

**Masculine Domination in Privileged Contexts:
British Migration in Spain**

**La dominación masculina en contextos privilegiados:
migración británica en España**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationships between gender and power in the context of lifestyle migration, using as a case study the British population settled in the province of Alicante, Spain. Drawing on a qualitative methodological strategy based on interviews, the analysis explores the role of drinking culture as a social space generating symbolic capital and reproducing gendered dispositions internalized in the United Kingdom. From a Bourdieusian perspective, it is argued that gender structures migration trajectories even among privileged groups, through forms of symbolic violence that condition access to sociability, recognition, and lifestyles. Gender inequalities are at the center of the analysis of privileged mobilities, challenging the homogeneous and uncritical image of lifestyle migrants and showing how their everyday experiences are marked by relations of symbolic domination.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. lifestyle, 3. gender roles, 4. violence, 5. drinking culture.

RESUMEN

Se examinan las relaciones entre género y poder en el contexto de las migraciones por estilo de vida, tomando como caso de estudio la población británica asentada en la provincia de Alicante, España. A partir de una estrategia metodológica cualitativa basada en entrevistas, se analiza el papel que desempeña la cultura del alcohol como espacio social generador de capital simbólico y reproductor de disposiciones de género interiorizadas en el Reino Unido. Desde una perspectiva bourdieusiana, se argumenta que el género estructura las trayectorias migratorias incluso entre sectores privilegiados, a través de formas de violencia simbólica que condicionan el acceso a la sociabilidad, el reconocimiento y los estilos de vida. Las desigualdades de género se sitúan en el centro del análisis de las movilidades privilegiadas, cuestionando la imagen homogénea y acrítica de los migrantes por estilo de vida y mostrando cómo sus experiencias cotidianas están atravesadas por relaciones de dominación simbólica.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. estilo de vida, 3. roles de género, 4. violencia, 5. cultura del alcohol.

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INTRODUCTION⁴

Clearly typified in academic literature, lifestyle migration is part of a broader set of human mobility forms, known as privileged mobilities (Croucher, 2012; Duplan & Cranston, 2023; McGarrigle, 2022). These encompass a variety of international mobility types, ranging from migration to long-stay tourism. The primary motivations of those who migrate relegate to a secondary role the factors linked to production dynamics, typical of labor migration. Greater emphasis is rather placed on the value given to leisure experiences, consumption practices, the natural and social environment, climate, cost of living, and existing infrastructure in the host society (transport, healthcare, urban amenities) (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Eimermann, 2015; Huete, 2009).

Discussions regarding the ways of conceptualizing these types of mobility delve into the trajectory of this line of research since 1990, and have already been examined in detail elsewhere (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; De Carvalho, 2023; Huete & Mantecón, 2010; King, 2018; Kunz, 2023; Rodes, 2011). Castilla-Polo, Huete, Mantecón, and Rosa (2023) note that among the profusion of terminologies and perspectives, two main currents stand out: on the one hand, that pursued by researchers primarily concerned with understanding the attitudes, expectations, characteristics (economic, demographic, and sociocultural), as well as the daily lives of the protagonists of these mobilities; and on the other hand, that more frequently adopted by those who study the impacts on the contexts of reception. The first line focuses on researchers socialized within the same cultural framework as their subjects of study, while the majority, more easily ascribed to the second current, have been based in places close to those where the repercussions of these realities are analyzed.

Since its origins in the 1970s and 80s, the second approach has encompassed studies developed from more critical perspectives, focused on highlighting the inherent conflicts within a complex social reality (some pioneering studies include those by Estivill, 1979; Galán et al., 1977; Gaviria, 1974a, 1974b; Jurdao, 1979; Nieto-Piñeroba, 1977; and Talavera, 1982; which have been followed by numerous other works). It still should be noted that the first current has also evolved considerably, widely broadening its critical reflexivity. In these more current approaches, attention is increasingly focused on the power relations derived from those territorial imbalances and social inequalities promoted by the capitalist system, making privileged mobilities a problematic phenomenon and, at times, one with neocolonialist connotations (Cranston & Duplan, 2023; Duplan & Cranston, 2023; Lundström, 2024; Lundström & Twine, 2011; Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2020; Spencer, 2025).

This principle of convergence between recent assessments carried out by Anglo-Saxon academics and those diagnoses made over forty years ago by Spanish or Mexican researchers has served to establish dialogues around the political dimension of privileged mobility (Gascón & Cañada, 2016; Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2021; Janoschka & Haas, 2014). With different rhythms and intensities, both currents have been interested in making visible the situations of injustice or economic exploitation derived from relations between social classes. Illustrative in this regard are those studies

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that address the actions of power elites who obtain surplus value by extracting resources from local working classes (Blázquez et al., 2011; Cordero-Ulate, 2006; Gascón, 2016; Hayes & Tello, 2016; Navarro-Cerdas, 2013), as well as those that analyze how the arrival of middle classes from outside a territory triggers gentrification and impoverishment processes (Hayes, 2014, 2018; Hayes & Pérez-Gañán, 2017; Hayes & Zaban, 2020; Romero-Toledo et al., 2023).

While acknowledging the contributions of these approaches, we aim to further our understanding of how power shapes the experiences and relationships that arise from these types of mobility. Our aim is thus to delve into the tensions that arise within the same class and ethnic-national group. Specifically, here we focus on the migration of British people to the Spanish Mediterranean regions and, even more particularly, on the ways in which gender constitutes a political dimension. The premise guiding this approach is that power permeates the entire network of social relations, both at the macro level—between geopolitical structures or influential lobbies—and in people's daily lives—within the family or in terms of leisure.

In addition to analyzing power relations between different socioeconomic and ethnic-national groups, we believe it is important to address the conflict that arises within social categories often perceived as homogeneous and privileged, and consequently, as lacking significant problems. In the case of the British population settled in southern Spain, their exposure to dynamics of social exclusion has already been documented (Hall, 2011, 2023; Hall & Hardill, 2016; La Parra & Mateo, 2008; O'Reilly, 2007), although the role of gender as a determining factor in their daily experience has been scarcely investigated—with the exception of the works by Ahmed (2015) and Dixon (2021). In any case, few studies have been found that address gender as a factor determining power relations in the daily lives of a population whose migration to Spain is linked to motivations closer to consumption and leisure than to production and work—although partial approaches can be found in Repetti and Calasanti (2020) and Huete et al. (2025).

Our aim is to delve deeper into understanding the role of gender as a factor that structures, and to some extent disciplines, the experience in Spain of the British lifestyle migrants within their context of geopolitical privilege. Although at first glance the population under study may not inspire the same empathy nor outrage as other situations involving groups exposed to blatant forms of exploitation or discrimination—giving the impression, in this case, of focusing on the everyday miseries of an affluent social group immersed in the dynamics of consumer society—we believe that its analysis can provide important sociological insights. This is particularly true given the frequent observation of increased alcohol consumption among individuals involved in various forms of privileged mobility (Bell, 2015; La Parra & Mateo, 2008; Pinto et al., 2022). This issue will be the focus of our attention. The normalization of a recreational space centered around drinking has been previously internalized in the countries of origin as a recurring facilitator of sociability (Fox, 2004) and, as we will explain below, its transposition to Spain will prove relevant when assessing the experience in the chosen destination.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

The approach suggested in the following pages focuses not so much on the tensions arising from the economic power that some individuals exert over others, but rather on the dynamics more closely related to the control of symbolic aspects. That is, on the ways in which people perceive and are perceived as a consequence of the different meanings they assign to the social situations in which they participate. It is true that economic and material aspects are always present in one way or another, generating interrelations between different levels, but for the purpose set forth here, it will be useful to pay special attention to the symbolic-discursive dimension, since it is in this sphere—that of recognition—that gender-related power relations will be played out.

To this end, some of the central concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology are used as points of reference. His perspective has always been interested in the forms of domination that originate within the different fractions that make up a social class. Penetrating this analytical level requires going beyond the study of economic capital (according to Bourdieu, the economic and material resources that a social agent can make use of to impose their interests) to also take into account the forms of social capital (the network of social relations that each individual can access to further their objectives), cultural capital (the acquired knowledge that influences social position), and symbolic capital (the reputation for competence and the image of respectability and good repute that can be converted into positions of power) possessed by the members of each class, and the trajectories they have followed to obtain them.

In Bourdieu's classic framework, the ways in which social reality is perceived are organized by *habitus*, that is, by systems of dispositions rooted in individuals through processes of internalizing values within a particular social class (and the conditions of existence linked to it) that end up structuring their perceptions, appreciations, and actions, without the individual being fully aware of it (Bourdieu, 1972). The concrete social practices of an agent result from the interaction between the constitutive dispositions of their *habitus* and the combination of the various forms of capital they possess, although this interaction gives in turn rise to different expressions depending on the field—or the state of the field—in which they manifest.

For Bourdieu, a field—for example, that of education, art, science, etc.—is a relatively autonomous and structured network of objective relations (of domination or subordination, complementarity or antagonism, etc.) between positions. These positions imply a hierarchical structure that conditions the perception of reality of those who occupy them. It is within this space of social forces constituted by this network of relations that the set of agents—individuals, groups, classes, institutions—that comprise it participate, occupying different positions. These agents struggle or compete to secure the forms of capital available in the field in order to ultimately maintain or improve their positions. Bourdieu (1979) summarizes this with the formula [(*Habitus*) (Capital)] + Field = Practice.

In order to understand the functioning of a social space and its lifestyles, all the elements that make up the aforementioned formula must be investigated. If the analysis were to delve into the specific variations of each individual, it would be necessary to develop psycho-biographical approaches that

exceed the scope of the sociological orientation proposed here. In any case, adopting such a perspective would require an effort that surpasses the more modest aims of this study. Nonetheless, maintaining the general approach outlined as a reference point will help guide the research and position the interpretations of the results obtained within a coherent analytical framework.

Pertaining to our objectives, Bourdieu conducted research on the political dimension of gender in everyday life and, in particular, on its role as an articulator of forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998). Thus, the power relations derived from the symbolic construction of gender relations refer to the imposition (and partly unconscious acceptance) of a definition of the legitimate uses of the body according to what certain positions recognize as acceptable and feasible (with respect to the sphere of sexuality).

The exercise of symbolic power involves a process of categorizing people, requiring a certain degree of complicity on the part of those who are subordinated to it, and ultimately produces definitions of what constitutes a legitimate social order, enveloping it in an appearance of inevitability that conceals or disguises its arbitrary nature (Bourdieu, 1991). In fact, some authors have spoken of an “accumulation by symbolic dispossession” to refer to situations in which a social agent manages to impose and naturalize the definition of social reality that most benefits their interests, simultaneously eliminating the possibility of alternative definitions to thrive (Fitchett et al., 2021).

In gender relations, symbolic violence may or may not be accompanied by other types of violence, and manifests itself in forms of coercion based on categories constructed by the dominant group and internalized as unavoidable by all those involved, provoking in the dominated—traditionally women—dynamics of systematic self-deprecation. These are modulated through emotions and feelings such as shame, guilt, anxiety, or humiliation. Having been learnt in childhood as dispositions that are activated naturally in specific situations, they regulate behavior in both intimate and public spheres (Bourdieu, 1998).

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

The research was conducted by means of a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. We believe this methodological approach is the most appropriate, given that our primary interest is understanding the meanings people ascribe to the situations in which they participate. Quantitative description and statistical extrapolation of the results are not objectives of this study (Valles, 2007).

The sample (see Table 1) consists of 35 British informants (17 men and 18 women) over 50 years of age, easily categorizable as members of the British middle class belonging to the baby boomer generation (born between the 1940s and 1960s). Their belonging to the same class in this case stems from sharing the material resources necessary to fulfill a common desire, typically characteristic of the aspirational sphere of the middle class: access, for extended periods or indefinitely, to owned or

rented housing in Mediterranean regions (which implies social recognition, that is, the affirmation of symbolic capital) (Paris, 2010).

The diffuse category often referred to as the *middle class* encompasses a variety of class fractions whose composition depends not only on the volume of capital accumulated by its members, but also on the structure of its distribution (the varying proportions of different types of capital). Thus, Britons who frequent or settle on the French Riviera can be distinguished from those who opt for southern Spain. As for the province of Alicante, our case study is a context in which the real estate and hotel businesses—with the critical support of local political authorities in legislative matters and promotional strategies—offer fairly homogeneous products for a market segment with equally very recognizable characteristics (Huete, 2009).

In any case, the province of Alicante exhibits particularly clear dynamics that are also present in many other Mediterranean regions of Spain and in the Canary Islands. The intense convergence of tourism in private homes undergoing different residential processes, a characteristic element of the social and economic reality of many coastal municipalities in Alicante (or those located in areas near the coast), poses significant challenges for local management planning (waste management, policing, healthcare personnel, energy supply, etc.). Moreover, these challenges are amplified by the frequent under-registration of foreign residents (which makes it difficult for local authorities to justify the funding required to provide certain services) (Huete, 2009; Huete & Mantecón, 2010).

This situation is further aggravated by the particular socio-spatial distribution of those who identify as lifestyle migrants. These individuals have shown a clear inclination to enclose themselves within their own residential enclaves, which have especially proliferated since the 1990s. This tendency is reinforced by the fundamental fact that the properties accumulated in these enclaves have often been offered in sale outside of Spain. These newly created urban areas are geographically separated from traditional population centers, where the majority of the Spanish population lives, fostering a fragmented municipal structure characterized by: a) a socioeconomic specialization between two spaces, one more oriented towards leisure and the other more towards work and the reproduction of the social logics that make it possible; b) a sociodemographic differentiation manifested in the overrepresentation of certain age groups in each of the spaces concerned; and c) an unequal distribution of people of certain nationalities, leading to the clustering of Central and Northern European citizens, with a predominant presence of those over 55, in the urbanizations developed on the municipal peripheries (Mantecón et al., 2016); this has led some municipalities to create specific offices to address the needs of these groups.

In these areas, aesthetic codes, linguistic frameworks, and a commercial network (grocery stores, bars and restaurants, and various services) adapted to the tastes, daily rhythms, and needs of lifestyle migrants are evident. All of this reinforces patterns, particularly among the British population, characterized by very strong intragroup relationships—among Britons themselves—and very weak intergroup relationships—with other nationalities (Casado, 2009). As a result, a dense network of British associations can be found in the region (Simó-Noguera et al., 2013).

Most of the people in our sample are retired from the labor market and identify as lifestyle migrants, as defined in the specialized literature: someone who relocates their residence for non-work-related reasons (or for whom work plays a secondary role), their primary motivation being to build a lifestyle centered around access to leisure experiences in a social and environmental context they consider beneficial and, obviously, affordable within their economic means. Thus, making use of the *lifestyle migrant* category serves the practical purpose of locating informants, since, unlike most other possible labels (expatriate, residential tourist, retired migrant, transnational resident, etc.), this category is perceived as non-problematic by almost all Britons residing in southern Spain, regardless of their administrative ties—a point also noted by Benson (2014) and Croucher (2014).

The interviews were conducted in 2022 in various municipalities in the province of Alicante, a Mediterranean region located in the southeast of Spain. Along with Málaga, the province of Alicante has the highest concentration of Britons over 50 years of age living in Spain (Giner-Monfort & Hall, 2024; Huete et al., 2025). Informants were selected by means of snowball sampling, guided by the search for individuals who fit the research profile. Initial contacts were made with six members of different associations of residents of British origin. The first series of interviews were obtained through these contacts. The meetings took place in cafes, community centers, town halls, the interviewees' homes, and, exceptionally, at the University of Alicante. We communicated in English. The shortest interview lasted 35 minutes, and the longest 105 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission, ensuring them the strictly academic purposes of the research and the protection of their anonymity.

The sample size was determined based on the principle of discourse saturation for the main topics addressed. After conducting the final interviews, it was found that the information obtained reached redundancy and that the recording of new arguments was highly unlikely. Following successive readings of the transcripts by all team members, themes, subthemes, and the various evaluations of these were identified, as well as shared discursive patterns that articulated the interpretations of our interviewees. In this respect, the standard procedures for qualitative thematic analysis were followed (Brinkmann, 2013; Conde, 2009).

In the section dedicated to presenting the results, the arguments are supported by excerpts from the transcripts. These serve an illustrative purpose, and their inclusion aims to facilitate the understanding of the reasoning presented in the interviews.

Table 1. Interview Sample

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital Status*</i>	<i>Years in Spain</i>
I1	Male	72	Single	21
I2	Female	69	Married	20
I3	Female	81	Single	30
I4	Female	69	Single	20
I5	Female	77	Married	11
I6	Male	78	Married	12
I7	Female	69	Single	10
I8	Male	66	Single	9
I9	Female	75	Single	27
I10	Female	74	Married	27
I11	Male	79	Married	21
I12	Female	71	Married	20
I13	Male	78	Married	14
I14	Female	76	Married	16
I15	Female	66	Married	18
I16	Male	66	Married	12
I17	Male	78	Single	17
I18	Male	73	Married	9
I19	Female	62	Married	14
I20	Male	56	Married	18
I21	Female	57	Married	8
I22	Male	56	Married	16
I23	Female	55	Married	16
I24	Male	58	Married	16
I25	Male	67	Married	32
I26	Male	66	Married	17
I27	Female	79	Married	20
I28	Female	63	Married	10
I29	Female	68	Single	17
I30	Male	70	Single	23
I31	Female	64	Married	11
I32	Male	75	Married	14
I33	Male	72	Married	20
I34	Male	72	Married	17
I35	Female	68	Married	21

* All individuals living with a partner were married. Those living alone were single, widowed, or separated.

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

The results presented here arose unexpectedly within the context of a qualitative research project aimed at understanding the repercussions of Brexit on the lives of Britons living in Spain (i.e., the process that in 2020 culminated in the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union [EU]). In this regard, the interviews addressed various issues, including questions about how gender could influence the perception of the post-Brexit scenario (resulting from a new administrative framework that, compared to the previous situation, hinders the mobilization of people and goods between the United Kingdom and the EU).

However, during the interviews, a recurring theme emerged, one unrelated to Brexit and not initially included among the topics to be addressed. Its discussion arose spontaneously when questions were asked about daily life in Spain. It was not mentioned until participants brought it up, and they were certainly not prompted to discuss it initially. Given its sociological interest, it certainly captured our attention. This was further reinforced by the willingness of interviewees to elaborate on it when asked. All of this motivated the elaboration of this paper. The topic in question can be summarized as the influence of *drinking culture* (an expression the interviewees themselves used) on the lifestyle of the British population residing in southern Spain.

The Social Space of Drinking Culture

The initial puzzlement we experienced at the recurring emergence of this issue was followed by a curiosity to understand how the interviewees defined and reasoned about participation in drinking culture. Especially so when we observed how drinking culture became a social space that regulated the behavior of men and women. Through this informal regulation, set in motion by members of the British community through subtle forms of symbolic violence (gossip, mockery, ostracism, etc.), the approximate delimitation of what is acceptable for a British lifestyle migrant settled in Spain was contested. Even beyond that, the much more complex and all-encompassing definition of what constitutes a good life and its implications from the perspective of masculinity and femininity was being discussed as well.

The lifestyle I would say [...] men like to go out more than women. You can simply see it in their lifestyles. Men expect more of a party lifestyle, but not partying all the time; rather, social drinking and all that (I22, male, 56, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

This form of relating, described as typically masculine, has structured the social life and leisure of many men in the United Kingdom, while also shaping a social space whose access was denied to women through informal mechanisms of social control.

It should be noted that when the interviewees referred to *drinking culture*, they were not alluding to alcoholism or to situations of isolation or social exclusion resulting from it. On the other hand, a matter of already identified and discussed gravity regarding British immigration to Spain, considering the sociodemographic characteristics of this population, their healthcare needs, and the pressure they exert on the sustainability of the Spanish public healthcare system (Huete & Mantecón, 2012; La Parra & Mateo, 2008; Legido-Quigley & La Parra, 2007), an issue that has also gained particular relevance following the administrative uncertainty arising from Brexit (Giner-Monfort & Huete, 2021).

Drinking culture does not imply alcoholism. It refers to a social space structured by leisure. In this case, leisure organizes a field of positions and relationships that requires the participation of people in recreational activities that include alcohol consumption or social interaction in private spaces (bars, pubs) where the main commercial activity is the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Women probably find it more problematic than men. Men don't find it as difficult. I think it might be part of their drinking culture, or, I don't know, maybe men find it easier to make friends

or socialize than women [...] In the British lifestyle, you mainly drink (I32, male 75, personal communication, March 30, 2022).

Reinforcing this idea, another interviewee stated:

I think it's harder for women [...] Their everyday social networks are limited; their family networks are usually at home [...] A single woman might not go into a pub just as easily as a single man does (I25, male 67, personal communication, September 30, 2022).

Here, drinking culture is organized as a space for interaction and integration. This space allows British people to join a community that provides them with recognition and support. That is, it constitutes itself as an important space for the accumulation of symbolic and social capital, which conditions the position of an individual in the field of relationships and, therefore, their perceptions and practices. In this regard, it shares similarities with the nightlife model for teenagers and young adults prevalent in so many places, although the reality we analyze here has its own unique dynamics.

In this case, it reveals itself as a social space promoted by local authorities and driven by Spanish and British businesspeople interested in reproducing in Spain the conditions necessary to replicate—and if possible, amplify—attitudes and behaviors learned in the United Kingdom over decades. These dispositions, articulated as *habitus*, shape the lifestyles of a generation of British *baby boomers* belonging to a social class that has been constantly exposed to media, advertising messages, and leisure spaces that promote a very limited range of recreational possibilities.

Recording the behaviors of the study population in Spain within the context of drinking culture by means of social research techniques provides valuable information, but it alone does not allow for us to understand the reality discussed here. Understanding the social space in which these behaviors become concrete practices requires comprehension; this space has a history that transcends the boundaries within which the behaviors of British migrants in the province of Alicante are observed. As they themselves explain:

We didn't have such free time in England, so we didn't socialize. When we worked, we only knew the people we worked with, and we used to drink after work, it was that kind of drinking culture, that was it (I6, male, 78, personal communication, July 25, 2022).

Access to this space of social relations has been conditioned by symbolic markers that distinguish between the behaviors of men and those of women:

For a woman, going to a pub in England, unless it's in an actual village, it draws attention to oneself. People will wonder, is she making herself available? That kind of thing. If I were in England, I wouldn't go into a pub alone (I4, woman 69, personal communication, July 25, 2022).

In Spain, on the one hand, there is a clash between the aspirations of individuals who want to take advantage of the changing context to redefine their positions and, to some extent, their personal identities, and on the other hand, the effects of *habitus* that insist on structuring the social order in accordance with deeply rooted ways of understanding gender relations. Ultimately, as explained by Kate Fox (2004), drinking culture in the UK—and in so many other places where it serves as a space for social integration—causes an apparent suspension of the social hierarchy system that operates in

the sphere of production, providing a temporary redefinition of status and compensating for certain frustrations. This, however, and as Fox points out, does not mean that a context of free expression and absence of social sanctions is that way established; rather, something akin to *regulated deregulation* emerges.

In Bourdieu's terms, one could say that a relatively autonomous field is structured where morally acceptable practices and those susceptible to sanction are redefined. Yet, in the case of lifestyle migrants immersed in drinking culture, the moral codes that govern their leisure activities find no disciplinary counterweight in the obligations and routines of working life, since most of the people who migrate for lifestyle reasons have left such obligations behind. Instead, the sense of responsibility and of what is decent or immoral finds its counterweight elsewhere, perhaps in the different ways in which men and women interpret their family commitments (Huete et al., 2025).

In the end, what we find here is an adaptive dissonance that finds its explanation in the persistent nature of a *habitus* that has marked the lives of at least one generation of people from the United Kingdom, who, in a new setting, tend to reproduce the conditions of their own upbringing.

I think it's probably easier for them [British men] because, it appears to me, it's still a great legacy of sorts for women to take care of their men. Men make friends quite easily because there are so many English restaurants in this area [...] It's like living in England but under the sun. While the women have to worry about cooking or doing the laundry (I9, woman 75, personal communication, July 25, 2022).

The excitement associated with starting a new stage in life in Spain is diminished by the social weight of the dispositions assimilated throughout life in the United Kingdom, when the organization of society was rigidly structured by a series of expectations ascribed to men (providers) and others to women (caregivers). These dispositions reduce the uncertainty and anxiety that some individuals may feel, at the expense of eliminating the freedom of choice desirable to others. The conflicts and tensions that could arise from redefining the rules of the game (and thus the limits of what is allowed) are suppressed through an exercise of symbolic violence in which certain *habitus* are established as preservers and reproducers of social positions achieved in the country of origin.

Thus, gender conditions the positions that men and women occupy in a field structured through specific leisure practices and, consequently, through the system of expectations that guides acceptable attitudes and behaviors in very particular recreational spaces. What we want to highlight here is the influence of gender on the social production of a "regime of truth" (to use Foucault's expression) that orders the spaces of everyday interaction. The political dimension of this situation permeates people's daily lives; to the practical problems that follow from building a new life in an environment different from the usual one are added the emotional tensions arising from: *a)* the need of a segment of the British population in Spain to preserve certain norms and codes of conduct, with clear implications from the point of view of their personal affirmation and, ultimately, of the preservation or reconstruction of symbolic capital they accumulated in the United Kingdom; and *b)* the challenging compatibility of the above with the desire of another segment of this population to exercise their

capacity to assert in Spain a lifestyle different from that led in their country of origin, also with decisive implications in terms of redefining personal identity.

These difficulties transcend the far from trivial fact that some people want or can access certain leisure spaces. The field of leisure exhibits a disciplinary character that affects people's emotional well-being and, considering the stage of life they are in, causes them to evaluate, in positive or negative terms, a whole chain of previous decisions—economic, logistical, and emotional—in which, in one way or another, their closest relatives have been involved (Cohen & Gössling, 2015). These tensions are amplified when taking into account the political and administrative scenario created by Brexit, as the possibility of developing fluid residential strategies between the United Kingdom and the EU is now more complicated. As has been specifically documented in the Spanish case, this new scenario places greater pressure on women, whose emotional ties with their families in the United Kingdom take on a different character and practical implications than those of men (Ahmed, 2015; Dixon, 2021; Huete et al., 2025).

It should still be noted that some of the women interviewed also described a certain relaxation in Spain (compared to the United Kingdom) of the forms of symbolic violence stemming from the type of male-dominated relationship described above, including the greater ease with which older and middle-aged women can access and participate in the social practices of drinking culture. In the opinion of these interviewees, the dynamics of exclusion and stigmatization of women in public spaces persist as a problem, although fortunately, it has been confined to certain generational boundaries and, in that sense, does not affect younger people.

New Lifestyles in Authentic Spain

The transposition of habitus from one context to another in order to reproduce the conditions that enable certain lifestyles is far from being a problem-free procedure. Bourdieu has sometimes been criticized for the deterministic and oppressive character he attributes to the habitus, in relation to people's capacity for action and social resistance (Boltanski, 2009; Burawoy, 2019). However, as described above, Bourdieu insisted throughout his work that, far from any mechanistic view, habitus is only translated into social practices through its articulation by agents who possess different combinations of capital and who interact in variable fields (and states of fields), in which the intervening social forces continually shape and reshape their positions and, consequently, the entirety of the field.

In any case, the discourses recorded through our interviews evidence a series of reactions in which alternative trajectories can be identified. These require efforts from the British population studied related, in one way or another, to a distancing from the social space structured by drinking culture and, consequently, to the assertion of other ways of understanding masculinity and femininity.

I think there is a drinking culture for men that doesn't exist for women [...] A man can go to a pub in Britain and spend the whole night drinking with other people... and a woman wouldn't. It's a big difference [...] And if you're a British man of a certain age, retired, not very fit, without many hobbies other than your great hobby that is drinking, then it's very attractive to come to

Spain, where, especially in Benidorm, alcohol is so affordable. So yes, there are some British men who would do it because drinking is their hobby and it costs a quarter of what it costs in Britain. I don't think that's the case for women, or for all men. But those are the ones they interview, the ones you see on television. That's a horrible representation of British men (I28, woman 63, personal communication, October 6, 2022).

I don't like drunk English people, that's why I don't go to Benidorm [...] The other day I saw a woman walk past a restaurant showing her bum, her bikini askew... Maybe men like that. For me, it's disrespectful. For me and for many other people (I7, woman 69, personal communication, July 25, 2022).

In the province of Alicante, distancing oneself from social spaces also requires adopting a different relationship with physical space. Thus, drinking culture becomes embedded in certain places that, as receptacles of specific practices, prevent access to a genuine experience of Spanish reality.

Access to authentic Spain is presented as a possibility for experiences reserved for Britons willing to challenge the aforementioned inertia, and also as a way to construct lifestyles based on different understandings of gender relations, nature, and culture. In this way, an idealized Mediterranean lifestyle, far removed from the overcrowding and superficiality common along the coast, shapes an imaginary world where Benidorm—the province's main tourist city and one of the most representative examples of mass tourism in the Mediterranean—is perceived as the anticlimax, the place where a retrograde *habitus* imported from the United Kingdom, reproducing old masculine domination ways, is projected and updated; the social (group) consumption of large quantities of alcohol being its most evident distinguishing feature:

What can one see in the tourists who come to Benidorm? They're a different class of people; they behave very badly, they get drunk [...] They're more inclined to do so because they're on holiday in Spain. Those who are residents don't behave like that (I33, male, 72, personal communication, April 13, 2022).

In fact, in most interviews, the statements on this subject evidence a desire to distance themselves from this lifestyle: "Although there are very touristy places in the province of Alicante, I rather like going to rural areas that the British don't visit. It's simply more Spanish, the authentic Spain" (I17, male, 78, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

We live in the countryside [...] We like being among our Spanish neighbors [...] We aren't typical English or British people [...] We live in a small village, and we're the only English people there [...] and it's perfect for us. We can go and visit the English community, we can visit the English 'ghettos' and then leave (I12, female, 71, personal communication, September 12, 2022).

As can be seen in the preceding testimonial excerpts, the self-perception of some interviewees as "atypical" Britons opens a space of mutual recognition for a segment of the population that distinguishes itself from the rest of its compatriots through the possession of a certain symbolic capital. This allows them to approach their relationship with the world and align their other forms of capital according to the tastes of a class fraction characterized by its distance from the "highly touristy places"

frequented by “typical British people.” In these vulgar, artificial places, fueled by the consumption of cheap alcohol, the Spanish population is a minority, as are the Britons interested in adopting healthy lifestyles and establishing stronger commitments to the region in which they live. The position occupied by the latter allows them to appreciate reality in a very different way from those immersed in the social spaces of drinking culture.

In this line of reasoning, those who stay aside the spaces frequented by the majority of the British population in Spain manage to gain a broader perspective. Thanks to this perspective, when they visit British-centric areas, they maintain a certain distance, displaying an attitude more typical of a visitor than a member of the community. Along the same line, they come to appreciate local traditions, culture, and nature in towns and small cities away from the coast, as well as family life and healthier ways of understanding gender relations. Their grasp of freedom and authenticity has nothing to do with the practices found in places like Benidorm, but rather with lifestyles that stand in stark contrast to the values associated with drinking culture.

The distinction raised here between those who aspire to experience an authentic Spain and those who are rather drawn to leisure activities organized around drinking culture is discussed through the lens of gender, which underpins the entire argument. However, it should be emphasized that the intent of this explanation is not deterministic. On the contrary, the intention is to enrich (not replace) other approaches. Thus, in line with studies conducted from Bourdieusian perspectives on lifestyle migration of British people to Spain, which demonstrate how class habitus and the unequal distribution of different forms of capital shape the opportunities and expectations of some groups compared to others (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010), the analysis presented here should be complemented by research into the intersections between, at the very least, gender, social class, and the generation to which the interviewees belong. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to that purpose.

CONCLUSIONS

The research presented here delves into an issue that has gone virtually unnoticed in studies on lifestyle migration: the unequal influence of an alcohol drinking-based leisure culture on the daily lives of British men and women who settle in Mediterranean Spain.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological perspective and from a qualitative methodological approach, we analyzed the social force exerted by *habitus* established in the United Kingdom when they attempt to reproduce themselves in a new context. In this case, that context takes the form of a social space whose rules are being challenged. Within a social group of British citizens over 50 years of age whose relocation to Spain is not primarily motivated by economic factors, some individuals seek to reproduce and adapt to a new environment the informal dispositions and regulations governing the social relations and leisure activities that have structured most of their lives in the United Kingdom, while others aim to redefine their lifestyle and the nature of those relationships.

The social space structured by what the interviewees refer to as *drinking culture* offers a range of opportunities in Spain for building social capital. Thus, those arriving from the United Kingdom find

themselves with the opportunity to integrate into a network of relationships that offers possibilities for mutual recognition. In this network, forms of symbolic violence linked to drinking culture—and the accompanying power dynamics of masculine dominance—are sometimes perceived as more relaxed; yet in any case, their influence is acknowledged. The degree of tolerance for behaviors that would be socially sanctioned in the United Kingdom is decided informally according to the rules of a game (of conduct and expectations) established by men and assumed as acceptable by a segment of the British population.

Other individuals, however, attempt to construct different ways of relating to the physical and social space in which they are embedded. The values that underpin these alternative interaction pathways are established in opposition to the predominant values in the social space regulated by the type of leisure (and the gender relations associated with it) that result from the attempt to reproduce in Spain *habitus* internalized in the United Kingdom. We observe how tastes serve to distinguish class fractions and, duly transformed into guiding elements of certain lifestyles, become producers of particular systems of recognition. In turn, these systems challenge the effectiveness of otherwise consolidated *habitus*, fostering social reactions that seek to assert themselves by developing their own schemes of perception and appreciation.

We believe that, perhaps, the fact that the interviews were conducted in English, but by researchers from backgrounds clearly distant from the British one, may have facilitated a certain relaxation among many of our interviewees, allowing them to speak about issues not initially anticipated and which would not have been so easy to address with researchers closer to their sociocultural context. Perhaps, without having set that goal before beginning fieldwork, the interviews took place in contexts of communicative interaction that are, in reality, difficult to achieve and, in any case, represent an almost indispensable condition for delving deeper into certain issues (a similar situation—due to its unforeseen nature—is described by Bell (2015) within the framework of research on privileged mobility). In this regard, it should be emphasized that the relevance of the topic was underscored by the interviewees themselves, as they are the ones who, without being directly asked on it, decided to assign it significant value when explaining their daily lives.

The findings discussed in this text contribute to placing power relations mediated by gender differences at the center of studies on privileged mobility and, in particular, on so-called lifestyle migrations. In this sense, it is worthwhile to explore avenues that facilitate the analytical integration of structural levels with those more concerned with everyday social interactions. This also requires developing and adapting theoretical perspectives that, as in the case of Bourdieu's sociology, take into account the political dimensions of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic factors. As shown, even if social relations do not translate into situations of overt oppression and exploitation, power possesses an essential explanatory capacity, as an element that permeates the entire social fabric.

We conclude with some comments regarding the limitations of this study. On the one hand, we acknowledge those limitations inherent in research whose primary objective was not the analysis of the issues raised here. By having emerged unexpectedly during qualitative fieldwork, the results acquire particular interest, although for that very reason it has not been possible to delve more deeply

into their explanatory keys. This fact undoubtedly motivates us to continue exploring the issues raised here in the future, designing research that specifically addresses these topics and that complements the qualitative perspective with a quantitative one. That way it will be possible to understand their true dimensions, taking into account the different positions and class fractions involved.

Finally, reflecting on the limitations of this work also leads us to consider the inherent limitations of perspectives grounded in the nation-State scale. From this framework, it might seem, as indeed happens in our research, that drinking culture and the forms of symbolic violence that come along with it are the exclusive domain of a generation and social class confined to the United Kingdom. This is of course not the case. In this sense, we must develop approaches that enable the analysis of residential mobility processes, and the tensions between actions and structures, from comparative and intersectional perspectives that include diverse contexts, social groups, and analytical categories.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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