Creating 'international communities' in southern Spain: Self-segregation and 'institutional whiteness' in Swedish lifestyle migration

Catrin Lundström

The self-archived postprint version of this journal article is available at Linköping University Institutional Repository (DiVA):

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-146219>

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original publication.

Lundström, C., (2019), Creating 'international communities' in southern Spain: Self-segregation and 'institutional whiteness' in Swedish lifestyle migration, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(5-6), 799-816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418761793>

Original publication available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418761793>

Copyright: SAGE Publications

<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/home.nav>

Catrin Lundström

Associate Professor, Sociology and Future Research Leader
 REMESO Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society
 Linköping University, 601 74 Norrköping, Sweden
 +46 11 36 34 35, catrin.lundstrom@liu.se

European Journal of Cultural Studies

© The Author(s) 2018

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1367549418761793

journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs

Article in European Journal of Cultural Studies,

Volume 22, no 5-6, pp. 799-816. First published online April 2, 2018

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367549418761793>

**Creating ‘international communities’ in southern Spain:
 Self-segregation and ‘institutional whiteness’ in Swedish lifestyle migration**

Abstract

This article examines intra-European relations in narratives of Swedish lifestyle migrants living permanently or part-time on the Spanish Sun Coast. It pays particular attention to the complexities of Swedish migrants’ cultural identities and patterns of self-segregation in the Spanish society by investigating the following questions: How do boundaries of social networks that Swedish lifestyle migrants participate in, or interrelate, with a sense of ‘likeness’? In what ways are the formation of these ‘international’ networks mediated through ideas of cultural similarity and parallel difference, and how do such notions both override and uphold boundaries tied to social, cultural and racial divisions? It is argued that the formation of so-called ‘international communities’ on the Spanish Sun Coast tend to cluster mainly northwestern European lifestyle migrants, which calls for an analysis of ‘orientations’ towards a certain ‘likeness’, and the function of these spaces and communities as spaces of ‘institutional whiteness’ that work as a ‘meeting point’ where some bodies tend to feel comfortable as they already belong here. The social and cultural boundaries that surround these communities destabilises the idea of a common, culturally homogeneous European identity and display intra-European racial divisions mediated through discourses of cultural differences. What appears is a south–north divide built upon a deep Swedish postcolonial identification with Anglo Saxon and north-western European countries and cultures, and a parallel dis-identification with (the former colonial powers in) southern Europe.

Keywords: Costa del Sol, institutional whiteness, integration, international communities, lifestyle migration, self-segregation

Creating ‘international communities’ in southern Spain:

Self-segregation and ‘institutional whiteness’ in Swedish lifestyle migration

Introducing lifestyle migrants in southern Spain

The term lifestyle migration has been used to describe ‘an affluent form of migration in pursuit of the “good life” from economically developed countries’ with the ability to create communities and allocate social capital abroad (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010: 50; Benson and O’Reilly 2009). Many lifestyle migrants are retired and spend part of the year abroad as part of a transnational migration movement, being ‘sojourners’, ‘dwellers’ or ‘homecomers’ (Gustafsson, 2008; Jansson, 2016). Spain is one of the key hubs for relatively affluent intra-European lifestyle migrants wanting to escape the ravages of winter in northern Europe (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009) and for retired people who are not so well off (Gavanas and Calzada, 2016; Lundström, 2014).

European migration to Spain has been analysed as a form of privileged lifestyle migration on the margins of society (O’Reilly, 2007; Holleran, 2016). Some suggest that northern European migrants often have an ambiguous status in Spanish society, largely due to language, culture or welfare service issues (Gavanas and Calzada, 2016). Researchers have explored the cultural habits, identities and practices of lifestyle migrants, at times with an emphasis on their privileged positions (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016). Although issues like class (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010), nationality (O’Reilly, 2002), transnationalism (Gustafsson, 2008), age (Casado-Díaz, 2006; Rodríguez, Fernández-Mayorales and Rojo, 2004), retirement (Gavanas and Calzada, 2016), culture (Benson, 2012) and gender (Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000) have been successfully covered in literature on European lifestyle migration, very little attention has been paid to how whiteness structures intra-European cultural identities, social networks

and institutional formations. Even though patterns of self-segregation and a general lack of integration have been central topics in studies of lifestyle migration to Spain, this research has not sufficiently explored how these patterns are shaped by boundaries of whiteness in Europe. Discussions about the racialised aspects of the terms ‘lifestyle migrants’, ‘privileged migrants’ and ‘mobile professionals’ and issues of (white) privilege can mostly be found in research on western expatriate migration in non-western contexts as part of a global racial structure in post-colonial times (Fetcher, 2010; Hayes, 2015; Knowles and Harper, 2009; Korpela, 2010; Lan, 2011; Leonard, 2013). This has sparked a dialogue about the migrant concept and the need to explore the race-migration nexus more thoroughly (Lundström, 2014; Erel, Murj and Nahaboo, 2016; Croucher, 2012). Pauline Leonard (2010: 2) suggests that these concepts simultaneously relate to ‘Others’, i.e. ‘other migrants’ who are differentiated by race, class, nationality, occupation and profession and, as such, excluded from these conceptual boundaries. An important aspect of white migration is linked to notions of mobility rights, orientations and opportunities (Lundström, 2014).

By analysing the experiences of privileged white migrants *as* migrant experiences (cf. Benson & Osbaldiston, 2016), the article explores how notions of intra-European racial differences structure cultural identities, social arrangements and institutional communities amongst Swedish lifestyle migrants living permanently or part-time on the Spanish Sun Coast. Such a focus highlights the complexities of lifestyle migrants’ marginality, self-segregation and boundaries of social networks. From a critical cultural analysis informed by whiteness studies, the article suggests that although formations of so-called ‘international’ social networks are structured around whiteness, they are perceived as neutral arrangements by the informants, guided by ideas of cultural similarity and parallel difference driven by neo-colonial orientations that divide northern European whiteness from its southern counterpart. It argues that the shape and the shaping of certain communities is informed by notions of ‘likeness’ constituted by

‘shared attributes’ that function as a ‘meeting point’ for a specific spectrum of migrants, namely Swedish, Nordic and other north-western European lifestyle migrants (cf. Ahmed, 2007: 154; O’Reilly, 2002). By racialising white patterns, practices and identities, the article adds to the discussions about self-segregation and socialising patterns and shows how they institutionalise white identities and reproduce racial divisions.

Prior research on white boundaries in Europe is primarily found within the field of cultural studies and largely focuses on religion, literature or cinema in the 20th century. Baltasar Fra-Molinero (2009: 149) notes the contradictory location of Spaniards between orientalism towards others and the orientalised view from northern Europeans and concludes that although Spaniards ‘have seen themselves as white since early modernity’, they tend to be perceived as ‘less than white’ by northern Europeans. In this apparent contradiction, Spaniards are depicted as ‘the Oriental within’ (Fra-Molinero 2009: 149). Roberto Dainotto (2000) follows a similar path and suggests that southern Europe and its racial connotations function as a kind of ‘near’ Orient within Europe.

This article draws on whiteness studies, cultural studies and research on lifestyle migration to analyse how intra-European views of whiteness shape cultural similarity and parallel difference in the maintenance of white cultural identities in intra-European lifestyle migration. The aim is not to present Swedish migrants as a homogenous group with a common white cultural identity, but to investigate how white cultural identities are created in relation to racial others in Europe. This analysis is guided by a view of whiteness that reflects ‘a multiplicity of identities that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local custom and national sentiments within the context of the new “global village”’ (Twine and Gallagher 2008: 6). In terms of whiteness, culture ‘establishes a register apart from individual identity that affects and defines white people collectively while suggesting a broad range of means by which racial matters influence or

inform the lives of white people, asserting that they, too, are “racial” (Hartigan, 1997 : 497). This study further explores whiteness as a place-specific dynamic and circumstance and ‘an organising principle in social and cultural relations’ in this particular context of southern Spain (ibid.). In this context, the article aims to understand how, through patterns and practices, Swedish white cultural identities become institutional spaces in ways that establish and maintain ‘privileges generally associated with being white’ (Hartigan, 1997: 496).

Ethnography in the South

The history of lifestyle migration from Sweden to southern Spain began in the 1960s with the appearance of cheap air travel and mass tourism. To this day, lifestyle migration from northern Europe and Great Britain is extensive but at the same time difficult to map. When compared to studies including seasonal residents, the official figure of around 400,000 British citizens registered in Spain appear to be heavily underestimated. In fact, if those living there for only part of the year are included, the British population in Spain is estimated to be between 750,000 and one million (O’Reilly, 2002; Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010) and constitutes the major ‘lifestyle community’ in the region. Informal numbers of Swedish migrants in Spain add up to 90,000 in total and 30,000 in Andalucía alone. Apparently, not many are registered as inhabitants, since only 6,120 people of Swedish nationality are registered as residents in the province of Málaga (which covers most of the Costa del Sol) (Gavanas and Calzada, 2016).

The article is based on two months of ethnography fieldwork undertaken in January 2010 on the Costa del Sol, mainly covering Fuengirola and Marbella. The fieldwork included in-depth interviews with twenty Swedish migrant women aged between 27 and 72 (median age 60 years) living temporarily or permanently in Spain, in combination with participant observations made in encounters with the larger Swedish community. Most of the

interviewed women were members of the SWEA network: a non-profit international network for Swedish-speaking women aiming to create a ‘personal network’ for its members and to ‘promote the Swedish language and spread the Swedish culture and tradition’.¹ It is important to underline that these women are not representative of Swedish-speaking migrant women living abroad, which is particularly important in relation to views on topics such as integration and self-segregation. As SWEA is a well-known network that attracts many Swedish migrants, it facilitated my participant observations of the broader Swedish community.

At the time of the fieldwork fifteen of the women were aged 50 and above, thus reflecting the age structure of lifestyle migrants in the region.² About half worked in the Swedish community (in restaurants, insurance companies, real estate agents, health services, shops, to name but a few). Seven were married to Swedish men and three were married or living with Spanish men. Ten were either divorced, widows or single. In the coastal town of Fuengirola, where most of the fieldwork work was carried out, I participated in a number of different activities in the so-called ‘Swedish colony’, such as dances, a sewing circle, jazz music nights and other events like quiz games at local Swedish-owned restaurants.

The study is part of a transnational ‘multi-sited ethnography’ (Marcus 2005) on Swedish migrant women in the US, Singapore and Spain. By ‘following’ socio-cultural expressions of Swedishness amongst Swedish-speaking migrant women, the study highlights how social positions are constructed in relational, contextual, situated and multiple ways and how they are embedded in transnational power structures. What is it that makes it possible to hold on to, relate to, identify with or dis-identify with certain positions more than others? In this sense, the ethnography is informed by a critical view that involves looking for ‘patterns of social domination, hierarchy, and social privilege’ and how power ‘holds patterns in place, how people accept or struggle against them’ (Agar, 1996: 27). In terms of whiteness, an ethnographic approach analyses how whiteness and racial otherness are reproduced in people’s accounts and

how discursive boundaries are reflected in material relations and social structures, and/or negotiated by people who inhabit these positions. As ‘a set of normative cultural practices’, the women in this study constitute the practitioners of white culture (Frankenberg, 1993: 228).

Finding one’s place in southern Spain

When Sweden joined the European Union (EU) in 1995 it became possible for Swedes – and all EU citizens for that matter – to work and/or retire in any member state. Even though Swedish tourism and migration to Spain was initiated in the 1960s, Swedish EU membership facilitated lifestyle migration. Over the years, the varying effects of international retirement migration (IRM), temporary or permanent migration and official or non-official migration have been discussed less in political terms, such as in the heated debate about tax-dodgers, and more in terms of spatial segregation, community infrastructure and strong networks (Lundström, 2014).

In her fieldwork with Britons in Fuengirola, Karen O’Reilly (2002: 181) identifies four types of migrant groups: full residents (living permanently in the region), returning residents (living in Spain but returning to Britain to escape the hot Spanish summer), seasonal visitors (living in Britain but visiting Spain every winter) and peripatetic visitors (moving back and forth between Spain and Britain). These types of migration are also applicable to Swedes. Many Swedish migrants move to Spain in search of a different way of life, while some go to work or study for a limited period of time but end up not returning ‘home’. Others decide to spend their retirement in Spain, while some have homes in more than one country. These routes are clearly gendered, in the sense that Swedish women’s migration tends to be linked to their marital situation, care work duties, or health situation. In contrast to previous research, which has mainly pointed to retirement as an explanatory factor for Swedish migration to Spain (Gustafson, 2008), the main reason for the participants in this study to migrate is liberation from

caring for family members, mostly children and parents, which reflects a gendered structure of care issues in migration processes. As their children are now adults and their parents have passed away, the women are free to choose where to live.

For the broader Swedish middle-classes in Fuengirola, the sense of downward class mobility in terms of economic capital and making ends meet is a common topic. This is solved by hard work and helping each other by imaginative business exchanges within the Swedish community. However, the reduction in economic capital is compensated for by the gentle Mediterranean climate and a higher quality of life, defined as a shift from a materialistic lifestyle in Sweden to a more enjoyable lifestyle in Spain. Spain is described as ‘culturally different’ and ‘more chaotic’, but with more relaxed social behaviour. Moving from Sweden is also accompanied by a sense of freedom from social norms and conduct.

Swedish lifestyle migrants and the ‘problem’ of integration

The discussion about ‘the lack of integration’ as ‘a major problem’ for migrant communities in general in Europe has not left the Swedish community untouched. However, as white northern-Europeans who are not part of the racialised construction of the non-western migrant, Swedish migrants can liberate themselves from the (negative) migration discourse (although there are examples of white migrants as targets in this debate due to the internal working migration in European countries, see Garner, 2007b; McDowell, 2009). Rakel, who moved to Spain with her husband four years ago, describes her position as a ‘foreigner’ in Spain, which she perceives as ‘always positive’ and ‘never negative’. In a Spanish class for foreigners, Rakel’s Spanish teacher picked immigration in Spain as a discussion topic:

Spanish people feel like this: first, “all these immigrants”! And the funny thing is: they don’t mean us! We are sitting there. We are immigrants too. No, no, no! But it is not us they are referring to. We are the good, ordinary people, it’s the other ones, Moroccans and all the others from Africa, not to mention the Gypsies [...]. After a while someone said: “But we are also foreigners”. “Yeah but we’re not talking about you”. Such a difference!

As northern European migrants, Swedish migrants can clearly escape the pressures of integration or assimilation into Spanish society. A lack of integration can therefore be associated with retaining cultural and social norms (or privileges) inside/outside Spain. Although the Swedish ‘immigrants’ that Rakel refers to clearly draw on more resources than Moroccan or other African migrant communities, Rakel and other Swedish migrants describe them as ‘just another migrant space’. However, as Umut Erel (2010: 656) formulates it, ‘cultural practices acquire different meanings and validations according to the local, national and transnational context’. Swedish, British or north European cultural practices thus articulate complex hierarchies of distinction in relation to non-western migrant communities.

In general, Swedish migrants do not primarily refer to a Spanish perspective when speaking about their poor integration. Rather, they worry about how they are portrayed in Sweden. Swedes on the Costa del Sol are both profoundly aware of and annoyed about how they are depicted in the Swedish media as ‘tax dodgers’, alcoholics, socially problematic youngsters, living segregated lives and socialising exclusively with other Swedes, eating Swedish food, not bothering to learn Spanish and so on.

Yet, as Swedish society has taken a more neoliberal turn, the perceived need to ‘get away from taxes’ that dominated the debate in the 1960s and 1970s has faded. Even so, the

people in ‘the Swedish colony’ – as the Swedes facetiously label their own presence on the Costa del Sol – are rather defensive of Swedish attitudes and research on Swedes in Spain. Notwithstanding, it should be said that Swedes living in Fuengirola *could* and often do have a predominantly Swedish lifestyle that is supported by a strong community, an institutional and business infrastructure, media organisations and cultural establishments. During my fieldwork I was often told that ‘everybody knows everybody here’. In this way, the Swedish cultural space makes segregation appear as a natural pattern, reaching out to those who are already ‘in place’ (cf. Ahmed, 2007).

A similar discussion about the lack of integration has taken place in other national communities on the Sun Coast. O’Reilly’s (2002: 181) description of the British community in Fuengirola gives a glimpse of a city structured by a British national identity:

British bars are full of British Customers and British Clubs are full of British members. Retired Britons, with leisure time to spare, can be seen spending this time with other Britons, in clubs and bars, on the beach or making visits to Gibraltar; working Britons are employed in British establishments, serving British customers. There are British clubs for almost every interest and activity: bowls clubs, a cricket club, an arts centre, a Scottish country-dancing club, bridge clubs, a theatre group, Brownie Guides, walking club, social club, fund-raising groups and many more. The majority of the members are British. [...] For many British, daily life involves talking to and being with other British people and very little interaction with Spanish.

In fact, this description could also apply to the Swedish community in Fuengirola. Swedes frequent British pubs, take part in British culture and visit Gibraltar, thus fitting O'Reilly's description of the British presence in Fuengirola. However, Swedes often point to Britons as major representatives of the lack of integration and, in this sense, resemble what is colloquially known as the colonial Brit. Nevertheless, in terms of migration they are not a 'problem', in that they are said to 'bring' something to Spanish society. As Rakel puts it:

we do not sponge on society, we are educated [...] we want to be part of society – okay many British live apart, they do not want to be part of society [...] we bring something positive, we bring money, we make things happen, we go to restaurants, and we are not a cost or a burden to anyone.

Although integration and segregation are important aspects of the contemporary European migration discourse, like Rakel, most women have ambivalent relations with this discursive repertoire. As migrants in the postcolonial era, Swedes, like Britons, have the right to be 'in place' without needing to be 'integrated'; a position for which whiteness works as a shared sense of entitlement (Garner, 2007a; Leonard, 2013). Even though they can relate to a lack of integration due to language default and cultural difference and also claim similar patterns to different migrants, they cannot identify themselves as migrants with the accompanying implicit references to poverty and/or illegality (even when they are not registered as residents in Spain). As lifestyle migrants, they instead see themselves as 'bringing' resources into Spanish society, rather than 'taking' resources away from it, which excludes them from the same migration frame.

At the time the fieldwork was conducted, supporting the view of similarity between the different migrant communities, integration and the issue of registration was a recurrent topic in the Spanish media. At the beginning of 2010, the national Spanish newspaper *El País* carried a series of articles about ‘undocumented migrants’, including an article on ‘unregistered lifestyle migrants’. This exposed some of the flip sides of the latter form of migration for Spanish society, including planning for health care, the social services and infrastructure: ‘In some cases, like in Marbella, the difference is noticeable: the census has 140,000 people from 137 nationalities registered, while the real population, calculated from the produced amount of garbage, is around 235,000 inhabitants all year around [...]’.³

Unlike the Britons in O’Reilly’s description, Swedes do not exclusively seek out other Swedes. Apart from Fuengirola, which has a strong Swedish and/or Nordic infrastructure, Swedes’ social networks include other northern migrant communities from the British and sometimes Dutch and German communities. From a Spanish perspective, the strong Swedish approach to the Anglo-Saxon culture could be perceived as insulting. On my first visit to the Swedish community association Consuelo, a Spanish woman working with Swedish youth confronted me with the rhetorical question as to why Swedes chose to come to Spain ‘when they only take part in British culture, read English literature, socialise with British people and cultivate prejudices or even racist attitudes toward Spanish people?’

Self-segregation and parallel set marginalisation

Research on lifestyle migrants in the Malaga province of southern Spain has questioned the rhetoric of a ‘classless’ community abroad, thus suggesting that economic and cultural aspects of class often prevail. As Oliver and O’Reilly (2010) argue, lifestyles and constructions of class positions continue to be related through habits, tastes, activities and personal relations. Indeed,

Swedish migration to Spain was originally clearly structured by class. Although not experiencing the negative social costs of discrimination and racism encountered by the many North African and Latin American migrant workers, Swedish women have had to adjust to Spanish income levels that are generally lower than in Sweden. This shift is particularly obvious in Fuengirola, where the Swedish community consists of young entrepreneurial couples, elderly women and less affluent retired women, in contrast to the rather wealthy community residing in and around Marbella (cf. Lundström, 2013).

The Swedes' activities that I took part in in Fuengirola included people of diverse class backgrounds. This was in contrast to Marbella, where SWEA and other organisations were described as more exclusive when it came to class markers, for example the size of the houses or the type of leisure activities, such as golf and horse riding, that were pursued. In this way, Marbella performed the function of a class orientation, even for women who could not afford to live there. The Swedish communities in Fuengirola were less marked by class, but had a strong national orientation.⁴ Freja, aged 55, had lived with her husband outside Fuengirola for more than ten years. In the light of her experiences in Spain, she had 'lost her belief in integration':

Freja: For my part, I must say that the idea of integration is not a valid one. Then you have to be in a mixed marriage, I think. Then you can become integrated. Or if you have lived here for a very long time, like some women and men have done, with children here, that's more Spanish. [...] That's different. But if you move here when you are older, and do not become part of this thing with schools and children and so on, then you should marry someone or have a friend here who is married to a Spanish man [...] You know, one always believed in integration,

which is so debated in Sweden, which one has own opinions about, but I have to say that I now understand the fact that Chinatown, Rosengård, and what's the name of that place in Stockholm [...] Rinkeby, Hammarkullen and Angered outside Gothenburg [different segregated areas in Sweden] exist. I do understand that. [...] I have a very different view of that today.

For Freja, the key to integration lies in social institutions, such as schools and marriages. As she does not take part in these in Spain, integration is not possible for her. In the discussion about Swedes' lack of integration, Freja compares her own situation with that of marginalised migrants in Sweden and elsewhere. Based on her experience as a migrant in Spain, she is able to understand the processes of segregation in Sweden. Her comparison denotes a kind of *parallel set marginalisation* between them; a situation that is characterised by shared experiences and comparability with these migrant communities (Sernhede, 2005).

At first, Jessica, a young woman in her thirties married to a Spanish man, believed that 'regardless of where you come from, you seek people from the same country, at least at the beginning'. She understands these choices better now and says that: 'It is the same thing for Turks or Muslims'. When visiting Sweden, she discusses the topics of segregation and integration and is somewhat surprised at how much she has in common with the migrant communities there. Despite this, she feels 'as integrated as I could be' in her current situation. Jessica is one of the few people who are married to a Spaniard but would still 'love to be even more integrated'. Working in 'the Swedish colony' makes her a part of the same, but she tries not to get too involved in it. She does not want to live in 'too Swedish' a way: 'I really avoid eating lunch in any of the Swedish restaurants.' 'You can live here without having the sense of living in Spain at all. There are Swedish magazines, Swedish cafés, Swedish restaurants.' At

the same time, Jessica finds Fuengirola a very ‘multicultural’ place. There are 22 nationalities at her daughter’s school, but at the same time she says, ‘unfortunately, we have no African or Muslim friends. I think that’s a shame’.

The notion of a ‘parallel set marginalisation’ is also important in the Swedish community in Marbella, albeit less well defined by national boundaries than in Fuengirola. Here, the boundaries of self-segregation are drawn around a northwestern European community. Dagmar, aged 67, and her husband are seasonal visitors and live in a spacious house outside Marbella for five or six months each year. She considers herself ‘a guest’ in Spain:

Dagmar: You have to accept the local customs. We live like they do in these immigrant suburbs in Sweden. I socialise with Swedes, Englishmen, a few Dutch people, Germans... some... one or two Frenchmen.

Catrin: Why is that?

Dagmar: I think it has to do with language problems. Few [Spaniards] speak good English. They live their lives. Do I socialise with immigrants in Sweden? The answer is no. And it is not because I have anything against them, I mean the diligent ones. I hope not. But I do not socialise with them. And it’s the same here. I don’t think there are any hard feelings. They know we come with our money and contribute to society. But they live their lives.

Dagmar points to a certain exclusion from Spanish society (partly using Spaniards’ lack of knowledge of the English language as an explanation) as a reason for the creation of a

segregated northern European-dominated community. Freja, who lives outside Fuengirola, refers to a Swedish-dominated community. Both their statements show similar positioning vis-à-vis local Spaniards and ('the diligent') migrants in Sweden – with whom they say they share migrant experiences (at a distance). They can now relate to the experiences of being a minority, like those, as Dagmar put it, living in 'these immigrant suburbs in Sweden'.

Nevertheless, the experience of being a Swedish 'immigrant' in Spain points to a different set of challenges, this time relating more to segregation and marginality than the challenges of poor, segregated neighbourhoods. Consequently, the idea of parallelism suggested by Freja and Dagmar differs due to class, ethnicity and race. One example of the ethnic and class boundaries is an area outside Marbella that is referred to as the *Swedish Hill*, with a luxurious pool service, Swedes-only restaurants and houses that are exclusively sold to other Swedes in order to preserve an 'ethnic neighbourhood'. This area now has less clear ethnic boundaries. Even so, Swedes can keep their ethnic community by means of shops, local organisations, meeting points and activities, or, among the upper middle-classes, by interests such as golf and sailing. This shift predominantly points to class-based consumption, formations of residential areas and social activities. Analytically speaking, this implication complicates any comparisons between marginalised and self-segregated migrant groups, in that the latter are able to maintain and increase their privileges in their particular space. Self-segregating patterns are rather a way to soften class and ethnic differences to the unifying orientation of whiteness. Through these patterns, white cultural identities and practices becomes a form of institutional whiteness, 'shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others' (Ahmed, 2007: 157)

Creating 'international communities' in Spain

Despite the claim of a parallel set marginalisation of poor and segregated migrants in Sweden, this idea is not a guiding principle for social arrangements in the Spanish context. In Spain, Swedes seldom socialise with marginalised migrants such as North Africans or Latin Americans, but do socialise with other migrants from north-west Europe and are often integrated in institutions of Swedish, Scandinavian or other north-western European origin. As Per Gustafsson (2008: 462) notes, immigrant associations are crucial for migrants who wish to maintain ‘the culture of their (former) home countries, language, religion, popular culture, celebration of national holidays’ and so on. These locations, Gustafsson (2008: 462) argues, provide ‘institutionalized settings for cultural flows and cultural practices – settings that are based on common origin, and usually also on perceived cultural similarity’.

Cultural similarity – and parallel difference from both locals and other migrants – is crucial for shaping communities with north-western European nationalities. In the main, Swedes living in Spain relate socially and culturally to migrants from Britain and continental north-western Europe, thereby constructing a local migrant culture of ‘outsiders’ in Spanish society (which seldom includes eastern Europeans). These social and cultural bonds are further materialised and institutionalised by investments in varying forms of capital: housing, social networks, businesses, clubs, private insurances etc. Swedes’ social orientation relates to O’Reilly’s study of Britons in Spain who are keen to move freely without the need for work- or residence permits and can claim health services and social security benefits, at the same time as ‘they construct discrete communities and call them international ones’ (O’Reilly, 2002: 191).

The discourse of ‘international communities’ is particularly recurrent in Marbella. Whereas the lower middle-class community in Fuengirola has a stronger national identity, the upper middle-class communities in Marbella are often cross-national, consisting mainly of Scandinavians, continental north-western Europeans and British islanders. Britt-Marie, who at the time of the interview was 50 years of age and had moved to Spain seven years ago after

having lived and worked abroad for several years, has her own business and lives with her son outside Marbella. For her, the most important aspect when moving to Spain was the agreeable climate, but also the ‘international atmosphere’ and the way of life. She describes herself as a person with great social skills and a ‘fantastic social life’, but cannot identify herself as an immigrant in Spain.

Britt-Marie: I feel very Swedish... [...] I have always felt very Swedish. Perhaps even more so after moving abroad. When you live in Sweden you don't think about that, of course you're Swedish.

Catrin: What do you mean exactly?

Britt-Marie: Being Swedish? Well yes, that you are not actually integrated into Spanish society. Which could be good or bad. But if you settle here... This is not Spain! This is a northern European colony! That's what I think, anyway.

Catrin: Swedes, Britons...

Britt-Marie: ... Dutch, Germans, Russians. It is incredibly international. It is as international as London. And it is probably not a coincidence that I live in these places, because I like living in an international milieu. That's where I feel happiest. If I'd lived in Seville or Jerez it would have been totally different. Then I would have been confronted by with the Spanish culture in a different way.

Like most of the women I interviewed in Marbella, Britt-Marie mainly socialises with other north-western European migrants from similar social segments, thus separating themselves

from non-European or eastern European migrants and local Spaniards. 'Being Swedish' means not being integrated into Spanish society, but remaining part of a north-western European colony. These networks are not defined as 'migrant communities', but as 'international communities' consisting of overlapping and connecting relations between British, German, Scandinavian and Dutch migrants, but scarce relations with local Spaniards. 'There are no Spaniards here', Britt-Marie says. Participation in an 'international community' points to a central aspect of Swedish lifestyle migration, which is that with a few notable exceptions, the women have not migrated to Spain to become part of Spanish society. Neither were they primarily driven by an interest in or for Spanish people and the Spanish culture (cf. Rodríguez, Fernández-Mayoralas and Rojo, 2004). As Britt-Marie puts it, she didn't go to Spain to become Spanish, but for the 'international atmosphere'.

Of course, it's a bit boring, but on the other hand, that wasn't the reason I moved to Spain, to become a Spanish woman. It was rather a question of lifestyle. And then I think the cultures are very different. We have more in common with English people than Spanish people.

But why does Britt-Marie have more in common with Britons than Spaniards? Also, why would she have to 'become' Spanish to socialise with Spaniards? These social divisions are often explained by the cultural differences between Spanish people and northern Europeans. Ursula, a retired woman in her 70s, who at the time of the interview had lived just outside Marbella with her husband for 20 years, identifies a common cultural ground between Nordic people. In a discussion involving the similarities and differences between Britons, Spaniards and Scandinavians, I asked her:

Catrin: Do you socialise with Britons or do you know them?

Ursula: Well, I know the ones at the [golf] club. They are a majority. The Spaniards are a minority. Englishmen are the majority, after them Scandinavians and then there are some Germans, maybe some French, very occasionally Italians.

Catrin: Do you know Spaniards otherwise?

Ursula: Yes! Oh, yes we do! Absolutely! But they are so damned difficult to invite to one's home. For one thing, they like to come between nine and ten, half past ten, for dinner, but at that time we have finished dinner. It's too late. And even so in the summer. And then you invite them at nine o'clock, let's say. Well, then they may show up at ten. They are... they are not very good at keeping time. Well then, however nice they may be you have to speak Spanish with them. And then if there are other guests here who perhaps do not do that, it often ends up with Englishmen socialising with Englishmen and northerners socialising with each other. That's how it is! We have different cultures.

For Ursula, national groups are divided along cultural lines. As her statement makes clear, the local golf club, with its costly membership fees, constitutes the (class-based) selection of people in her everyday life. In the golf club, Ursula and her husband socialise with Britons – despite their cultural differences. Victoria, aged 64, who has lived in different southern European countries for almost ten years, says that foreigners who are not married to Spaniards often ‘end

up together’ in different national associations, such as SWEA. However, at the time of the interview Victoria had just joined a British association ‘because they had interesting talks’.

‘Likeness’ and difference

Living in Spain and socialising with other foreigners fosters a cosmopolitan perspective. Even through Britt-Marie and Ursula mainly socialise with ‘similar’ cultures, they feel more ‘international’ than Swedes in Fuengirola, but ‘with Spanish social space providing a backdrop for evaluations of authenticity and integration imagined in “the good life”’ (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010: 51). As Ghassan Hage (2000: 232) advocates, this kind of cosmopolitanism is inherently intertwined with whiteness as ‘a symbolic field of accumulation’ to which aspects like cosmopolitanism are attached. In this analysis, cosmopolitanism denotes those who are sophisticated enough to transcend their own culture and incorporate cultural ‘difference’ into their lives, in this case including those who socialise with people outside the Swedish community (Hage, 2000: 204).

Accordingly, a sense of an ‘international atmosphere’ and its interrelated cosmopolitan worldview is stronger amongst upper-class Swedes in Marbella than the lower-middle classes in Fuengirola, who mostly socialise with other Swedes or Scandinavians. Although segregation among Swedes in Marbella is more class-based through private housing, gated communities or membership of expensive clubs, Swedes in Fuengirola can live ethnically segregated lives by choosing Swedish restaurants or joining open organisations, such as the *Church of Sweden*.

How do ‘likeness’ and ‘similarity’ bond these ‘international communities’? On the one hand, the notion of ‘international communities’ is maintained by an experience of migration that excludes Spaniards. On the other hand, despite the endeavour to promote

‘international communities’, all migrants are not included in them. Thus, when analysing how Swedish lifestyle migrants and homologues from different north-western European nationalities, such as British, Dutch and German, tend to cluster in southern Spain, Ahmed’s (2007) concept of ‘orientations’ is useful, because these spaces seem to attract certain subjects who are already ‘in place’ and that stem from and create a particular kind of whiteness. ‘International communities’ as ‘meeting points’ in southern Spain appear to be orientated ‘around’ a kind of ‘likeness’ that is in turn created ‘around’ north-western European whiteness. As spaces in which some bodies feel comfortable because they ‘already’ belong, they become examples of ‘institutional whiteness’. ‘Likeness’ and ‘shared attributes’ appear as orientations that bring some people together; in this case north-western Europeans with a particular whiteness confined by shared cultural practices, cultural identities and cultural similarities in a Spanish context. In this way, cultural patterns serve to communicate racial differences between north and south. Rather than being a common European ‘meeting point’, Spanish society provides a backdrop for the northern European social spaces to which the Swedish women in this study are drawn. However, north-western European ‘likeness’ appears as a neutral social arrangement and institutional operation for a common cultural orientation, but without a racial basis (Hartigan, 1997: 496). As an orientation device, institutional whiteness denotes the ways in which whiteness reinstates its boundaries by seemingly race-neutral words, actions and practices (cf. Ahmed, 2007).

It is here suggested that when migrants come together in ‘international communities’, the division between southern and northern Europe is central and marks a northern European category of ‘likeness’. Following Ahmed, the tendency of ‘likeness’ as a ‘meeting point’ or form of orientation recruits subjects who feel that they are already part of an ‘international community’ based on intra-European boundaries of whiteness. Such recruitment fosters a sense of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, but results in a division between

migrants from northern Europe and those from other parts, for example, North Africa and locals from Spain, particularly those from Andalucía. In these gatherings, the notion of cultural similarity ‘trails behind’ bodies and can lead to the institutionalisation of a certain ‘likeness’ shaped around north-western European whiteness (Ahmed, 2007: 157). ‘Likeness’ also shapes the contours of belonging to certain spaces and communities, to which capital such as houses or land might be tied (institutional whiteness). These spaces are dominated and defined by whiteness through cultural practices and relations as well as a sense of similarity, practised through class-based associations, golf clubs or networks labelled as ‘international’ that naturalise their bonds. Such spaces show that self-segregation can serve to naturalise and keep privilege ‘out of sight’, without being depicted as racialised.

In these communities, the boundaries of ‘Europe’ are redrawn by means of intra-European divisions and overlapping neo-colonial mappings of race and whiteness. As Ramón Grosfoguel (2003) argues, the map of whiteness changed during ‘the second modernity’, 1650–1945, when Europe’s ‘heart’ moved away from Spain and Portugal to the northern parts of Europe and further to the US. As a result of this shift, the previously ‘white’ southern Europe was partly excluded from the discursive field of whiteness, and “Hispanics” were constructed as part of the inferior others excluded from the superior “white” “European” “races” (a tendency that is currently reinforced by the economic crisis in southern Europe) (Grosfoguel, 2003: 45). Following Richard Dyer (1997), the racial myth of ‘the West’ as ‘a leading edge of the white world’ is contrasted with another myth; that of the South.⁵ In the accounts of Swedish migrants, the idea of a darker South is not necessarily located *outside* the European continent, but within it, as a ‘near Orient’ (Dainotto, 2000)

Concluding remarks

By analysing how Swedish migrants' white cultural identities are shaped around institutional whiteness in Spain, the article challenges the idea of a common, culturally homogeneous European identity. The article describes how the unifying concept of whiteness intersects with and overrides national and class differences. When the Swedish women I interviewed moved to Spain, they did not expect a sense of cultural similarity with Spaniards prior to arrival, as they did with British migrants. In general, they did not migrate to Spain to learn about its culture, but for climate and lifestyle reasons. Only a few of them socialised with Spaniards, preferring instead to orientate themselves towards national, Scandinavian, British and/or north-western European so-called, 'international communities'.

As relatively affluent migrants, the participants have been able to create a liminal national or 'international community' and thereby position themselves outside the discursive boundaries of 'locals' and 'migrants'. Here, Swedish national identity is lived, negotiated and re-inscribed by marking a cultural distance from Spaniards and non-western migrants, thereby drawing the line for an institutional whiteness that includes Swedish, Nordic and other north-west European migrants. These socially, discursively and spatially segregated 'international communities' consist of overlapping and connecting relations between northern European migrants from similar social segments who share the embodiment of a certain 'likeness'. Ideas of similarity and parallel difference thus make some people feel close to each other, yet distant from others. Such ideas overlap with classed notions of cosmopolitanism, which explains why the identification with 'international communities' is stronger in the surroundings of Marbella, where most of the wealthy migrants cluster, than in Fuengirola, where Swedish migrants struggle to make ends meet. However, even Swedes who experience a downward class mobility through migration can choose to self-segregate with fellow nationals or other Scandinavians and escape the demands of social and cultural integration into local society.

By locating aspects of class mobility and socialising patterns in the framework of whiteness, the article demonstrates that racial patterns and divisions are both tenacious and rearticulated. While it is important to highlight class identities and internal class structures in lifestyle migrant communities, the article demonstrates that the dynamics of whiteness functions as a crucial ‘organizing principle’ of the social and cultural relations in these lifestyle migrant communities (Hartigan, 1997: 497). This links an analysis of habitus, consumption patterns and cultural identities in privileged migrant communities to the ‘perpetuation of a historical, cultural tradition of white domination’ (Hartigan 1997: 498) exerted in the European context (cf. Frankenberg, 1993).

As Swedish nationals cluster with other Scandinavians, Britons, Germans or Dutch in southern Spain, north-western European whiteness appears as a spatial ‘meeting point’ to which some bodies already belong. Their ‘likeness’ and ‘shared attributes’ bring them together in a foreign context in relation to a ‘near’ Orient, thus constituting a form of institutional whiteness (Ahmed, 2007; Dainotto, 2000). Institutional whiteness recruits subjects who ‘feel’ that they already belong and results in a division between migrants from north-western European countries, non-European migrants and locals from Spain. Hence, ‘international communities’ in southern Spain are not primarily defined by the frame of ‘migrants’ versus ‘locals’, but by overlapping social, cultural and racial divisions within the category of migrants and Europeans.

References

- Agar, M. (1996) *The Professional Stranger: an informal introduction to ethnography* 2nd ed. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2007) ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’, *Feminist Theory* 8(2): 149-168.

- Anthias. F. and Lazaridis. G. (eds.) (2000) *Gender and migration in Southern Europe: Women on the move*. New York: Berg.
- Benson, M. (2012) 'How culturally significant imaginations are translated into lifestyle migration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(10): 1-16.
- Benson, M. (2016) 'Deconstructing Belonging in Lifestyle Migration: Tracking the Emotional Negotiations of the British in Rural France', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(5): 481-494.
- Benson, M. and O'Reilly, K. (2009) 'Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration', *The Sociological Review* 57(4): 608-25.
- Benson, M. and Osbaldiston, N. (2016) 'Toward a critical sociology of lifestyle migration: reconceptualising migration and the search for a better way of life', *The Sociological Review* 64(3): 407-423.
- Bonnett, A. (2004) *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics, and History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Casado-Díaz, M. (2006) 'Retiring to Spain: An Analysis of Differences among North European Nationals', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32(8): 1321-39.
- Croucher, S. (2012) 'Privileged mobility in an age of globality', *Societies* 2(1): 1-13.
- Dainotto, R. M. (2000) 'A South with a View: Europe and its Other', *Nepantla. Views from South* 1(2), 375-390.
- Dyer, R. (1997) *White: essays on race and culture*. London: Routledge.
- El País (2010) 'El perfecto negativo de Vic y Torrejón. La Costa del Sol lucha por empadronar a su enorme población extranjera', *El País*: January 19.
- Erel, U. (2010) 'Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies', *Sociology* 44(4): 642-60.

- Erel, U., Murji, K., & Nahaboo, Z. (2016) 'Understanding the contemporary race-migration nexus', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(8): 1339-1360.
- Fra-Molinero, B. (2009). 'The Suspect Whiteness of Spain' in Jennings, La Vinia D. (ed.) *At Home and Abroad: Historicizing Twentieth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance*, pp. 147-69. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Fetcher, A-M (2010) 'Gender, empire, global capitalism: colonial and corporate expatriate wives', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(8): 1279-97.
- Frankenberg, R. (1993) *White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Garner, S. (2007a) *Whiteness: an introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Garner, S. (2007b) 'The European Union and the Racialization of Immigration, 1985-2006', *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary global Contexts* 1(1): 61-87.
- Gavanas, A. and Calzada, I. (2016) 'Multiplex Migration and Aspects of Precarization: Swedish Retirement Migrants to Spain and their Service Providers', *Critical Sociology*.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2003) *Colonial subjects: Puerto Ricans in a global perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gustafsson, P. (2008) 'Transnationalism in retirement migration: the case of North European retirees in Spain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31(3): 451-75.
- Hage, G. (2000) *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Hartigan, J. (1997) 'Establishing the fact of whiteness', *American Anthropologist* 99(3): 495-505.
- Hayes, M. (2015) 'It is hard being the different one all the time': gringos and racialized identity in lifestyle migration to Ecuador', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(6): 943-958.

- Holleran, M. (2016) 'Residential tourists and the half-life of European cosmopolitanism in post-crisis Spain', *Journal of Sociology* 4: 1-14.
- Jansson, A. (2016) 'Mobile elites: Understanding the ambiguous lifeworlds of Sojourners, Dwellers and Homecomers', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(5): 421-434.
- Knowles, C. and Harper, D. (2009) *Hong Kong: migrant lives, landscapes, and journeys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Korpela, M. (2010) 'A Postcolonial Imagination? Westerners Searching for Authenticity in India', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(8): 1299-1315.
- Lan, P.C. (2011) 'White Privilege, Language Capital and Cultural Ghettoisation: Western High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(10): 1669-1693.
- Leonard, P. (2010) *Expatriate Identities in Postcolonial organizations: Working whiteness*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Leonard, P. (2013) 'Making whiteness work in South Africa: A translabour approach', *Women's Studies International Forum* 36(1): 75-83.
- Lundström, C. (2013) Swedish Whiteness in Southern Spain, in France Winddance Twine and Bradley Gardener (eds). *Geographies of Privilege*, pp. 191-203. Routledge
- Lundström, C. (2014) *White Migrations: Gender, Whiteness and Privilege in Transnational Migration*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marcus, G.E. (1995) 'Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117.
- McDowell, L. (2009) 'Old and New European Economic Migrants: Whiteness and Managed Migration Policies', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35(1): 19-36.
- O'Reilly, K. (2002) 'Britain in Europe/The British in Spain: Exploring Britain's Changing Relationship to the Other Through the Attitudes of its Emigrants', *Nations and Nationalism* 8(2): 179-193.

- O'Reilly, K. (2007) 'Intra-European migration and the mobility - enclosure dialectic', *Sociology* 41(2): 277-293.
- Oliver, C. and O'Reilly, K. (2010) 'A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration. Habitus and the Individualizing Process', *Sociology* 44(1): 49-66.
- Rodriguez, V., Fernandez-Mayoralas G. and Rojo F. (2004) 'International Retirement Migration: Retired Europeans Living on the Costa Del Sol, Spain', *Population Review* 43(1): 1-36.
- Sernhede, O. (2005) "'Reality is My Nationality": The Global Tribe of Hip Hop and Immigrant Youth in The New Sweden', in M. Andersson, YG, Lithman and O. Sernhede (eds.) *Youth, Otherness and the Plural City. Modes of Belonging and Social Life*, pp. 271-290. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Twine, F. W., & Gallagher, C. (2008) 'The future of whiteness: A map of the "third wave"', *Ethnic and racial studies* 31(1): 4-24.

End notes

¹ SWEA was founded in Los Angeles in 1979 and has over 7,500 members in 33 local chapters in more than 30 countries. The purpose was to create a worldwide social network for Swedish-speaking women. All individual names have been changed.

² The average age on the Costa del Sol is 66.4 (Casado-Díaz, 2006).

³ 'En algunos casos, como en Marbella, la diferencia es notable: el censo tiene registradas a 140.000 personas de 137 nacionalidades, mientras que la población real, calculada sobre la producción de basuras, es de 235.000 habitantes durante todo el año [...]' (*El País*, 19 January 2010).

⁴ The Scandinavian radio broadcasts were all in Swedish.

⁵ The idea of 'the West' has not been static over time. There have, as Bonnett (2004) shows, been different views about what is/could be included in the idea of 'the West'.