land of others; though you speak the same language, and [though] they are friendly and treat you like one of the family, you will always be a foreigner, a Spanish person outside of his country, and furthermore, you are in a country that was once a colony. (Male, 33 years old, residing in Peru)

I believe that they see me as a strange bird, and though you quickly begin to have more friends from [here], don't kid yourself, you are not like them; you are from the south of Europe. I identify myself with those like me, with the others that are not from there, (the nationality isn't so important, though it has an influence, nor is race, but it is important to be a foreigner; that identifies you and unites you). Yes, you identify the immigrant with the expatriated, the work and the level of the labor, or of income, is what you identify with, though to me that is mostly unimportant. (Male, 39 years old, residing in Germany)

The identity of Spanish corporate expatriates is constructed from different superimposed sources that appear repeatedly in the interviews. First, the nationality, the region, and the city where one comes from were frequently mentioned as basic sources in the construction of personal identity. The country, concretely, repeatedly appears:

Only when I am with Spanish people do I feel myself, as the humor and the meaning of things are very different from how one interprets things here. (Woman, 44 years old, residing in Australia)

Second, the company for which one works is frequently mentioned, as is the job position, and the level of education. Third, multiple references are made to gender, which sometimes has more weight in the identity formation of the expatriates than it would have in their country of origin, especially in countries in which the relationships between genders are different than what is typical in Spain. Finally, certain and more folkloric aspects such as holidays, religion, or gastronomy, or things related to entertainment, like supporting a football team, are also present:

...Mostly I feel more identified with my compatriots, especially those with whom I get together to watch the news or a football match; we have our pools and our things, some are Real Madrid supporters, others are Atletico [de Madrid] supporters. Too, you start to feel better when your male and female friends are from the same city, sharing experiences with them. (Male, 33 years old, residing in Peru)

Therefore, expatriate identity construction is about a diverse construction but one in which the nationality and the culture associated with it continue being key. The expatriate who had completed her international experience at the time of her interview confirmed this:

...You identify yourself with anyone who has a relationship with your country or your culture, Latino, or European. [During my experience], I identified myself with my job and level of education, but the former has more weight, the proximity of your culture of origin. (Woman, 49 years old, resided in the United States)

Lifestyles

The lifestyles that come out of the interviews with Spanish corporate expatriates varied according to the host country. Three elements were key in their accounts: schedules, security, and the food. With respect to the schedules, making reference to countries having a more “European” schedule than the habitual one in Spain was frequent, that is, local schedules were typically earlier and more adjusted to the hours of sunlight than the Spanish expatriates were accustomed to:

We think that in Latin America everything is like here. How naïve we are! Not at all. The schedule is European, not Spanish, the people get up earlier and go to bed earlier. (Male, 38 years old, residing in Colombia)

The lack of security was a concern, especially among the expatriates residing in Latin American or African countries. It was usually pointed out, however, that respecting certain norms of behavior is often basic to maintaining security and that when such norms are followed, the sense of insecurity decreases. In this sense, the expatriates tried to deal with environments perceived as unsafe by adapting to the surroundings. In countries that are economically more developed, concerns about security were not present.

Food was also an area mentioned to mark the differences between the country of origin and the host country. Along general lines, all expatriates indicated that the host country food was quite different not only from Spanish food but also from the ethnic food from the host nation as it was prepared and served in Spain:

They don't live like they do here; in their country they have their schedules and their customs, which marks the day-to-day; the food is [also] not the typical food from a Westernized Moroccan restaurant. (Male, 37 years old, residing in Morocco)

The lifestyles of the expatriates, in general, are seen to be influenced in a very superficial way by the life in the host country. In fact, aspects such as gastronomy, schedules, ways of perceiving insecurity, and the customs and holidays are frequently mentioned. However, aspects more central to the culture are hardly mentioned by the expatriates. Moreover, the expatriates seem to have carried preconceived ideas about what their lives were going to be like in the host country and to have accepted stereotypes that were based on an imaginary social collective of the country of origin (Castoriadis 2013).

Cultural Problems and Clashes

When expatriates speak about cultural problems and clashes, they refer to the lifestyles which are alluded to above, that is, the food, schedules, and security. The theme of security appears in all the interviews, especially in the countries with less socio-economic development.

Nigeria is a country where contrasts do not exist because there is nothing; we didn't leave the security enclosure. We ate once a day, and what we ate was European food; contact with the local population was minimal, and if there was [any], it was a brutal clash. (Male, 38 years old, residing in Nigeria)

Security is a necessity and one pays for it; as with healthcare, it's very mediocre. (Male, 39 years old, residing in Brazil)

Too, there is emphasis on the different standards regarding healthcare and food safety. The food is another problem, since eating outside of the restaurants carries the risk of catching some disease; I had stomach problems from a parasite..., water only in bottles, and no ice-cubes in the drinks. (Male, 37 years old, residing in Morocco)

As for healthcare, I had a stomach problem due to a parasite, and until I returned to Madrid, it didn't get better. (Male, 33 years old, residing in Peru)

In developed countries, the interviewees did not find any difference in the matter of security. However, in some expatriate locations, like the United States and Canada, though the sensation of insecurity was not acute, there was nevertheless a cultural clash between the Spanish expatriates and the host nation with respect to attitudes towards security and, especially, concerning the North American use of firearms or weapons as a means of combating insecurity.¹¹

The only thing that happened to me was that they pick-pocketed my wallet in New York..., but in Madrid that can also happen to you. (Male, 52 years old, residing in the United States)

Well, apart [from] their taking your wallet..., there isn't anything else. (Male, 39 years old, residing in Germany)

I have never seen anything, nor have I experienced anything dangerous. A friend, yes, he was in a store that was robbed.... Here, having guns is allowed..., [which] is [itself] a danger. (Woman, 32 years old, residing in Canada)

The topic of languages was also strongly highlighted in the interviews, either because the language was different and impeded effective communication, or because, though they spoke the same language, different dialects and slang made it difficult to communicate effectively. One 38-year-old male residing in Colombia asserted: "The slang, even though you speak Spanish, is different; during the first weeks, I didn't understand, and then you have the double meanings of words...." Other themes mentioned that are seen as sources of problems, or at least produce a cultural clash, include different standards with respect to the fulfillment of social norms and laws, including customs, norms related to driving, and punctuality or the adherence to set schedules.

Settlement in the Host Country

One common theme among all expatriate interviews was the significance of home or roots. When immersed in a global and interconnected society, even a culture centered around mobility (not only work-wise but culturally), roots and origins remain important for those people who are outside of their countries, away from their immediate social surroundings and culture. In the interviews, two distinct profiles of corporate expatriates were detected in terms of those who reported being settled in the host country and those who expressed desire to return to Spain. The younger people, or those with greater affective or family bonds with the country of origin, showed a greater desire to return and less connection with the host country. In contrast, older expatriates and those who had established family or affective bonds with people from the host country or with other non-Spanish expatriates tended to see the situation of expatriation as a longer-term project. Consequently, they showed less desire to return to Spain, either rejecting the idea outright or intending to postpone it indefinitely (limiting themselves to brief stays, vacation time, or planning for future retirement).

Among the expatriates who did not show desire to return to Spain, nostalgia was seen as only a temporary feeling that arises at very personal moments—the birth of a child, the death of a friend or relative, important family dates, and holidays, such as Christmas. In these individuals, the decreased level of homesickness and the increased connection to the host country (or to any previous host countries) was the result of a parental link, constructed with a local spouse, meaning they had married a native resident of the host country or an expatriate from another country and critically, had children that they were raising in the host country:

If we return to Spain, it will be to retire; I don't see myself in Spain now, with my daughter and my husband here. (Woman, 44 years old, residing in Australia)

I've been out of Spain too long; all my adult life has been abroad.... Each one of my daughters was born in a different country; my wife is not Spanish.... If I return it will be to retire or to spend some time, but no more. (Male, 41 years old, residing in France)

After 12 years, my case is a bit special given that I've made my life in Malaysia, [though] I would like to be able to return one day, mostly in order to take care of my parents, who are getting old. (Male, 43 years old, residing in Malaysia).

This finding does not indicate that having offspring or "building a home" in the host country is the only factor behind some expatriates' postponing of a return to the country of origin. Some expatriates choose to remain in foreign countries for lifestyle reasons: for the experience of living outside of their country, seeing the opportunity of being an expatriate as an adventure, the freedom of being outside of their surroundings, or the opportunity to grow professionally or personally. In such cases, individuals intend to return home but only after a certain amount of time as an internationalized professional. This finding indicates that both making a home in the host country and the desire to have international work experience are factors in the reduction of nostalgia among expatriates, although the desire to return home does not entirely disappear in the second case.

Conclusions and Discussion

The interviews with Spanish corporate expatriates show a certain level diversity among individual experiences, but overall, there exists a marked homogeneity in the responses. First, as the first hypothesis maintains, Spanish corporate expatriates have a marked tendency to establish relationships of comradeship and friendship with other corporate expatriates, especially with other Spanish expatriates and emigrants. In the same way, they create physical enclaves in establishments or private homes where a cultural home is recreated that is similar to that of the country of origin. They also use social networks and instant messaging groups in order to create and maintain these networks and enclaves. In this sense, the Spanish expatriates tend to behave in a way that is similar to what is reflected in the scientific literature on expatriates of other nationalities.

With respect to second hypothesis, regarding self-perception as a separate collective, the interviews show that Spanish expatriates tend to see themselves as forming a distinct collective within the host country. They tend to have the notion that the host society sees them as tourists or immigrants. As such, their sense of otherness comes about not only as a result of identity construction that emphasizes their cultural "Spanishness" but also as a result of being considered an outsider in the host country. Put in another way, the expatriates tend to feel like elements outside the host society; as such when it comes to creating their identities, they continue to rely on the culture of Spanish society, of which they feel a part.

Thirdly, we suggest that some expatriates create certain lifestyles of their own and wind up feeling settled in their situation of expatriation. In this case, the results are less conclusive. These Spanish corporate expatriates seem to create and enjoy a lifestyle that is distinct from the host country, although this seems to be more the result of a desire to recreate the culture of the country of origin than to intentionally create a new lifestyle of expatriates. The number of expatriates who achieve this sense of being settled in the host country, however, is relatively low. The majority of Spanish expatriates interviewed tended to consider their situation something temporary, a brief but significant experience that would end with their return to their cultural home. Only those that established families or made affective connections, either with other expatriates or with people from the host country, showed greater rootedness in the host country and a greater acceptance of the situation of expatriation.

What is more, some of those individuals expressed a desire to remain expatriates, accepting the likelihood that the host country would change according to the necessities of their company or organization.

Finally, it was sustained that some expatriates tend to magnify the differences between and the problems with the culture of the host country and the culture of the country of origin—and that of the collective of corporate expatriates. Indeed, a certain tendency to emphasize the differences with respect to the culture of origin was evident in interviewee responses, although a positive valuation was also detected regarding many of these differences. For example, some affirmed that the food in the host country was very different but also that it was “good” or in some cases “better” than the food of their country of origin. In other cases, the interviews showed that some expatriates tend to minimize these differences and to suggest that with particular mechanisms, such differences could become irrelevant. For example, when such expatriates spoke about the lack of security in some environments, they were more likely to suggest that they became accustomed to it and that by following certain rules and protocols, it was less worrying. Despite these differences, the corporate expatriate collective saw itself as a source of advice and support for all its members in order to get over the differences and problems derived from cultural clashes. Similar to the results of other literature, the Spanish corporate expatriates identify themselves with other expatriates, *i.e.*, with those who are found to be culturally similar—be they compatriots or not. In short, the study undertaken here reaffirms the findings of existing literature, which indicate that expatriates generally spend their free time and end enjoy forms of entertainment with other expatriates of any nationality.

In sum, the results of the research undertaken in this study of Spanish corporate expatriates suggest that on one hand, the idea of a global subculture of expatriates carries a certain amount of weight. People who are expatriated, be they in America, Europe, Australia, Asia, or Africa, tend to create their own enclaves. Yet, on the other hand, it is also true that these enclaves are primarily organized according to certain national criteria. As such, the identity of “expatriate” and the culture of an expatriate collective forms as expatriates of one nationality unite with other expatriates of the same country, region, or city. The collective is then expanded by adding expatriates from countries of the same continent or those of similar cultures. This study concludes that Spanish corporate expatriates seem to feel primarily Spanish, acting as a globalized national elite. The contrast with the host culture compels them to seek the companionship and support of others of their native, national culture, and when this is not possible, others of similar cultures, *i.e.*, with the corporate expatriates from other nations. These findings are consistent with the studies that have been conducted of other expatriate collectives, such as British corporate expatriates (Beaverstock, 2002, 2005, 2011). Nationality, a common language, and the situation of expatriation are key when it comes to constructing enclaves and establishing social relationships with other expatriates. Beyond this study, broader comparative studies of a quantitative nature would be necessary in order to confirm the tendencies observed in this present study and in the existing literature on expatriates.

Notes

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² It should be noted that the designation of expatriates as cosmopolitan is not perfect since there can also be non-cosmopolitan expatriates, such as colonial representatives in empires.

³ However, in the last few decades, many corporations from all over the world have expatriated staff.

⁴ This organization is, in their own terms, “a non-profit association constituted in 2004, for Spanish companies with international presence, whose principle objective is to promote international labor mobility.” Currently, it consists of 42 business organizations, among them are the most important Spanish transnational corporations. See: <http://www.feex.org/>.

⁵ This proportion also appears in the reports from the consulting firm Brookfield (2012, 2014).

⁶ In the questionnaire, they did not even ask the nationality of the expatriates. We are aware of the difficulties in extrapolating this data in this way, but these reports are found among the limited sources of available secondary data to discover the profile of the Spanish corporate expatriate.

⁷ In Spain, we find, nearly alone within the anthropological and sociological studies on this theme, one doctoral dissertation by Cecilia Donnersmarck (1998), based on interviews with Brazilian women expatriated in Spain.

⁸ Inse Factors were scored following a scale of 0 to 5. 5 indicating the maximum value of the factor for companies and 0 null interest.

⁹ Twenty eight of the 29 expatriates interviewed were stationed internationally at the time of their interview, and one had already concluded her expatriate experience at the time of her interview.

¹⁰ This is the word that is used with a certain disrespect and humor for foreigners in Spain, especially those from Western Europe and the United States.

¹¹ Spain one of the most restrictive countries in the world when it comes to permitting citizens access to firearms.

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Appendix

Table 1. Corporate expatriates interviews

	Host country	Gender	Age	Expatriation time
1	Brazil	Man	39	3 years
2	United Arab Emirates	Woman	29	1 year
3	France	Man	41	15 years (10 USA/5 France)
4	USA	Woman	29	3 years
5	Canada	Woman	32	4 years
6	Turquía	Man	42	7 years (1 Turkey/ 2 Malaysia/4 USA)
7	USA	Man	52	9 years
8	Germany	Man	39	12 years
9	Colombia	Man	38	4 years
10	Nigeria	Man	38	1 year
11	Morocco	Man	37	1 year
12	Australia	Woman	44	23 years (15 UK/ 8 Australia)
13	Brazil	Woman	27	1 year
14	Malaysia	Man	43	12 years
15	Peru	Man	35	4 years
16	Japan	Man	53	20 years (not consecutive)
17	USA	Woman	49	2 years
18	India	Man	31	1 year
19	Mexico	Man	29	1 year
20	Belgium	Man	30	2 years
21	Germany	Man	54	1 year
22	UK	Man	40	2 years
23	USA	Man	36	1 year
24	Mexico	Man	26	2 years
25	Germany	Man	27	2 years
26	France	Woman	42	3 years
27	Italy	Man	26	1 year
28	Panama	Man	52	3 years
29	Argentina	Man	48	1 year