

**DISCURSOS TRANSNACIONALES DE INCLUSION ETNICA:  
EL CASO DE LOS *ESPAÑOLES POR ADOPCION***

**TRANSNATIONAL DISCOURSES OF ETHNIC INCLUSION:  
THE CASE OF *ESPAÑOLES POR ADOPCION* (Spaniards per adoption))**

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**RESUMEN**

*“¿Continuará siendo la emigración argentina en España una Cenicienta poco conocida, oculta tras los efímeros ropajes principescos que la hacen aparecer como una ‘no emigración’, supuestamente en un plano de casi igualdad con la población Española?”  
(Actis y Esteban, 2007:246)*

En los últimos años, los Argentinos de origen español (o Euro-Argentinos) han emigrado a la tierra de sus antepasados en números crecientes, en base a la doble ciudadanía obtenida via el *ius sanguinis*. El periplo migratorio de este grupo ha sido alentado en gran medida por la expectativas de obtener los mismos beneficios que los Españoles nativos, pese a las restricciones del mercado laboral. La explotación de la *nostalgia étnica* ha sido promovida por discursos transnacionales que no solamente prometen hacer realidad los sueños de los Euro-Argentinos, sino también auspician tratados binacionales sobre la base de los lazos de sangre. En contra de las representaciones negativas que afectan a otros colectivos, los medios de comunicación han contribuido a sostener la figura del argentino como el *inmigrante modelo/retornado*. Exploramos estos puntos en profundidad a partir del caso de Aguaviva, un pequeño pueblo rural que por medio de una innovadora propuesta de *inmigración programada* destinada a contrarrestar la pérdida de población, patrocinó inicialmente el arribo de varias familias Euro-Argentinas. Sin embargo, las expectativas mutuas de integración entre la población nativa y la visitante se desvanecieron rápidamente. Si de alguna manera los argentinos fueron considerados como el grupo más similar a los nativos, esta semejanza fue la base de sus conflictos. Este estudio de caso es paradigmático por cuanto refleja

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preocupaciones respecto al envejecimiento de la población nativa, así como en cuanto a la búsqueda de soluciones alternativas a los dilemas demográficos. Finalmente sugerimos temas futuros a investigar desde una perspectiva transnacional comparada.

**Palabras Clave:** inmigración del retorno, afinidad étnica, Argentinos en España, inmigración de argentinos.

### ABSTRACT

Argentines from Spanish descent are increasingly migrating to the land of their ancestors as Euro-Argentineans, on the basis of their eligibility to dual citizenships supported by blood heritage (*ius sanguinis*). We argue that Argentines' recent migratory path to their grandparents' homeland is supported by their hope to access the same rights and benefits as native Spaniards, expectations that often collide against their limited job opportunities. The exploitation of ethnic nostalgia in both countries has been taking place amidst transnational discourses that not only support Euro-Argentines' migratory dreams, but also governments' political treaties on the basis of blood ties. Contrary to the negative representations depicting other immigrant groups, we examine how the media have highlighting the image of the Argentine migrant as the *model immigrant/returnee*. To explore these issues in detail, we focus on a case study of *immigration by design* led by Aguaviva, a small rural town Spain, which initially sponsored the resettlement of several Euro-Argentinean families. Nevertheless, soon after arrival, the expectations of visitors and natives clashed regarding their mutual expectations of social integration. Even if Argentines were considered as distant family members, it is precisely this alleged similarity with their hosts that became their curse. This case study reflects broader Spanish and European concerns about aging and fading populations, as well as about immigration as a solution to demographic dilemmas. Finally this essay suggests areas for future research taking into account a comparative transnational perspective.

**Keywords:** return migration, ethnic affinity, Argentines in Spain, Argentine immigrants

## **Introduction**

In recent years, both the Argentine and the international media have featured the stories of thousands of Argentines waiting overnight at the doors of the Spanish and the Italian Consulates in Buenos Aires, hoping to obtain either a passport or a job offer that will bring them promises of a better future abroad (Castiglione and Cura, 2007; Rohter, 2002). Media stories have also underscored the opportunities waiting to unfold for those daring to retrace their ancestors' migratory pasts. As in the case of other Latin American countries, Argentines of European descent are increasingly settling down in their ancestors' countries of origin (mostly Spain and Italy) as Euro-Argentines, on the basis of their eligibility for European citizenships supported by blood linkages (*ius sanguinis*). Since the Spanish and the Italian nationality can be passed from one generation to another even by nationals living abroad, and may be held concurrently with Argentine nationality, observers worry that millions could potentially claim these nationalities and migrate to Spain and Italy (Heguy, 2003; Relea, 2000). This possibility has recently attracted considerable attention on both sides of the Atlantic, with reports emphasizing the increasing number of Argentines who have been retracing their steps back to their former European homelands. The novelty of this phenomenon in the twenty-first century is inscribed not only within a process of massive migration diaspora from the South to the North, but also amidst claims of citizenship and ethnic incorporation as it has been never seen before.

This paper examines Euro-Argentines' presence in Spain in the context of reception policies, transnational discourses and practices that in various ways diverge from recent immigrants' expected possibilities for social and economic advancement. Euro-Argentines in this article are the children and grandchildren of those who left Spain during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly until the onset of World War II, and landed in South America (mostly in Argentina, Uruguay and South of Brazil) while searching for new opportunities for success. Nevertheless, Argentines' presence in the old continent is not new since out-flow migratory trends to Spain can be traced back to the 1960s, and peaked in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, while in the 1970s, particularly after the coup d'état in 1976, Argentine streams to Spain were mostly motivated by political reasons; economic factors have constituted the main migratory drive since the 1980s on (Actis, 2007; Sarribe, 2000). Actis (2005) points out the existence of three incoming waves of Argentines in Spain, the first represented by the political exiles in the 1970s, followed by the presence of economic migrants beginning in the mid 1980s'on, and right after Argentina's economic

debacle in 2001. The latter was accompanied by the fall of President Fernando de la Rúa and the succession of four presidents in twelve days (see Urdiales y Ferrer, 2005; Viladrich, 2005a).

While until the early 1990s Argentines constituted the largest Latin American influx in Spain, representing 29.2 % of the Latin American population in the country, in recent years their presence descended to a 15.4% particularly due to naturalization and the growing presence of nationals from other Latin American countries (Vicente Torrado, 2006; Martínez Buján, 2003; Izquierdo, López and Martínez, 2002). In fact, the rising *Latino Americanization* of Spain has been encouraged by this country's growing economic drive along with rising unemployment in Latin America, bilateral treaties that have facilitated Latin American immigrants' entry and residence, cultural similarities (language) and difficulties to enter the US after September 11 (Viladrich, 2005a, 2003; Gratiús, 2005). In addition, Argentines' presence in Spain has lately become less visible due to the increasing number of those entering the country as Europeans. As noted by other authors (Sarrible, 2000; Domingo, 2005) immigrants who hold dual citizenships appear as "returnees" in Spain, even among those who were born abroad. Certainly, the proportion of dual citizens registered as Spanish returnees has increased in recent years, particularly among those coming from Argentina. According to the Spanish census, 27% (or 227,796 people) of the total of Spanish citizens counted in Spain in 2001 were born in Latin America (Domingo, 2005). In terms of the Argentine-born in Spain, the most comprehensive study reveals that they number just over 250,000 (Actis and Esteban, 2007).

In spite of the increasingly diversity of the Argentine migratory outflow, the literary and testimonial literature on Argentine emigrants in recent decades has emphasized the experiences of middle-class Argentines, who either left their country to upgrade their professional careers, or joined the number of political exiles who were forced to leave Argentina in different periods. As early as 1965, journals were publishing articles about the "exportation of intelligence" that underscored the selective emigration of high-level professionals. As with some other immigrant groups such as Cubans in the US (see Pedraza-Bailey, 1985), research on Argentine emigrants have generally portrayed "successful" case studies. Political persecution, economic instability, and Argentines' better opportunities to succeed abroad are the major themes of books and articles on Argentine émigrés (e.g., Melamed, 2003). Although this literature represents an enormous contribution to our understanding of Argentina's contemporary migratory processes, it has overstated the image of "white" well-educated Argentines, able to thrive in mainstream societies by joining prestigious corporations and research institutions (see Viladrich, 2007 for a critique). The

lack of promising careers and the devaluation of educational credentials that had in the past assured upward mobility for middle- and lower middle-class sectors in Argentina, have turned an increasing number of émigrés into an overqualified labor force for the low-status positions they may have access to in their country (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Thus, in an effort to avoid downclassing, migration to Europe and to the US has become a typical middle-class social strategy in a market where educational credentials no longer assure a relatively comfortable standard of living.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Argentina's most recent emigration streams have been characterized by wider socioeconomic diversity and lower educational levels (Actis and Esteban 2007).

In this essay we examine how Argentines' migratory path to their ancestors' homeland is constructed on the basis of claiming "equal treatment" vis-à-vis native Spaniards. To that end, this paper argues that expectations of ethnic inclusion on the part of Argentine-Spanish citizens are built upon the notion of shared similarities with their hosts, which paradoxically tends to hinder their differences and disparate expectations in terms of job-related incorporation.

This research falls into a body of literature that deals with ethnic affinity policies that grant privileged benefits and citizen status to potential émigrés assumed to share common origins with those in receiving nations. As noted somewhere else (Cook and Viladrich *in press*) ethnic affinity policies are meant to grant prospective immigrants special privileges including citizenships and job opportunities, based on assumed common origins. At least on paper, ethnic affinity immigrants are supposed to enjoy the same benefits than natives, although conflicts often emerge once the first attempt to compete with jobs held by the second. We argue that while Euro-Argentines design a migratory path to their ancestors' homeland on the basis of their citizenship rights, natives contest newcomers' full membership by offering them jobs in less desirable niches (Sacristán, 2005). By claiming themselves as "surrogate children" abroad, Argentines move a step forward to joining the Spanish majority vis-à-vis other groups that appear as *ethnic others* both within and outside South America.

The essay examines the literature on Argentine émigrés vis-à-vis a discourse analysis of 257 articles compiled between 2000 and 2005 from the Spanish, Argentine, American and European press. We analyzed articles that contained specific references to ethnic affinity and return migration from Argentines to Spain in particular.<sup>2</sup> A fifth of all articles compiled specifically dealt with the town of Aguaviva, located in the rural Spanish region of Aragon, which represents a special case of immigration by design. The articles were collected as events in Aguaviva unfolded and were subsequently followed via electronic searches of newspaper databases. Aguaviva serves as a

window into the often conflicting expectations deployed by Spanish-descent Argentines and their co-ethnic hosts. We argue that the Aguaviva case is significant because it reflects broader Spanish and European concerns about aging and fading populations, as well as about immigration as a solution to demographic dilemmas (see Novick 2007; Castiglione and Cura 2007). This essay's ultimate purpose is to examine how the process of achieving a dual citizenship is accompanied by social and political strategies in which discourses of ethnic inclusion clash against actual integration policies and subtle exclusionary practices.

### **Claims for Citizenship on the Basis of Ethnic Ties**

In recent years, countless media stories have underscored the opportunities waiting for those daring to retrace their ancestors' migratory past, while giving testimony to the unprecedented number of Argentines moving to Spain, now a main destination for Argentine émigrés (Esteban, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the Argentine government has stressed the moral debt that Spain allegedly owes to Argentina, by pointing out the country's welcoming reception to the millions of citizens from that country that landed in its harbors by the early twentieth century, vis-à-vis the increasing harsh regulations imposed to Argentines planning to live and work abroad. As a result, both the Argentine government and the mainstream media have promoted an ideology of return, as a subtle means towards gaining political leverage with their European counterparts.

While many Argentines hope to achieve a European status for practical reasons, others have grown up in social contexts rich in European social and cultural thought (e.g., tastes, music and sentiment) that provide them with narratives about the past, such as stories about the first world war told by their grandparents, which have contributed to the construction of their own social personas (see Sarramone, 1999). As noted by other authors (García, 2004; Barón et al., 1995) the election of European countries as Argentines' preferred places of destiny have been supported by a social imaginary fond of story telling that somehow idealizes European memories, customs, and traditions. These narratives, through time, have contributed to nurture the emotional imagination of Europeans' children and grandchildren in Argentina. Issues that have been pointed out in the literature include Argentines' overall familiarity with the culture and language of their ethnic homeland, similar phenotypical traits, religion, as well as transnational networks of friends and relatives (see Cook and Viladrich, *in press*; Aruj, 2004).

Nevertheless, not all Spaniards' descendents are eligible for a dual citizenship and, in most cases, the path to getting a European passport is far from easy as applicants usually endure

unexpected complications along the way. Bureaucratic requirements are usually echoed by endless hindrances including long waiting times and difficulties to find, validate, and adequately translate original documents, along with the expenses entailed in obtaining the needed certification. It is often actually simpler, faster, and cheaper to apply for a dual citizenship in the ethnic homeland rather than in the country of birth. In many cases, Argentines will attempt to regularize their situation in the country of destiny either by getting a job or a working visa, or by seeking the necessary documentation that will allow them to become European citizens. As a result, many prospective Euro-Argentines enter Spain without a visa (due to the visa waiver bestowed upon them) and begin the eligibility process for a dual citizenship once they have settled down (and often overstayed) in Europe. Those who are unable to fulfill the necessary requirements for the citizenship process often become undocumented, and are therefore subjected to the same exploitative conditions experienced by other immigrants who work in unsafe environments under flexible job contracts.

As a result, Argentine governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have steadily pressed the Spanish government to legalize *“los sin papeles”* (without legal papers, undocumented), which presumably in Spain are represented by a number that oscillates between 80,000 and 120,000 Argentines including prospective Euro-Americans (see Algañaraz, 2004). The increasing deportation of Argentines in irregular situation has made more evident the similarities with their Latin American peers.<sup>4</sup> According to Diego Arcos, president of the Argentine House in Catalonia, Spain: *“Argentines constitute the main bag of illegal immigration, a minimum of 160,000 people. Our trick is that we have a European look, we pass unobserved, and that is why they don’t either detain us or expel us. But that does not stop the fact that many of us continue living in the most absolute marginality”* (see Algañaraz, 2005). The publicized death of an undocumented Argentine worker in 2005 brought to light the precarious situation of many Argentines in Spain (see Pisani, 2005), while it disclosed the contradictions between a discourse of legalization and of ethnic inclusion versus the paucity of legislation aimed at protecting immigrants’ rights.

As noted by other migration scholars (Guarnizo, 2003; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Portes 2003) the diasporic contributions of émigrés to their sending nations is one of the main reasons for which governments keep an eye on their émigrés, while “rushing to pass dual nationality and dual citizenship legislation and granting migrants representation in their national legislatures” (Portes, 2003: 878). The Argentine government is no exception as it has a very clear aim at supporting the claims of those who seek to emigrate to Spain, either as Argentine citizens or as Euro-Americans,

just on the basis of the juicy remittances periodically sent home. According to Moré (2005) the remittances sent back to Latin American countries from Spain grew to 2,895 million euros in 2003, with over 1 billion US dollars being annually remitted from Spain, and one billion from the rest of Europe.

The Argentine government, as many other states that benefit from migrants' periodic remittances (see Levitt and DeWind, 2003), has become an outspoken advocate of its citizens living abroad. As in the case of other sending countries, it promotes active political participation (e.g., facilitating Argentines' vote in foreign countries) and supports civic engagement. For example, the creation of a bilateral commission focused on the legalization of Argentines in Spain was one of the pillars of the foreign policy package led by former president Nestor Kirchner, and followed by his wife, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (Argentina's newly elected president) on the basis of an alleged "legal reciprocity" between the two countries. And some changes have taken place. In 2002, the Spanish Civil Code was modified to approve the granting of Spanish citizenship to the children of Spaniards living abroad in spite of the applicant's age. In the past, only Argentine citizens younger than 21 years old were eligible for Spanish citizenships. The new code also allows the recuperation of Spanish citizenship by those who had received the nationality of the country of residence. In addition, under these changes the grandchildren of Spaniards were entitled to become citizens after residing in Spain for at least one year. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations in Argentina successfully challenged this regulation as they considered that it violated the basis of *ius sanguinis*, as mandated by the Spanish Constitution (La Nación, 2002). Despite the expressions of "good will" of Spain towards Argentina, the restrictions to enter this country without a visa have particularly increased since the Argentine socioeconomic and political default in 2001, which contributed to the rising numbers of Argentines with an undocumented status in Europe (Actis and Esteban, 2007; Algañaraz, 2006). As a response, the Argentine government has consistently supported the argument of Spaniards' "historic amnesia" regarding the welcoming reception that Argentina offered to Spanish citizens less than a century ago. In sum, links of blood and common ethnic origin from the past are publicly used to shape public opinions towards supporting beneficial treaties in the present.

### **Tensions Across the Atlantic: From Above and Below**

Immigrants' movements in Europe have been gathering momentum in recent years while recruiting main allies in civil society and securing media coverage to back up policy changes. Along

these lines, Argentine organizations in several countries, including Spain and Argentina, have supported the rights of the children and grandchildren of Spaniards living abroad, as well as those of the undocumented population. Generally, grassroots groups have inscribed their claims within a broader agenda that involves the defense of human rights, and include the denunciation of the harmful working conditions of immigrants in irregular situation (Vertovec, 2003; Portes, 2003). In Argentina, however, transnational discourses constructed on the basis of dual citizenship rights have more often been stripped from a thorough analysis of the social determinants that underscore migrants' living and working conditions in Europe. Although citizen-rights organizations and immigrant-rights groups agree upon Argentines' ethnic and cultural ties with Spain (considered by most as the "mother country"), they have mostly circumscribed their demands to their members' acquisition of a dual citizen status.

In any case, as noted by Portes (2003) transnationalism "from below" can be seen on the steady work of these organizations on both sides of the Atlantic, which have pressed the Spanish government to launch general regularization campaigns and to terminate restrictive citizenship laws—two of the main mechanisms through which Spain has regularized its immigration flows (Gortázar, 2000). As recently broadcasted by the media in both countries, the Spanish senate has recently passed a law that makes all grandchildren of Spaniards eligible for the Spanish citizenship.

Under the motto of "Argentines should be treated in Spain as Spaniards were treated in Argentina," *El Casal de Catalunya* and other non-profit organizations in Argentina have continuously supported media campaigns defending the rights to citizenship and legal residence in Spain of descendents of Spanish citizens (Clarín, 2004a). *Hijos y Nietos por La Nacionalidad Española* (Children and Grandchildren for the Spanish Citizenship, NHINE) and *Los Morados* (the Purple ones), are two of the NGOs funded less than five years ago, to fight for the right of all Spanish descendants to be eligible for Spanish citizenships (Burrieza, 2002). The language of rights has been, as in this case, a merely political form of inclusion, rather than a thorough examination of the social determinants underscoring European policies towards political exclusion, such as the economic benefits of counting on irregular migration (e.g., cheap labor, tax evasion, etc).

Spain, on the other hand, has very specific reasons to nurture the cultural ties with their Argentine descendants. Argentines abroad are an important source of financial flows particularly taking into account the high level of Spanish assets in Argentina. During the 1990s, Spain became the second largest investor in Argentina after the US, and one of its main commercial partners until the financial crisis in Argentina in 2001 which led to the transition from the convertibility of the

peso to its devaluation (Cerón, 2005; Gratius, 2005). According to the Spanish Embassy, the number of Spaniards living in Argentina able to vote in 2005 was 203,586, 77% of whom reside in Buenos Aires. The relevance of Argentina as a voting booth explains the frequent visits of Spanish governmental officials to Argentina, all of whom have made clear the interest of Spain in supporting Argentines' dual citizenship and settlement in the peninsula.<sup>5</sup> In a trip to Argentina in 2005, Spanish president Rodriguez Zapatero directly referred to the liaisons between these two countries by stating: *"First of all, we have to thank Argentina for the openness and generosity with which it received the large number of Spaniards who came here looking for a political refuge or for economic opportunities. Secondly, I want to thank the Argentines who now find in Spain their contribution to our economy, to our cultural life and to our creative activities."* (Clarín, 2005).

With a community of 270,000 Spaniards in Argentina, citizens from this country form the largest group of "potential" Spanish returnees. In addition, the Spanish government has estimated that about 650,000 descendants of Spaniards will be eligible for Spanish citizenships in years to come, a figure that includes 300,000 Argentines (Pisani, 2002). To encourage liaisons between the two countries, Spain has recently endorsed pilot projects aimed at bringing Spaniards and Euro-Argentines back to the peninsula. This is the case of "return programs" (e.g., Operación Volver) that have sponsored the temporary visit of elderly Spanish citizens to their regions of origin (Irigoyen, 2004). Spain's welcoming arms to their descendants living abroad have become conspicuously evident in the midst of harsh migratory policies and practices aimed at curbing irregular migration from their former colonies. Recent demographic projections estimate that in order to keep up with the reduction of its current population and support the frailer social security system, Spain should receive at least 240,000 immigrants per year until 2,050 (Civale, 2004). In fact, the only group of Spanish citizens expected to grow until 2030 is the population aged 65 years old and older (from 18% to 25%), while the economically active population (20-64 years old) is projected to drop 6 points (Convertine, 2004).

### **Similar but Different: The (De)Construction of a Model Minority**

Spaniards' public opinion towards the foreign population has dramatically changed in recent decades, partially as a by-product of the Foreigners' law, passed in 1985, which promoted legal exclusionary clauses between residents and irregular immigrants. As pointed out by Pérez-Díaz et al. (2001) although the density of the foreign population in Spain is lower than the average in the EU, its negative image among the general public has significantly increased in the last decade.

According to the barometer from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Sociological Research Center) almost 60% of the surveyed Spanish population in September 2006 considered the immigration phenomenon as one of the three main Spanish problems, above unemployment and terrorism (Blanco, 2007). The fear of losing Spanish identity rests on the faulty perception of having “too many immigrants in the country,” an image highly promoted by the media. The escalating anti-immigrant campaigns and xenophobic movements in Europe also tells us about the manipulation of public perceptions on the basis of minorities’ exclusionary treatment supported on the promotion of fear regarding social and economic insecurity, including the competition for jobs (Birsil and Solé, 2004; Evens Foundation, 2002; Pérez-Díaz et al., 2001).

European countries are facing paradoxical demands between the need for *new blood* to guarantee their national survival and the rejection of foreigners, a phenomenon that is subtly supported by the media as well as by conservative political parties and nationalistic civil organizations (Evens Foundation, 2002). As noted by Chavez in the US, the use of public media have been pivotal in galvanizing anti-immigrant concerns regarding the construction of immigrant subjects as a burden to the national economy (Chavez, 2001). The media have also played a key role in installing and reproducing fears regarding Latin Americans’ untamed reproductive ability along with their overuse of medical and social services, which are not supported by actual data (Chavez, 2004; Chavez et al., 1992).

In term of public perceptions, Latin American immigrants in Spain seem to be preferred over North Africans, especially Moroccans, and Argentines are preferred over Latin Americans particularly over Ecuadorians, Colombians and Peruvians (Cook and Viladrich, *in press*). As a country, Argentina is considered as the “friendliest” and the most similar to Spain. In a study on the role of the media in shaping social representations of Latino American immigrants in Spain, Retis (2005) concludes that Argentines are generally seen as the prototype of the returned immigrant or as Spaniards’ children and grandchildren. As noted by (Cook and Viladrich, *in press*) the images of ethnic affinity migrants constructed by the press resemble sympathetic vignettes of co-ethnics coming back home after a long sojourn abroad. The Spanish media have particularly contributed to highlighting the image of the Argentine migrant as the “model returnee,” whose claims of European citizenship are legitimized on the basis of sharing cultural and ethnic traits. Against the stigma surrounding Colombians (as violent and drug dealers, see Gil Araújo and Montañez Sánchez, 1999) and Ecuadorians (as an economic underclass), Argentines are seen as siblings in disgrace that need “*una mano*” (give them a hand) to get out of the cold (see Murias, 2004; Novick and Murias, 2005).

In addition, the Spanish media and the arts have been exploiting a sort of “Argentine fashion,” making Argentina, and Argentines, a likable product in the Spanish imagination (see Cea, 2004; Izquierdo Escribano et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, the flip side of these positive representations calls attention to Argentines’ depiction as the downward mobile middle-class relative that should conform to unyielding plans of social integration. As will be further examined, even if Argentines are considered the model minority within the Latin American aggregate, it is precisely this alleged similarity with their hosts that becomes a curse, as they are seen as camouflaged Latin Americans who can erroneously pass for Europeans (see Cook and Viladrich, *in press*). Thus, Argentine newcomers’ settlement in Spain involves a complex process in which they face contradictory representations as “accepted returnees” on the one hand, and “impoverished foreigners from the South” (e.g., *sudacas*) on the other; images that contest their long-term possibilities for social integration. Actis (2005) argues that Argentines’ positive representations have contributed to vanish from public perception those in irregular situations who endure serious legal and economic hurdles, as in the case of undocumented. As noted by Solé and Parella (2003) non-EU immigrants are subjected to discriminatory practices in the labor market independently of their previous experience and qualifications. Contrary to Moroccans, whose needs for social assistance are acknowledged by the Spanish social services, Argentines may encounter more obstacles to justify their application for social welfare benefits due to their assumed higher social status than other national groups (Actis, 2005).

### **Immigration by Design: Unmet Expectations and Illusions of Similarity**

In spite of the discourses from both sides of the Atlantic regarding ethnic affinity between Spaniards and Argentines, the literature reflects a mismatch between recent immigrants’ expectations and the ones held by their hosts in recipient societies. As pointed out by Tsuda (2003a, 2003b), ethnic returnees often expect to have access to the same job opportunities as those enjoyed by natives. Furthermore, idealization of the ethnic homelands is more common among those who have been raised amidst tales portraying their homeland’s grandeur, and who often become disenchanted once they settle down in their countries of ethnic origin.

Cheap migrant labor has been the fuel behind the boom of tourism, construction and home services in Spain, Italy, as well as in other industrialized countries. These fields have blossomed thanks to the presence of seventy million tourists per year (Civale, 2004). Italy and Spain have responded accordingly by creating special regulations that allow and control South American

streams as well as by regulating access to job and benefit programs. Consequently, most recent Argentine émigrés have been welcomed in European regions that are either suffering from population loss or in occupations that no longer attract natives (e.g., domestic service, construction and military work, restaurant and delivery) particularly in rural areas in need of strong manpower, or in summer resorts highly in demand for seasonal workers (Palavecino, 2003). This pattern coincides with the migration flows from Latin America to Europe, where growing numbers of middle-class professionals have been severely hit by the effects of inflation and the consequent depreciation of their salaries, the devaluation of their professional degrees and rising unemployment (see Margolis, 1998).

As noted in the literature, the crash between what is “hoped for” and what is found can lead immigrants to serious adaptation issues and even marginalization in societies of reception (Maderuelo, 2005). This is even more so among educated Argentines who have left their country of birth hoping for a seamless path to upward mobility only to encounter less-than-fulfilling occupational niches. Even if they hold high-level degrees, Argentines are often forced to endure lengthy and costly certification processes in order to validate their credentials in Spain, which frequently takes years of additional study and unanticipated expenses (Herranz, 2000). And even if earning much better salaries than in their countries of birth, highly-specialized Argentine migrants are more likely to feel cheated and frustrated once they realized that their labor force is sought in low-skill jobs, many of which are considered as stigmatized occupations back home (see Garcia, 2004; Viladrich, 2005b; Margolis, 1998). They may feel treated as second-class citizens, away from the dreamed expectations they had hoped would be awaiting for them among their blood-related kin in the diaspora. Interviews with Argentine immigrants in Spain (Malgesini, 2005) revealed that although Argentines initially appear to insert themselves more easily into Spanish society than other national groups, they actually experience higher levels of frustration in the long run. As noted earlier, Argentines’ perceptions of downward mobility are mostly related to the types of jobs they have access to, often below their credentials and individual expectations (see IOM, 2004; Viladrich, 2005b).

In this section we present an interesting social experiment that has been launched by Spanish rural towns based on “importing” nationals from Latin America, on the basis of their implicit similarities. This is an ideal case to examine the phenomenon of “immigration by design” as a solution for population loss on the one hand, and as a strategy for revamping depressed rural areas by bringing in ethnically related groups. Our argument is that if on the one hand both newcomers

and their putative co-ethnics will expect, at least initially, to get along with each other, things become more complicated when they begin to become competitors for jobs highly demanded by natives (see Piore, 1979; Massey et al., 1987).

In 2000, the Spanish Association of Municipalities Against Depopulation (AEMCD) was created for the purpose of saving from extinction thousands of small Spanish towns suffering from the exodus of their indigenous populations. The goals of this association were to foster economic development while encouraging selective immigration to endangered rural areas. Under the master plan, these towns agreed to sponsor Latin American families of Spanish descent that would settle down in their territory. Each of the municipalities of the associated towns agreed to pay for relocation costs and offered newcomers housing and job contracts in exchange for their commitment to stay for a period of at least five years. Implicit in this plan was the idea of finding the “right” kind of residents among a diverse pool of immigrants. Overall, it was expected that those sharing ethnic roots with their hosts would be more easily integrated into the practices and customs of rural inhabitants.

Aguaviva was the first town that launched this migratory adventure by calling for eligible candidates in Argentina. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Aguaviva had the lowest birthrate in a country known for having the lowest birthrate in the world (Fernandez Córdón, 2001). More than 5,000 Argentine families responded to the first announcement; a total of 25 families were recruited, including families from other Latin American countries and Romania. As a result, the number of inhabitants in the town rose from 580 in 2000 to 720 in 2002, most of whom were children from Spanish descendants whose presence actually saved the school from closing down (Algañaraz, 2004). The honeymoon between hosts and newcomers, however, ended quickly. Within a year of arrival half the Argentine families (11 families, all with dual nationality) had left or were considering leaving. Some had not finalized a contract with the municipality, but others left in violation of contractual terms. Most claimed that they had been given false promises of adequate housing and work, and felt frustrated and betrayed because of what they felt were unfulfilled promises of the original agreement. Some ended up with unanticipated debts and landed jobs that were far below their expectations (Pisani, 2001).

Although Argentine-Spaniards spoke the same language than their hosts and shared many of their cultural and religious values, they were disappointed with both their short- and long-term prospects of social advancement. Educated middle-class professionals were among the deserters, who grew steadily resentful towards their new jobs that they considered as below their training.

Some complained about being treated as citizens of “second category,” stripped from the dreamed perspectives they had hoped would be awaiting for them among their blood-related kin in the diaspora. The moral debt that Spain had with Argentina was also invoked in these narratives, on the basis of the welcoming reception that Argentina had given to Spaniards during the worse economic and political periods suffered by its citizens in the twentieth century. In sum, newcomers expected their hosts to repay this debt by providing the same opportunities to them that had been given to their Spanish ancestors across the Atlantic many decades ago. Aguaviva natives, on the other hand, expected their guests to be appreciative of the possibilities granted to them and complained about their lack of work ethic and their unrealistic expectations. In their perception, Argentine deserters held a different concept of work than local residents (Webster, 2001). Incensed by what they considered treacherous behavior, Aguaviva residents took them to court alleging breach of contract and demanding payment of relocation costs paid by the township.

To the extent that they are accurate, the perspectives of participants in this well publicized drama are illustrative of a mismatch of self-understanding and expectations. Aguavivas’ natives assumed that the selection of Spanish-descended immigrants entailed a high probability of successful integration given their linguistic and cultural affinity to locals; hence the importance of “selection” and “control” over immigration were a pillar of the repopulation plan. In fact, this case study deconstructs taken-for-granted assumptions beneath the idea that national identification of European-descended Argentines with their country of ethnic origin is reproduced intergenerationally. In the end, the idea of ethnic migrants’ similarity with their putative co-nationals abroad is not only an historically ill-formed notion but it can also adversely affect people’s lives and have perverse policy outcomes. Analytically, this assumption naturalizes ties between people and ancestral homelands and detracts attention from the task of examining historically variable identifications, their institutional bases, the circumstances under which latent nationality links may become active in the long term, as well as the consequences of this development in affected countries.

### **Concluding Remarks and Implications for Future Research**

As discussed in previous pages, the exploitation of *ethnic nostalgia* in Argentina has been part of a diasporic memorabilia, which has been refurbished by an Argentinean political milieu that is not only eager to support Euro-Argentines’ migratory dreams, but also to demand favorable economic treaties on the basis of blood ties (see Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002).<sup>6</sup> As noted by

Levitt and DeWind (2003) contrary to the earlier idea that state sovereignty would diminish in a globalized world, the state seems to be here to stay to the extent that it continues to redefine its reach by taking care of, and benefit from, its citizens abroad. And while Argentines have created civil and political associations eager to claim the rights and recognition of their émigrés, questions remain regarding the short and long-term effects of these efforts, including the possibility of fading through time and the little impact that they may have on the second generation (see Levitt and DeWind, 2003).

Although ethnic-affinity migration is not a new phenomenon, this pattern has been increasingly accelerated and facilitated by agreements between sending and receiving nations, along with new technologies of communication and transportation that enable migrants to remain connected with their countries of birth (see Levitt and Dewind; 2003; Portes et al., 2003 and 1999). As examined in this essay, the research literature has acknowledged the disparate positions of natives and newcomers when it comes to the kind of occupations and recognition that each expect of each other. Ethnic-affinity Argentine immigrants, although in theory welcomed in Spain, encounter unseen challenges as their labor is welcomed in areas and occupations no longer desirable for the native population (see Tsuda, 2003b). Because of the alleged similarity with their hosts, Euro-Argentines often expect to have access to mainstream occupational niches in Spain, a prospect that collides against the actual possibilities available to them. Devaluated statuses in terms of jobs and social acknowledgment often become raw reminders of the lost social privileges, both material and symbolic, that immigrants used to enjoy in their countries of birth (Margolis, 1998; Viladrich, 2005a and 2005b). As noted in the Aguaviva case, Argentines may find that their claims of *ethnicship* are not reciprocated in terms of achieving advantageous living conditions and expected working opportunities. In addition, they may express higher frustration levels than ordinary immigrants as they are less likely to successfully cope with status depreciation (Cook and Viladrich, *in press*).

Finally, we would like to point out the limited scope of this essay and highlight the need for in-depth studies on Argentines' diverse incorporation patterns through time. The recent migratory trajectories of downward mobile and less educated argentines conspicuously differ from the experiences of the educated middle-class that joined a promising Spanish job-market decades ago. In addition, further research on the transnational dimensions of the discourses and practices of this migrant population is also needed (see Actis and Esteban, 2007). More research is also needed on the pathways of incorporation that characterize ethnic-affinity immigrants vis-à-vis others

newcomers amidst multi-layered social fields (Glick Schiller et al 2005; Levitt and DeWind, 2003). Future work should examine the ways in which Argentines, and other ethnic-affinity immigrants, become involved in economic, political and cultural transnational enterprises in both sending and recipient nations. Nevertheless, as noted by Portes (2003) not all immigrants are transnational and some immigrants are more transnational than others. While many Argentine migrants become *transborder* citizens (paraphrasing Glick Schiller, 2005; Glick Schiller and Fournon, 2001) and therefore claim rights and privileges from more than one government, others become settlers and through time tend to lose (or diminish) their political and social attachment to their country of birth. In addition, many Argentine immigrants in Spain do not remain there for good, and even claim ethnic affinity to other countries, as in the case of holders of other European passports (e.g., Italians).<sup>7</sup>

Social phenomena that also remain to be explored involve the analysis of the transnational paths of migrants who seasonally work in Europe, and return to their countries of birth periodically. An example of the latter is represented by Argentine *tango migrants*, many of whom enjoy dual citizenships and have become the ultimate global trotters as they perform in Europe, the US and Argentine intermittently throughout the year. These artists are embedded in actual and virtual tango networks of artists and patrons with whom they stay in permanent contact with, regardless of their physical location. As in the case of other transnational fields (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999) tango networks are key for their survival, as these allow them to live and perform within and across different nations at the same time. While to a certain extent Argentine tango artists rely on local tango niches on the basis of ethnic entrepreneurship (see Viladrich 2005a, 2005b) they also belong to flexible, mobile and profitable global webs on which they rely to make ends meet (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). And in fact, tango immigrants' resourcefulness to make a living is closely related to the conditions imposed by a post-industrial job market characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty, minimal job security and low-paid positions in the service economy (Viladrich 2005c; Levitt and DeWind 2003; Portes, 2001).<sup>8</sup>

Western-European countries have increasingly become multi-ethnic societies, a phenomenon that has awakened new debates regarding immigrants' rights to citizenship and the future of traditional, national, and regional cultures. Migration flows and transnational linkages have made national and cultural frontiers more diffused in the midst of challenging (and sometimes conflicting) cultural and religious differences. From a policy perspective, the challenges that European countries are facing in terms of social exclusion (e.g., poverty, lack of access to education, health and social

opportunities) that unavoidably comes with globalization, are more markedly affecting immigrants from developing countries including Argentines. Migrants' return to their countries of birth by "turning brain drain into brain gain" will depend on what their countries of origin can offer in terms of professional and investment opportunities vis-à-vis the changes in policies and conditions of reception in the host societies (IOM, 2004).

### **Notes**

1. Although many middle-class Argentines would attempt to continue their education abroad, as a strategy to assure an upward mobility trajectory and to become more competitive back home), this alternative has become more restrictive in recent years. In a newspaper article (Iglesias, 2001) observes that the demand of professionals applying to study abroad (mostly in the US, Canada and Europe) increased to up thirty percent in a two-year period. The major problem is that the offer of fellowships has remained steady, while the competition for the same number of positions has increased.
2. Analytically, the term return migration is problematic because it assumes the perspective of receiving states and refers to both people who return to their countries after a sojourn abroad, and to the descendants of emigrants who after one or more generations retrace the migratory routes followed by their ancestors. For analytic purposes, we prefer the use of ethnic affinity migrants because it underscores perceived commonalities among migrants in an ancestral homeland and hosts while not taking them for granted.
3. For example, on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2000, El País, one the most important Spanish Newspapers, published a front-page article concerning the long waiting lines of Argentines at the Consulates of Spain and Italy in Buenos Aires (Relea, 2000). The number of European passports granted to Argentines descendents of Spaniards, increased from 10,600 in 1998 to 20,000 in 2000 (Piotto and Duran, 2001).

4. In recent years, the media have reflected the abuses experienced by Argentines trying to enter Spain as “tourists” and who have been rejected on the spot after experienced unjustified detention.
5. For example, the media reported the visit of Jaime Mayor Oreja to Buenos Aires, vice-secretary of the Partido Popular in November 2002 (Seminario 2002). Two main Spanish candidates to the presidency visited Argentina in 2003: Mariano Rajoy from the Popular Party (PP) and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, Clarín 2004b).
6. As noted by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) much of the transnational discourses interconnect nostalgia, memory and identity to relate a particular population place into a particular homeland.
7. The emergence of a nationalist discourse of *Argentineanness* among immigrants is also intertwined with the conditions of reception that differ markedly among recipient countries. In fact, it typically arises in situations in which recent arrivals feel compelled to redefine their allegiance to their country of birth as a reaction to the way they feel publicly represented, and treated, by their hosts (see David and Cook, *in press*; Viladrich, 2005b). While Argentines have been more often seeing as members of a “model minority” in Spain, this is not the case in the US, where they have mostly remained as members of an invisible group within the Latino melting pot (see Viladrich, 2005; Viladrich 2003).
8. Levitt and DeWind (2003:569) note that: “... today’s migrants enter an economy increasingly based on post-industrial enterprises. It offers stable employment to the relatively small portion of the immigrant labor pool who are highly educated and skilled and more short-term employment to unskilled migrants with little English.”

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