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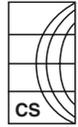
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Abstract

International mobility is a growing phenomenon in which academicians are highly represented. While studies on transnationalism have widely focused on the mobility of people in terms of migrancy and exile, homecoming has been much less studied. This article contributes to filling this gap by analysing the homecoming experiences of three social scientists who have coincided in a Catalan university. The narrative of their personal trajectories and experiences of return allows for an understanding of homecoming in relation to wider discourses of mobility in the context of globalization. Contrary to dominant beliefs, homecoming is approached not as a return to one's origins, but as a movement that implies dislocation and displacement and puts the homcomer in a position that is, in important ways, not essentially dissimilar to that of the stranger. The authors argue that the study of homecoming sheds light on certain neglected aspects of contemporary globalization, such as the existential limits to the international mobility of people or the favouring of local attachments over global options combined with the prevalence of cosmopolitan orientations. The article also calls attention to the cultural transfers of returnees to their countries of origin as well as to their world-making activities.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism, displacement, homecoming, return migration, strangeness

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Introduction

This article focuses on the experiences of three returning social scientists who have coincided in a Catalan university after having been internationally mobile for a significant period of time. It describes our personal trajectories and experiences of return, while it also seeks to understand them in relation to wider discourses of mobility in the context of globalization. Homecoming is approached not as a return to one's origins, but as a movement that implies dislocation and displacement and puts the homecomer in a position that is, in important ways, not essentially dissimilar to that of the stranger. It is argued that the study of homecoming sheds light on certain neglected aspects of contemporary globalization, such as the existential limits to the international mobility of people or the favouring of local attachments over global options. Furthermore, it calls attention to the cultural transfers brought about by returnees to their countries of origin as well as to their continued world-making activities.

In the three cases, our return was made possible by the Spanish research programme Ramón y Cajal (RyC). Since 2001, this has been the only nationwide programme through which scholars educated or working abroad could enter and become integrated into a historically endogamous university system. Hailed as the flagship of the Spanish scientific system in terms of human resources, the RyC programme provided a centrally funded five-year research contract and starting funds to support independent research lines. University authorities in Spain compete strongly to attract RyC researchers to their institutional setting. However, at departmental level, the RyC figure has not always been properly understood, and has sometimes been met with indifference or distrust. The integration and permanence prospects of RyC researchers in Spanish universities proved to be a difficult matter, although the programme gradually became consolidated as a tenure-track pathway into Spanish academia. Since 2010, in the context of the present economic crisis, reiterated cuts on a science budget already significantly below European average, and a 10% replacement rate for retiring personnel since December 2011, its very essence and continuity are being questioned.¹

In spite of our present coincidence as RyC researchers, in a move back from more central locations within the global higher education field, our trajectories are highly dissimilar in terms of length of stay abroad, career stage in which we left home, itinerary and disciplinary orientations. One of us has spent 14 years in the UK, obtaining both her university degree and her PhD in a British university and then staying on and working as a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer, while another spent 13 years in the US, completing her master's and PhD and working as researcher, adjunct and visiting assistant professor in US universities. The third one has spent four years in the Netherlands working as a postdoctoral researcher. We are currently affiliated to departments of sociology and geography, although two of us have highly interdisciplinary backgrounds and define their research primarily in interdisciplinary terms.

On the homecomer's various displacements

This article provides a common frame for the analysis of these divergent experiences and orientations, without subsuming them under a single voice. Each of the three authors is

responsible for a section that has been written individually and that functions as both a personal reflection on the subject matter and a case study description of a particular trajectory. We have not agreed on common themes on which to base our personal narrations, opting to give plenty of leeway to our diverse academic interests, views and experiences of return, but our perceptions and writing have obviously influenced one another as the project progressed. A common frame through which the different narratives can be related to each other and examined in more general terms is developed below around the concepts of homecoming and displacement, and is taken up again in the concluding section. Since the 1980s, biographical methods and autoethnography have called attention to research as a political and socially conscious act, emphasizing the centrality of stories rather than theories in social research and the influence of personal experience on the research process (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Ellis et al., 2011: 11–12). Aware of the dangers concerning the biographical illusion and close to Pierre Bourdieu's (2006) perspective of self-analysis, we analyse rather than narrate biographical facts, seeking to understand ourselves in relation to the field that has shaped our position-takings, which also allows us to explore their implications and relevance for wider issues concerning the nature of contemporary mobilities.

In this context, two different frames of interpretation are proposed: the concept of homecoming and that of displacement. Whereas the stranger, from Simmel to Bauman, has figured prominently in social theory, the homecomer has occupied a much more marginal place. This is mirrored in the relative neglect of return migration in migration research, which has been described as 'the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration' (King, quoted in Stefansson, 2004: 5). Homecoming cannot be easily accommodated within the predominant focus of much migration research on migration as a one-way process and on integration in the host society, nor is it necessarily made visible in current approaches that emphasize transnationalism and the circularity of movement.

However, a number of studies have started to highlight homecoming as a way of shedding light on certain neglected aspects of contemporary globalization. First, when homecoming is approached as a reality rather than a myth, it becomes not a nostalgic longing for the past, but a future oriented social project (Stefansson, 2004), a 'civic 'journey to the future' inspired by the ideal of a cosmopolitan *Weltverbesserer* (world improver) from below' (Darieva, 2011: 492). Thus, Bude and Dürrschmidt distinguish homesickness as a future-directed urge of 'belonging to' a specific context with its attached commitments and responsibilities, from nostalgia as a backwards-directed 'longing for' bygone times and situations, calling for a reassessment of the social figure of the homecomer as embodying the realization of the limits of global omnipresence (2010: 491, 493). As a powerful emblem against 'flow speak', the homecomer who, in the midst of global opportunity chooses local attachment, 'stands for a research agenda that sees the paradigmatic experiences of globalisation not only in outbound mobility and deterritorialisation, but takes seriously the in-bound consequences of the same' (Bude and Dürrschmidt, 2010: 493).

Second, recognizing the social role of the homecomer calls attention to the transfer of social and cultural (and in the specificity of our case, scientific) capital. The homecomer is a crucial figure in this process, as he or she brings home new understandings and practices acquired abroad, effectively becoming an agent of transformation and renewal. This

should not just be viewed as a mere transfer between localities, or from a global core to localized peripheries. As Darieva shows in her study of transnational engagement of second- and third-generation Armenians in the US with post-socialist Armenia, this local involvement with the homeland is simultaneously an involvement with global issues such as 'development' and 'democracy', so that it can be appropriately conceptualized through the notion of diasporic cosmopolitanism (Darieva, 2011). In this perspective, it is not transnational mobility or border-crossing as such but openness to the world and to others (Delanty, 2009) that are seen to be distinctive of cosmopolitanism. A focus on homecoming and on the simultaneous experiences of rootedness and openness that force migrants to creatively respond to their multiple attachments in new ways, to engage in forms of cosmopolitan sociability through which social relations of inclusiveness and openness to the world are created (Darieva, 2011: 491; Glick Schiller et al., 2011: 400, 402), calls attention to seemingly contradictory attitudes and practices that have tended to be underestimated in the growing literature on cosmopolitanism.

Third, homecoming is a complex and highly destabilizing process, both for the individuals involved and for their communities. On the one hand, as Bude and Dürschmidt point out, how much of the outside world the homecomer can successfully transplant serves as a test for the openness of place (2010: 493). On the other hand, homecomers face difficulties and ruptures, not merely because they need to adapt to a place that has been transformed as much as they have changed themselves in their absence, a place which is familiar and yet strangely foreign, but also because they encounter explicit resistance, or ambivalence at the very least, towards the newness which they represent. These complexities and ambiguities, which will be amply illustrated in the following sections, require negotiations and inventive arrangements. In this sense, we argue that the transformation of homecoming into a form of mobile creative cosmopolitanism (Darieva, 2011: 505) can be viewed as a response to these difficulties and necessary accommodations.

Nevertheless, the concept of homecoming, even if approached as a future-oriented social project, is still not free from connotations which seem to somehow deny these very complexities and ambiguities. This is because a mythical notion of homecoming as the closing of a circle and the restoration of order, as in Odysseus' model, is powerful in our culture. We therefore adopt a second frame of reference, that of displacement, in order to complement and, at the same time, destabilize an implicit view of homecoming as a return to one's origins. The perspective of displacement emphasizes movement, but also dislocation and the impossibility of return as the closing of a circle. Displacement is traditionally associated with the identity of the foreigner (see, for example, Sennett, 2011), while the degree to which the homecomer is also a displaced figure tends to be underestimated. We wish to reclaim displacement for an analysis of the homecomer, the person who, having returned home, finds her or himself estranged and distant in many ways from a world which is supposedly taken for granted. In particular, we argue that the experience of displacement confers us an outside/inside duality as researchers, which marks the ambivalences of our present situation and forces a dimension of self-doubt and inventiveness that can lead to the forms of creative cosmopolitanism alluded to above. Displacement can also give origin to a fertile space of freedom, a freedom of self apart from place (Sennett, 2011: 89), when it is associated to the experience of the homecomer and not exclusively to that of the foreigner.

We distinguish, in this context, four types of displacement, which have shaped our trajectories and current position-takings in different ways: spatial-territorial displacement, temporal displacement, linguistic displacement and disciplinary-academic displacement. Spatial-territorial displacement refers to our geographical migrations within the same and different countries. As Ricoeur (1962) asserts, the discovery of a plurality of cultures is not an innocuous experience, as suddenly it is possible that ‘others exist’ and that we may just be an ‘other’ among others. Geographical displacements even within the same country, as identified by Henry Lefebvre’s work on the Pyrénées (1965) and autobiography (1975), can generate complicated but fruitful dialectical relationships between life and thoughts. This conflictual life-space displacement can be perceived, as Lefebvre does, as an advantage, displaying this outsider experience as a credential: ‘I am Occitan, that is to say, peripheral – and global’ (Lefebvre, 1975: 60). Spatial-territorial displacement allows the renegotiation of boundaries and the construction of hybrid identities, as Soja (1996) further elaborates in his concept of ‘third space’.

Temporal displacement is analysed through our own biographical displacements as individuals shaped by our gender and age. For two of us our international mobility has meant coming back to more junior academic positions. Furthermore, symbolically the three of us have experienced return as a form of going back in time. We are older than colleagues in (teaching-based) non-permanent positions, whereas academics of our own age groups tend to occupy permanent posts. Additionally, for a significant number of RyC researchers, return roughly coincides with starting up a family. Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1998) provide in their accounts of the individualizing tendencies that shape what they approach in terms of the post-familial family, a frame for approaching this issue which is taken up below.

Through linguistic displacement, in terms of the language that we have adopted in our spatial-territorial displacements, we have become translated individuals. In this context, Salman Rushdie states, ‘Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained’ (1991: 17). Like Rushdie, we maintain that something is gained, rather than lost, in translation, and propose that it is more than just central linguistic capital for the benefit of our own academic careers.

Finally, academic displacement refers to our shifts in terms of research focus and academic settings. We have returned from Anglo-Saxon – or Anglo-Saxonized – university systems, which are known for being more market oriented, research-intensive and competitive than those in Southern Europe (Clark, 1983), and also more connected to global academic debates. Furthermore, whereas managerialism and entrepreneurship are at the centre of the Anglo-Saxon university model, Southern universities traditionally respond to more centralized models of organization in which results (in terms of external funding, publications, etc.) are not so crucial in the regulation of academics’ behaviour (Mora, 2001).

Homecoming as an unfinished project

I returned to Barcelona in 2010 after a long intermittent trajectory abroad which spans 20 years, involves two European countries – Belgium and Great Britain – and five different

cities; this very intermittence, composed of multiple movements back and forth, being an example of what Nikos Papastergiadis has described in terms of the multiplicity of directions and the complex patterns of contemporary migration (2010: 247). Therefore, this is not my first or only homecoming. The first return, and still the longest, was on finishing a first degree in sociology at Glasgow University, after having spent six years abroad. I had benefited in the late 1980s and early 1990s from the incipient policies that greatly facilitated free movement within countries of the EU, at least for students. Both in Belgium and Scotland, European students were for the first time treated as home students for the purpose of university fees. I also obtained, while still a student in Brussels, an Erasmus grant for a stay of six months at the University of Glasgow, after which I decided to transfer and finish my degree at Glasgow, which became my intellectual home.

On my return to Barcelona after my first degree, I struggled with the realities of work while trying to continue my studies at postgraduate level. My research interests were in the sociology of culture, which did not exist, and I ended up in a PhD programme on the philosophy of culture, which seemed the most closely related field. In retrospect, and even if I was not successful at the time in finding a home in the Spanish university system, I did unwittingly find the most suitable place for my research. My focus became the work of Walter Benjamin and especially of Theodor Adorno, who is often too readily dismissed as a cultural elitist by a strong cultural studies tradition in Britain. A fees-only award from the ESRC for European students, combined with a maintenance scholarship from Glasgow University, enabled me to embark on a PhD back in Glasgow. Having found my intellectual home made me no less a stranger,² who was able to thrive in the unusual freedom that being an outsider grants, and to build on the ambiguities of involvement and detachment. This led to the writing of a thesis on a hybrid genre of literary journalism in Latin America which charted peripheral modernity through its fragmentary narratives, applying and questioning the relevance of European theories about the division between high and low culture. I later worked as a researcher in an interdisciplinary research centre in England, before obtaining a lecturer position in a sociology department where nearly half of its members were like me, foreigners.

One of the critiques directed against 'flow speak' within some globalization theory points to the fact that it emphasizes the lure of global options to the detriment of factors linked to existential possibilities that effectively limit these options. This 'lived selectivity' refers to the opportunities provided by the life cycle of individuals and families, which counterbalances the intrinsic risk of 'chronic disembeddedness' associated to mobility in search of self-assertion (Bude and Dürrschmidt, 2010: 487). Thus, family commitments at different moments of the individual life cycle will determine one's choices when facing global options. In my instance (and in the stories of many others with similar trajectories) this has certainly been the case. Education was the main purpose of moving as a young, unattached individual and continued to weigh heavily on the scale even at a later stage, leading to what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1998) have approached in terms of the individualizing forces that converge in the post-familial family, marked by the difficulty of coordinating the centripetal biographies of individuals in search of self-development. In this context, breaking with what these authors consider today's market demands for individual, totally mobile persons becomes an act of explicit refusal of one's global options, which increasingly threaten a sustainable family life,

among other social bonds. The birth of my son and the difficulty of maintaining transnational family arrangements thus finally made homecoming the only viable option.

Edward Said (2000) has defined migrancy and exile as a discontinuous state of being. Yet, to me this only fully resonates when I reflect on the experience of homecoming, not on that of being away from home. To the fact that my past history seems to become obliterated and only resurfaces as distant fragmentary memories that an all-encompassing present cannot fully accommodate is added an essential lack of comprehension, of being able to find my way in a situation and context which I am only slowly starting to master. This is what Alfred Schütz (1976) primarily referred to as the experience of the stranger, not of the homecomer. Thus, I still find myself applying schemes of perception that I have learned in British universities and lacking the adequate knowledge of situations that continuously make me feel out of place. In a reversal of Schütz's insights, I felt like a fish in the water when I was a foreigner, but have become a stranger on my homecoming.

Being a stranger at home has definitely less advantages than being one abroad, leads not to enjoying a great deal of freedom that can be creatively exploited but to inadequacy, and represents a handicap that can significantly limit one's possibilities of survival. Part of this inadequacy can be directly attributed to the particularities of my current position as RyC researcher. Francisco Tapiador (2011) describes a 'Cajal' researcher as a parachutist: 'Someone unknown, paid by the government, who falls from the sky into a research group with the objective of reinforcing it.' Feeling a stranger is thus not just a subjective matter but context related, and derives from occupying an uneasy and ambiguous position in a university system that favours the organization of relatively self-enclosed, highly hierarchical research groups. In this context, Tapiador stresses that it is not just good work, publications and securing research funds but a lot of *savoir faire*, some good luck and the ability to navigate within the system that will be essential for guaranteeing one's permanence.

It is true that, as one of the co-writers of this article insists, our particular position also enables us to have a much greater impact than we would have if we stayed abroad. This is not just about 'the responsibility of trying to improve the system from within', as Tapiador notes, but essentially a matter of introducing newness and a fundamental dynamism that is seen to be still relatively foreign in the Spanish higher education system. Our teaching and research, however outlandish and out of place, transplant what is common practice at the institutions that occupy a central position in the global higher education system at a time when internationalization and global competitiveness are meant to be the way ahead for Spanish universities. Conversely, homecoming and reconnecting with our mother tongue and the world of our childhood, even with the backwardness that marks Spain's semi-peripheral position in the global economy, can revert productively in the nature of our work, especially given the fluid relationship between social scientific disciplines and our own existential realities. This is an aspect not contemplated in Bude and Dürschmidt's (2010: 491–493) argument for a shift from routes to roots, but can nevertheless prove decisive in the life of social scientists, as for example in Adorno's decision to return to Germany in the 1960s (Adorno, 1998).

The experience of being a foreigner in my own home has been counterbalanced by the pleasures of lecturing in Catalan, my mother tongue. Without the inadequacy of accent,

the inferiority complex of speaking a borrowed tongue, assuming an immediacy and transparency that are in fact no less deceptive. Lecturing in Catalan I have been able to feel at home, in a momentary escape from what Julia Kristeva (1991) approached as the silence of polyglots. On the other hand, with respect to writing I am, and intend to remain, at least for the time being, a translated writer. Global asymmetries and inequalities work here in my favour: my weak position as a stranger is reversed when we come to publishing in an international field dominated by English, a fact which, not without some reason, can provoke a certain resentment.

I would like to finish this account of my homecoming with a question and a reflection on hospitality. Will Catalan university be as hospitable as British university has been to me? I am grateful for the unconditional hospitality in allowing me to enter, in a context in which entrance if you are a stranger to the system and the individuals involved is by no means easy. Yet, by necessity this hospitality can no longer be forthcoming to someone who is, after all, not a foreigner. The question should then be rephrased as to how permeable will this environment be to the unfamiliar views and practices which I bring on my return. The success of my homecoming will depend on the ability to find a space that allows for some degree of recognition of this difference, a space that can again become a home even when its immediacy and unquestionability have been fundamentally shattered.

Returning to an old/new university setting

In 1999, I finished my bachelor's degree from the Balearic Islands University with an Erasmus scholarship at the University of Strathclyde, in Glasgow. At that time, I was one of the first students enjoying this scholarship at my university. This first international experience encouraged me to move from Mallorca to Barcelona where, first, I would take a postgraduate course in international development studies and, afterwards, I would enrol in the doctoral programme in sociology. In 2003 I obtained a scholarship that allowed me to carry out PhD studies full-time in the context of a competitive R&D project on education inequalities in Latin America.

Aware of the job continuity difficulties at my own university, I applied for a postdoctoral researcher position at the International Development Studies Department of the University of Amsterdam. At that time, I found it extraordinary that the position was openly advertised and that they invited people from different parts of the world without any previous contact with the Dutch university system to take an interview. Even though my application was finally successful, my expectations of getting the position were low because of the recruitment practices in Spanish universities, where academic jobs were given often in advance to 'internal' candidates and publicly advertised only to fulfil legal procedures (Pereyra et al., 2006). In fact, as Lamo de Espinosa (2001) argues, academic politics in Spanish universities are all about the control of the reproduction of the academic staff.³ Between 2007 and 2011, my postdoctoral work in Amsterdam developed in the framework of a new research programme that studied the relationship between education policy and economic and social development from multiple perspectives. This programme was well-resourced and allowed me to work in a team of highly motivated researchers, have access to and produce an important amount of data, participate in a

number of international conferences, organize international seminars and invite outstanding scholars to them, edit several books, attract interesting PhD and master's students to work with, etc. Altogether, our research group could build a strong international network and locate our products in the global academic space. As a condition of this, I had to embrace English as my everyday language and learn how to work in a highly interdisciplinary and intercultural setting.

To a great extent, my RyC project, which I elaborated in 2010, aimed at trying to 'import' the research line I started developing in Amsterdam into the Spanish context. With a few exceptions, the analysis of the relationship between education, globalization and development was remarkably underdeveloped there. I explored possibilities in different universities to develop this project, but I finally decided to return to the research group where I did my PhD for different reasons. First, due to the academic and human quality of the people working there. Second, because of the conviction that this group would offer me the most suitable environment to develop my project. And last, but not least, because for family reasons I wanted to live in Barcelona; in fact, in the same year I returned, I had my first daughter.

In contrast to the other two narratives included in this article, my return did not represent a drastic rupture, especially when it comes to territorial and spatial displacements. The fact that I returned to the same research group where I did my PhD made things much easier, since I did not have to sell myself in a totally new working environment, or build affinities with a new group of colleagues. However, I also lost the re-energizing feeling of 'starting from scratch', the emotion of meeting new colleagues and the intellectual excitement of learning from new ways of doing things. Furthermore, I was not abroad for as many years as my two co-authors – four years⁴ – and, for personal reasons, I was commuting quite often between Amsterdam and Barcelona. In fact, even when I was living in the Netherlands, I kept collaborating in a few projects with my old/new research group.

However, in saying this, I do not want to play my return down. It was not easy to be back in a place that, after four years, has not changed so much, precisely when I felt that my career was at a very different point. Furthermore, my first contact with my new department was far from pleasant. The first week I was there, I was put under pressure to do teaching substitutions of colleagues on sick leave. I also found it discouraging that, in the first months, RyCs like myself had the status of pre-doctoral students, which limited our room for action at many levels. I also felt that the Spanish university could substantially improve its welcome procedures for new scholars with simple policies such as creating a protocol for new incorporations. Several RyCs at UAB (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) – which is supposed to be one of the most internationalized universities in Spain – told me that they had to spend a lot of time arranging very basic things in the first months. In my particular case, I was not given a computer, a telephone or even a chair where to work, which meant that I had to buy these very basic facilities from my research budget. I was also constantly disappointed with the rigid bureaucratic procedures in place, which I felt were taking an excessive amount of time and energy. The sum of these things generated a lot of frustration at the beginning. However, this was not what frustrated me the most, but rather the university setting changes I experienced in a more academic sense.

Most Spanish universities have mainly focused on professional-oriented education and have not traditionally worked as 'research universities'. At best, the research activity within the Spanish university context is considered a recent development (Pérez Díaz, 2004). In this respect, it is illustrative that Spanish universities, like most Southern European universities, are underperforming in the European Union FP7 programme.⁵

Moving from a very well-resourced research programme based in a university that is strongly connected with global academic debates to an apparently semi-peripheral academic space was the most challenging aspect of my return. This academic displacement was perfectly staged in a meeting with one senior staff in my new department where, as a way to encourage postdoctoral staff to publish in international (i.e. Anglo-Saxon) journals, he said something like: 'As a Southern scholar, if you want to publish in these journals, you need to adopt the theories of the American and British professors, and apply them to our context. Do the Spanish case, do the Spanish case!' Semi-periphery, like social class, is not only a material condition. It is also symbolic in nature and directly related to the mental limits that we (self-)impose upon our intellectual ambition and to the range of possibilities we imagine are within our reach.

Another aspect I found disappointing was that the master's programme of my new department was quite unsuccessful at attracting students and, content-wise, was very generalist. This meant that it was difficult to engage with good quality students whose intellectual interests were close to my area of specialization. I also missed further intellectual exchange and cross-fertilization between the different research groups.

As a way to overcome some of these challenges, I stopped expecting recognition from certain sectors and focused my efforts within my research group. Despite the financial crisis that is beating strongly against the Spanish university, we have been able to attract international funding for new research and teaching projects, contract new PhD students and attract postdoctoral researchers that are close to my research area. I also enjoy and value the possibility of introducing new themes, networks and dynamism at the university level, but also at the societal one – which, in fact, was something that was difficult for me to do when I was living abroad and had less mastery over the local cultural codes, politics and language. Finally, especially when I am not convinced about whether I took the best decision by returning to my home country, I am inclined to think, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos does, that most revolutionary insights and paradigmatic changes into academia – as well as in other domains – are more likely to come, not from the well-off centres of power, but from the semi-periphery and, in general, from those locations where domination and social injustice are experienced more intensively (Dale and Robertson, 2004).

Hybridity as a space for being

I returned to Barcelona in 2007, after 13 years abroad – 12 years in the US, where I studied a master's and a PhD and worked as a researcher and professor, and one year in Canada. At that time, I considered that the most difficult part of the process of returning home was going to be to make the decision to do it. For a while I considered to reject the job in Spain because it implied a significant loss of personal income and job status. Nevertheless, the idea of getting back grew slowly, hand in hand with a mystified image

of Europe that included efficient pedestrian compact cities and lovely small villages – daydreams highly appealing to an urban planner. Eventually, the loss of financial revenues and status linked to the return was balanced by the expectations of making a contribution to a society in which I grew up and bringing my children closer to extended family members. Once the decision of getting back was taken, I envisioned a relatively easy process of adaptation. While abroad, I had lived in fairly different places and environments, adapting relatively well to professional and personal life changes. Furthermore, during those years that could be defined as the expatriated period, I came back to Europe at least twice a year. Once, I even spent half year in Barcelona. I had consistently followed political and social events in Spain and I maintained contacts with academicians from the country. My research had Barcelona as one of the main focal points of analysis. Besides, I always enjoyed life changes and new challenges.

Personal contacts and frequent trips had provided the best of both worlds for 13 years. While I kept a vague identity as a European and even never applied for a green card which would have made life significantly easier, I was always eager to work and live in the US. I forecasted that the reverse process had to be similar, or even easier. I was coming back to my own country and culture. Interestingly, it turned out to be quite different.

As an international student in the US, when I arrived in 1994 I was advised that the cultural shock of re-entering was often bigger than the one of exit but, by the time I returned in 2007, I had all but forgotten the advice. Only later, after a long period as repatriated – by 2013 I had already been back six years, longer than my co-authors – I became aware of my hypercritical attitude towards my home country and my university colleagues, resulting from my lack of understanding and acceptance of processes and norms that were questioned by my value system, while in general my colleagues found them obvious.

Quite early upon my return I became directly involved in administrative work and academic curriculum restructuring within my department. This involvement, which to a great degree reassured the trust of the department in my work, also provided the conditions for recurrent frustrations, as often my advice regarding new procedures seldom materialized. Asserting my frustration, eventually, some of my close colleagues and best friends voiced their annoyance towards my attitude with sentences such as: ‘you never find anything right’, or ‘this is part of our system’. It took me a few years to realize that, to some extent, they were right. I expected to return into the known and I took for granted my intimate knowledge of the place (Schütz, 1976). Over time, my everyday experience called me to consider my attitude and to search the literature regarding the many challenges of return, ranging from reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas (Gaw, 2000) to the challenges that companies may incur in the repatriation of workers as a result of reverse cultural shock (Adler, 1981; Black, 1992), and even the brief depressive states among returning tourists and backpackers (Hottola, 2004; Sussman, 2000). In this introspection the fact that I faced assimilation challenges outside academia helped. My lack of adequate communication in a culture that I took for granted but in fact was not anymore mine had affected other areas of my life. A year after my return I had serious health problems. The presence of stones in the gallbladder developed into a serious cholangitis before surgery was performed. My case had not been classified as urgent. I had

been caught up in the Spanish medical waiting list criteria, in part as a result of my communicative skills in relation to the symptoms: giving what I considered precise and to the point information. Later on I was advised that if I had dramatized my symptoms, I would have been understood properly. There had been a mismatch between my communication patterns and assumptions and those of the national health system. And for a long period I was far from fully aware of it.

My difficulties in adjustment were further challenged by the fact that I had the perception that who I was did not relate to any essence or specific place of origin or profession. I had worked in different fields and jobs during years and found people who build an identity through a professional affiliation, a religion or a nationality quite naive. Prior to my return to Spain, I was a faculty member in urban planning at the University of Utah; before I had been a faculty member in geography and political science departments at New Mexico State University. Earlier, I had been research fellow at Rutgers University, Indiana University and Johns Hopkins University. My first university degree in Spain was in philosophy and the second one in communications; while in the US, I received a master's in city and regional planning and a PhD in urban planning and policy development. Upon my return to Barcelona, I became a researcher in a geography department. Neither shifting academic fields nor working, teaching and living in new geographic settings was new. These previous experiences and the relative easy adaptation I had before contributed to my lack of preparation prior to the return. I was not envisioning any cognitive anticipatory adjustment effort, which contributed to my difficulties of readjustment (Black et al., 1992; Schütz, 1976). I completely lacked the preparation and understanding of the complexities of the re-entry process (Chamove and Soeterik, 2006).

Around three years after my return, I started to realize that my personal cultural clash was the result of the incorporation of values and behaviours of US culture into my identity. It caught me by surprise because I had a perception of myself as a relatively self-displaced and free-floating personality. Born in the high Pyrenees mountains during the last years of the Franco era, displacement was a familiar feeling, in which I thrived. I grew up in a closed rural and isolated society of profound gender, class differences and repressive religious practices. Although unable to interact with a different reality, I developed from an early age the idea that life could and should be different somewhere else, and that the values and norms of my own society were not the only valid option. My early life experiences seemed to provide evidence that personal identity is fluid and performative (Butler, 2006); and to a great degree, this idea was reinforced through personal and professional life choices.

The years in the US allowed me to develop new and different meanings and representations. The freedom and academic challenges of embarking in a new professional field were regenerative. This empowerment was directly related to the possibility that, having new others to interact with, new discourses about me were generated. In this new setting, and contrary to my experience in Spain, for instance, I was praised and admired for having a rural background.

Once back in Spain after 13 years abroad, I re-entered a cultural value system that not only was not mine anymore, but that I also did not expect to be foreign. As a coping strategy, ultimately I decided to follow the performative power of daily life by which to

demand change is to enact it by personal daily practices (Butler, 2010). I considered that the best option was going to be to do things differently, attesting the power of human agency theories (Biesta, 2008). Nevertheless, my activities had to comply with traditions, institutions and structures that arose from different beliefs and actions, and at last I realized that operating on the margins was not going to transform the system or guarantee my survival in it.

My return home has been and will probably be an ongoing process of negotiation that may generate an in-between space or third space that, as Soja asserts, is: 'a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined life world of experiences, emotions, events and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centre and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived' (Soja, 1996: 31). A hybridity resulting from the discovery of the never innocent plurality of cultures (Ricoeur, 1962) and from the acceptance of the right to be somehow different in a dialectical relation between the present location and all the ones in which we have been. I must acknowledge my present existence as an unfinished process of reshaping identities and sense of belonging; and accept hybridity as a space for being.

Conclusion

Having entered (or re-entered) Spanish university after years of international academic mobility, our lived experience of homecoming has taken the form of numerous dislocations and incongruities, which we have approached in terms of spatial-territorial displacement, temporal displacement, linguistic displacement and academic displacement.

With respect to spatial-territorial displacement, the mobility that our return implies is not new. Continuous international and intra-national mobilities, first to pursue our studies and later for work purposes, have defined our academic trajectory. In this sense, territorial displacement and the conflictual life experiences that being an outsider implies have been very much part of our life. Earlier mobilities provided positive and reassuring life experiences. Paradoxically, homecoming has become the most dramatic spatial-territorial displacement of all. We were unaware that back home we would be confronted with a culture that had become foreign to us, and consequently unprepared for the cultural shock experienced upon return. Our international trajectories and connections and our new local attachments have become the source of difficult and contradictory negotiations, adaptations and balancing acts.

This challenge has been reinforced by temporal displacement, which was also unexpected. Despite our prolonged academic experience, we are in non-permanent positions, similar to those of colleagues who are significantly younger than us and who have been educated in situ. Symbolically, we have experienced return as a form of going back in time, reinforcing perceptions of the discontinuity of migrants' experiences. The crisis and drastic budget cuts in Spain have aggravated the situation. We are still fundamentally viewed as outsiders, and therefore find ourselves in a weaker position than our younger colleagues. On the positive side, our return is related with starting up a family or bringing children close to an extended family, which is highly valued in Mediterranean culture. In this respect, we feel proud of having been able to put an end to years of itinerant mobility

through which we were imperceptibly becoming trapped in a global web; to privilege roots over routes.

Through the adoption of English the three of us have been able to participate in international academic debates, becoming translated individuals. Perhaps it is linguistic displacement that has been experienced by all of us as the least problematic on our return. On the one hand, reconnecting with our mother tongue has been a source of pleasure. On the other, the advantages of being fluent in the dominant language of the academic field have turned our displacement into a source of academic capital. We still primarily write in English and have also been drawn to teach in a growing number of courses which are increasingly being offered in English. Through embracing as translated individuals a language in which we still, in many ways, can feel at home, we also contribute to central academic debates beyond self-imposed limitations to illustrating the Spanish case (see the second narrative), but with full consciousness of the world-making potential of our writing.

In terms of academic displacement, the three of us have experienced and had to confront intense feelings. We return from specialized, interdisciplinary and well-resourced university settings that are hospitable and open to international people and ideas. We were already aware that in Spain we would not enjoy equivalent material conditions; this is the reason why the most shocking aspect of our return was related to immaterial and subjective factors. The predominance of a local focus and the lack of a welcoming tradition, a result of the low level of internationalization in most departments, frustrated us in the beginning and made us feel somehow strangers at home. However, having been socialized into the 'rules of the game' that are just starting to penetrate our universities is a source of valuable academic capital and provides us with opportunities to have a social and academic impact that was in fact more restricted while we were abroad.

These personal incongruities and displacements – the strangeness of our homecoming – push us towards embracing forms of radical self-problematization and cosmopolitan openness. To a great extent, it is precisely the need to establish new productive links between our local contexts and our international backgrounds that becomes key to the success of our homecoming. The ability to situate our dislocated selves in relation to both home and abroad in unexpected new ways, to build from our displacements a productive space that can serve as the basis for a creative cosmopolitanism, is revealed as fundamental in guaranteeing both our survival as returnees and the valuable contribution that we can make towards the transformation and openness of our university.

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Notes

1. Whereas 90% of researchers who joined the RyC programme in 2001 were made permanent, 32.6% of researchers joining in 2005 and 46.2% of those joining in 2006 have not achieved a permanent position. Researchers are on average 42 years old, have a research experience of

- 15 years, head their own research lines, and have considerable experience abroad and international connections. *Source*: ANIRC (National Federation of RyC Researchers), 2010. See also Corral, 2011.
2. The term stranger is semantically wider than that of foreigner, generally associated with legal citizenship. Moreover, as Richard Sennett has argued, the stranger has been seen in certain contexts marked by profound social change as an unknown rather than as an alien or foreigner (1978: 48–49). This section plays with these semantic ambiguities in order to build a view of the complexities of strangeness home and abroad.
 3. Although, after spending a few years in Amsterdam, I observed that some type of endogamic practices were also common there.
 4. Even then, four years abroad is a critical timing. If the RyC application had been unsuccessful I would have had to reconsider my future plans quite drastically because, at that time, I had options to become tenured in Amsterdam. In fact, I felt that living in this bubble represented by international scholarship, commuting constantly between different cities, establishing liquid links with international people who go back and forth, etc., was not sustainable any longer. In other words, I had some pressure to decide where I should establish my roots, have a family and so on.
 5. noweurope.com/2009/06/04/which-countries/

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Résumé

La mobilité internationale est un phénomène croissant où les académiciens sont fortement représentés. Alors que les études sur le transnationalisme ont privilégié la mobilité des personnes en termes d'immigration et d'exil, le phénomène de retour au pays d'origine est beaucoup moins étudié. Cet article contribue à combler ce vide en analysant les expériences de retour au pays de trois chercheurs en sciences sociales ayant travaillé au même moment dans la même université catalane. La narration de leurs trajectoires personnelles et de leurs expériences de retour au pays d'origine permet de comprendre et mettre en perspective le retour au pays avec les discours plus généraux sur la mobilité dans le contexte de la mondialisation. Contrairement aux croyances dominantes, le retour au pays n'est pas perçu comme un retour aux origines mais plutôt comme un mouvement qui implique des perturbations et un déplacement et qui met celui qui retourne dans une position pas très différente de celle d'un étranger. Nous soutenons que l'étude du retour au pays met en évidence certains aspects négligés de la mondialisation contemporaine telles que les limites existentielles à la mobilité internationale des personnes ou la place privilégiée des attaches locales par rapport aux options internationales et leur interaction avec la prédominance des orientations cosmopolites. Cet article vise aussi à mettre en évidence les transferts culturels des personnes qui retournent dans leur pays d'origine et leur construction d'une sphère d'activités internationales.

Mots-clés

Retour au pays, déplacement, cosmopolitisme, migration de retour, singularité

Resumen

La movilidad internacional es un fenómeno creciente en el que los académicos están altamente representados. Mientras que los estudios sobre transnacionalismo se han centrado ampliamente en la movilidad de las personas en términos de migración el exilio, el regreso a casa ha sido mucho menos estudiado. Este artículo contribuye a llenar este vacío mediante el análisis de las experiencias de retorno de tres científicos sociales que han coincidido en una universidad catalana. La narrativa de sus trayectorias y experiencias personales de retorno permite una comprensión del regreso a casa con relación a los discursos más amplios sobre movilidad en el contexto de la globalización. Contrariamente a las creencias dominantes, dicho regreso es abordado no como un retorno a los propios orígenes, sino como un movimiento que implica traslado y desplazamiento y pone al retornante en una posición que no es esencialmente diferente a la del extraño. Sostenemos que el estudio del retorno a casa arroja luz sobre ciertos aspectos descuidados de la globalización contemporánea, tales como los límites existenciales a la movilidad internacional de las personas o el favorecimiento de las adhesiones locales sobre las opciones globales combinadas con el predominio de orientaciones cosmopolitas. El artículo también llama la atención sobre las transferencias culturales de los repatriados a sus países de origen, así como a sus actividades de construcción del mundo.

Palabras clave

Regreso a casa, desplazamiento, cosmopolitismo, migración de retorno, extrañamiento