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# Are They Leaving Because of the Crisis? The Sociological Significance of *Anomie* as a Motivation for Migration

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**Abstract**
This article offers a sociological analysis of the migration motivations of highly skilled people who left Spain after 2008. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews, I map the role that *the crisis* played in highly skilled individuals' migration narratives. Using the recently emerging migration flow between Spain and Norway as a point of departure, I analyse migration from one of the most crisis-stricken regions of Europe to one of the least affected regions. This analysis establishes that the migrants' educational and occupational resources help to protect them from the threat of unemployment. Their reluctance to use the crisis as a reason to leave is further analysed as part of their symbolic and social boundary work. The article concludes that what Durkheim conceptualized as *anomie* provides an apt label for the particular set of societal problems cited by people who migrated from Spain after 2008.

**Keywords**
anomie, boundaries, economic crisis, European migration, highly-skilled, Spain

## Introduction

During the last decade, research on intra-European migration has largely focused on the significant east–west migration that followed the post-2004 EU enlargements (see e.g. Burrell, 2010; Favell, 2008a; Hellerman, 2006; Parutis, 2014; Van Riemsdijk, 2010). Since the 2008 financial downturn, we have seen a change in the map of European migration flows; namely, there has been an influx of people moving from the most heavily impacted parts of Europe to countries such as Germany, the UK and Scandinavia, which

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were less severely affected. In contrast to east–west migration, which has been mainly attributed to recent EU enlargements, migration from southern Europe to northern Europe is thought to be caused by the current economic crisis. With some exceptions (see e.g. Enríquez and Romera, 2014; Focus Migration, 2013; González-Ferrer, 2013; Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2014; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014), analyses of this new migration phenomenon are lacking.

Among the recent migration patterns that have appeared since the economic crisis hit Europe in 2008 is an increase in Spanish migration to Norway. The Spanish community in Norway has gone from being virtually non-existent 10 years ago (counting a little more than 100 entries in 2004) to becoming a small and growing community, with more than 1500 entries and a resident Spanish population of almost 5000 in 2014 (Statistics Norway, 2014). Although this migration flow is modest numerically, it is interesting because it provides an opportunity to study a new migration pattern from one of the most crisis-stricken regions of Europe to one of the least affected regions.

The economic collapse in 2008 created very abrupt changes in Spanish society. Unemployment rose to 26 per cent, and soared to 56 per cent for those under 25 (Eurostat, 2013). Many people were unable to pay their mortgages and home evictions skyrocketed to one every 15 minutes in 2012 (Romanos, 2014). Protest movements mobilized across the country against political corruption, increasing social inequality and the effects of austerity measures (Campos Lima and Artiles, 2013). The protests are one reflection of the record low trust in Spanish politicians and the political system that was captured by national polls: in 2014, 80 per cent of those polled rated the general political situation in Spain as 'bad' or 'very bad' (CIS, 2014).

Estimates suggest that nearly 700,000 people emigrated from Spain between 2008 and 2012, more than any other southern European country in the same period (González-Ferrer, 2013; see also Instituto Nacional de Esdadística, 2015). Ámparo González-Ferrer has suggested that because the tendency to migrate increases with education level, and the percentage of people aged 24–34 with university degrees is high in Spain (44% for women and 34% for men), it is reasonable to assume that the majority of those who migrate in the wake of the crisis are highly qualified (2013: 10).

The highly skilled interviewees in my study talked about leaving Spain as a form of career development rather than because they were unemployed. This impression corresponds with that conveyed by pre-crisis studies of the intra-European mobility of highly skilled individuals (notably Favell, 2008b). What is new about the motivations cited by highly skilled Spaniards and migrants from countries such as Italy and Greece after the crisis struck, however, is the emphasis on corruption, bad working conditions, lack of faith in politicians, lack of meritocracy and, above all, the very bleak future prospects they anticipated in their countries of origin (Enríquez and Romera, 2014; Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2014; Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014). The findings reported by Anna Triandafyllidou and her colleagues indicate the usefulness of looking at southern European countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain as different cases that form part of a similar tendency when it comes to key motivations for emigration in the aftermath of the crisis.

Many of the Spanish migrants I interviewed said that they left because they disliked the kind of society they saw developing in Spain, not because of the economic crisis. In

this article, the informants' reluctance to cite the economic crisis as a reason for leaving will help us analyse some of the ways in which boundaries that surround social and ethnic hierarchies play both practical and symbolic roles in migrants' accounts of *why* they chose to migrate.

Studying highly resourceful migrants provides an opportunity to look more closely at non-economic dimensions of migration. I argue that Durkheim's (1951[1897]) concept of *anomie* (which refers to a break-down of purpose and ideals in society) captures a particular set of non-economic reasons for leaving crisis-stricken countries. Such non-economic dimensions are particularly prominent among highly skilled migrants' reasons for leaving, because such migrants are less affected by economic downturns. However, it is likely that these kinds of societal dimensions also factor into the decision-making of migrants who leave primarily because they cannot find work. Thus, analysing non-economic societal migration motivations has the potential to provide a more complete understanding of this contemporary migration phenomenon.

The research question that I address in this article is: how can highly skilled Spanish migrants' accounts of their decision to migrate provide a better understanding of European south–north migration in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis? Exploring the informants' reluctance to draw on the crisis in their migration narratives helps us to better understand both why people left and the broader social significance of the crisis as a motivation for migration.

## Analytical Framework

In an article on class, recession and employment security, Will Atkinson (2013) shows that the degree to which people fear unemployment varies according to their class and occupational resources. In the case of highly skilled, successful migrants, their perceived and actual abilities to control their current and future prospects in the labour market are clearly anchored in the relatively large amount of resources available to them. However, importantly, Atkinson suggests that even individuals who are protected from the crisis by their class and occupational resources can possess a sense of insecurity and 'threatened privilege' when faced with economic crises (2013: 644). The concept of *social boundaries* is central to our understanding of how people's resources and the fear of losing them affect the way that they talk about motivations for migrating.

The social boundary concept is well established in the social sciences. It appears in sociological classics, including *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim, 1965 [1912]), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Marx, 1963) and *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1978). Pierre Bourdieu, who places symbolic classification at the centre of class reproduction, has been particularly influential in shaping our understanding of class boundaries (see Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]). In the upcoming analysis, I draw on Lamont and Molnar's (2002) excellent overview of the study of boundaries in the social sciences to clarify three central concepts that are useful for unpacking the social significance of having to leave because of a financial crisis: 'symbolic boundaries', 'social boundaries' and 'boundary work'. Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168) define symbolic boundaries as 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people and practices over time and space'. Although social and symbolic boundaries are

equally real, symbolic boundaries are 'tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon a definition of reality', whereas social boundaries denote 'objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunity' (2002: 168). The term 'boundary work' refers to 'the kind of typification system or interferences, concerning similarities and differences that groups mobilize to define who they are' (2002: 171). Boundaries can be drawn based on class and status, but also based on, for example, race, ethnicity or gender. As Steve Garner's (2012) analyses illustrate, class positions are heavily employed in the mediation of racialization processes. Class may also intersect with other social locations such as nationality or religion in constructions of social and symbolic boundaries vis-à-vis other groups. Unlike poorer or darker-skinned migrants, highly skilled white migrants originating from 'Western' countries have the opportunity to construct their belonging by emphasizing phenotypical and cultural similarities with the majority population (see e.g. Guðjónsdóttir, 2014). Highly skilled and white migrants might, for example, evoke social boundaries in order to protect themselves against prejudices deriving from 'the tendency to lump together quite disparate groups of non-citizens, from asylum seekers to so-called "economic migrants" or foreign nationals in prison' (Bosworth and Guild, 2008: 703). White migrants can draw on such boundaries by referring to social imaginaries of 'highly skilled mobile Europeans' on the one hand, and on less fortunate migrants and movers on the other hand.

In recent years, we have seen a growing literature on the mobility of highly skilled Europeans, which also contributes to our understanding of *why* people migrate within Europe (see e.g. Favell, 2008b; Recchi and Favell, 2009). For example, Adrian Favell's (2008b) ethnographic study of young professionals who lived in large European cities before the crisis struck found that such individuals emphasized career possibilities and self-fulfilment as migration motivations more than they emphasized economic considerations.[1] In Favell's pre-crisis interviews, however, young professionals from Spain and a range of other European countries did not cite bleak future prospects, corruption, fraud or a lack of faith in politicians as reasons for leaving their countries of origin. By contrast, Enríquez and Romera's recent report on the post-crisis migration of highly skilled individuals from Spain suggests that the most significant drivers of outmigration from Spain at the moment include the lack of meritocracy, corruption and failures of the political system, job insecurity, precarious working conditions and 'discouragement with some features of Spanish society such as lack of civility, disorganization and apathy' (2014: 2).

Even though scholars such as Markus Hadler (2006) have rightly suggested that 'dissatisfaction with the current location' was also one of the migration motives in pre-crisis Europe, recent studies have indicated that grievances about negative societal traits can substantially increase following a crisis. An article in *Sociology* on the global financial crisis and individual distress offered relevant insights into how abrupt social changes can lead to increased feelings of subjective deprivation, subjective injustice and emotional distress (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2012). Drawing on Durkheim (1951 [1897]), Berglind Ragnarsdóttir and colleagues (2012) demonstrate how the rising expectations of an economic boom followed by bleak future prospects in the wake of financial collapse increase individuals' distress. The effects of actual worsening living conditions on distress are

importantly 'contingent on whether the social context encourages pessimism about the future' (Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2012: 771). Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas suggest that problems in southern Europe that pre-existed the crisis, such as lack of meritocracy and high levels of corruption, are greatly magnified in the wake of the crisis and can, in turn, trigger decisions to emigrate (2014: 1631). Thus, the grievances that people may have had about labour conditions, corruption or distrust in politicians can, together with radically worsened future prospects, turn into central reasons for leaving.

In the following discussion, I will draw on Emile Durkheim's concept of anomie in an attempt to label the deep dissatisfaction with the 'current location', disillusionment and lack of hope in parts of Europe today.

Durkheim introduced the concept of anomie in 'The Division of Labour in Society' (1933[1893]) and further developed it in his seminal comparison of suicide rates in Europe (Durkheim, 1951[1897]). Tracing the etymological, historical and contextual usage of anomie in Durkheim's writings, Meštrović and Brown (1985) concluded that translating anomie as 'normlessness' is inaccurate. They argue that Durkheim regarded anomie as 'a painful state or condition felt by individuals as well as by society' (1985). According to Durkheim (1951[1897]), anomie arises in societies with weak co-operative communities that place a disproportionate importance on the marketplace. The state of anomie in a society creates feelings of discontent, meaninglessness, hopelessness and a sense of injustice: 'The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate' (1951[1897]: 253). Luc Bolitanski and Eve Chiapello argue that 'all the indicators in which Durkheim taught us to read anomie have been on the increase since the second half of the 1970s' (2005: 421). Bolitanski and Chiapello understand such developments not merely as a mechanical result of increasing job insecurity and poverty, but as a result of people's receding power over their social environment and fading belief in the future (2005: 421). Of importance here is how Emile Durkheim suggests that such developments become particularly apparent during *economic booms* and *economic crises* (1951[1897]: 241–243). In 'Suicide', Durkheim situates anomie in periods when the logic of market forces has taken over and made societies difficult to live in because the moderating role of society is weakened: 'Now this very lack of organization characterizing our economic condition throws the door wide to every sort of adventure' and has become so 'inbred that society has grown to accept them and think them normal' (1951[1897]: 257). Meštrović and Brown (1985) see Durkheim as highly critical of Western culture; he blames governments for anomie, because they have become the tools and servants of economic life rather than its regulators. Drawing on this understanding of Durkheim, I suggest that anomie provides an apt label for the state of hopelessness and lack of belief in politics, government and the future among Spanish citizens.

## The New Migration Route in Context

The European financial crisis impacted Spain in 2008. It was generated by long-term loans, a collapse of the building market, the bankruptcy of major companies and a particularly severe increase in unemployment (Eurostat, 2013). What started as an economic crisis in 2008 catapulted Spain into a social and political crisis that has led to widespread

dissatisfaction and a string of protest movements (Campos Lima and Artiles, 2013). One such social movement organization was established in 2011 by those who claim to have left Spain for political reasons. The movement, *Marea Granate* [Maroon Wave], interprets migration as a conscious political act and a transnational extension of the fight against injustice in Spain.[2]

In contrast to the politically conscious mobilization frame of Marea Granate, several of the people I interviewed cited the screening of a particular TV programme by RTVE as an important reason for the appearance of the new migration route from Spain to Norway for less resourceful Spanish migrants. The programme, *Españoles en el Mundo*, features one-hour portraits of Spanish people living in various countries. The 11 January 2011 edition focused on Spaniards in Oslo and emphasized the high standards of living, family-friendly working conditions, good wages and low unemployment rates (3%) in Norway. Later the same year, Norway's largest newspaper featured far less positively framed front page articles on Spanish migrants in Norway: 'Fleeing the debt crisis in the South to work in the North'[3] and 'The Euro-refugees are coming!'[4] Several such articles in the Norwegian media have labelled Spanish migrants 'crisis-refugees', and in 2013 the Norwegian Welfare Authority (NAV) commissioned a report (Friberg et al., 2013) to 'map' the needs of this new immigrant group and its impact on the welfare system. The political and media discourse in Norway has resembled the British debate on migrants as 'welfare scroungers', but as in many other countries, third-country nationals and intra-European migrants from Romania are targeted most often (see e.g. Briggs and Dobre, 2014). The deeply politicized nature of the debate on migration in Europe (see e.g. Bosworth and Guild, 2008; Fox et al., 2012; Gullestad, 2002) is an important part of the context in which the interviewees in this article narrate their migration decisions and position themselves vis-à-vis other migrants.

## Data and Methodology

The data analysed here were gathered as part of a larger study of Spanish migration to Norway.[5] The analysis was based on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in three cities in Norway in 2013 and 2014 with 23 highly skilled migrants who arrived after 2008, in addition to informal conversations in the interviewees' homes or other venues before and after the interviews. Interviews were mostly conducted in English, but some were done in Norwegian and have been translated into English here. The interviews were transcribed in full and are quoted verbatim. Interviews with key actors in the state and volunteer apparatus dealing with migration from Spain provided contextual information. The interviewer was a Norwegian sociologist, and this may have enhanced the interviewees' need to defend themselves against media depictions of Spanish migrants as desperate, irrational and poverty-stricken.

As Parutis (2014) and others have shown, the concept of 'highly skilled' is far from self-explanatory. It is used here to label migrants who have obtained a university-level education. Some of the interviewees came to Norway immediately after they finished their studies, whereas others had up to 15 years of experience working in Spain at the time of their interviews. This study did not specifically target young Spaniards; it includes people from their early twenties to their mid-forties, but most of the informants were in

their thirties. Most were employed in the upper end of the labour market when they were interviewed, in sectors such as oil and gas, construction, IT and academia. However, three informants were unemployed, and four who had initially taken on unskilled work to learn the language had eventually acquired jobs in the skilled labour market during the interview phase of the study. Although the large number of informants working in the upper end of the labour market reflected the recruitment process used in this part of the study, it was not a selection criterion. Roughly half of the informants were recruited via two large companies and with the help of three internet forums used by Spaniards living in Norway. The rest were recruited using the snowball method. The informants were all white and came from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds. Some of the informants referred to their parents as 'having money', or to family houses by the beach or in the mountains, and three of them mentioned large family businesses. Many informants indicated that they had well-educated parents, including several civil servants, a well-known journalist, a doctor and a lawyer.

The researcher did not systematically introduce the economic crisis as a topic of discussion during the interviews, but it was implicitly present because the informants were recruited based on their arrival in Norway after the watershed year of 2008. The conversations were exploratory in style, but they were conducted as 'active interviews', with the interviewer playing an active part in mirroring the interviewees' reflections while letting them suggest which topics to emphasize. The analytical focus of this article was developed by searching for recurring themes in the interview material. The stories and backgrounds of the informants were naturally highly diverse but a common theme was the tendency to reject the implicit assumption that they left Spain mainly because of the economic crisis. Thereafter, I started to follow issues pertaining to the crisis in the narratives using a strategy inspired by what Moran-Ellis and colleagues (2006) describe as 'following a thread'. By following the thread of crisis, the theme of the analyses moves from examining how the crisis as a migration motive is related to issues of class and ethnicity in the interviewees' narratives to grappling with the societal ramifications of the crisis in their country of origin.

## Did We Come Because of the Crisis?

Interviewees such as Clara, a young academic employed in the university sector in Bergen, made it clear that the crisis had very little to do with her decision to leave Spain. Clara is part of a small group of informants who displayed relatively little dismay over the current situation in Spain; they mainly attributed their departure to career opportunities. Clara's carefree explanation for why she applied for a job in Norway is a good example. She had several opportunities in Spain, but she wanted a chance to concentrate on her PhD and she pursued an opportunity abroad because it suited her research interests: 'I didn't actually think, "I want to move to Norway". There was a position that really matched my profile, and I thought, "OK, I'll send the papers and see what happens".' This group of informants described themselves as relatively well protected from the crisis because of their educational and occupational resources, and they attributed their decisions to leave to interesting opportunities in the international labour market (see

Favell, 2008b; King, 2002; Parutis, 2014 for discussions of European migration as self-fulfilment and the quest for career possibilities).

Theodor, in his late twenties, had lived in Norway as a student and had gone back to Spain to earn a second MBA degree; he explained that his protection from unemployment was anchored in class resources specifically related to his family's wealth. He emphasized that he did not *have to* leave, because his family background allowed him to pursue a career in Spain and kept him secure financially:

> There were two main reasons [to leave]. One was professional; that would be in 2010, when I started to study for my Master's. The second one, because I saw no future in Spain. I mean, of course, my family has some means, so I could always have worked with them for one of the many companies we have there, but I didn't want to; I wanted to pursue my own career.
>
> Interviewer: So you were not desperate in terms of money or something like that?
>
> Theodor: No, no, no!
>
> (MBA, petroleum sector, Bergen)

For Theodor, the move to Norway provided an independent career path, but because of his family's resources, it was not in any way a flight from hopelessness or unemployment. However, Theodor's story paints a picture of Spain as a place with *no future*. It indicates that the crisis has affected people's lives in a more multifaceted way than just personal employment insecurity. Although Theodor indicated that he was protected from the risk of unemployment or poverty, he regarded Spain as a place with no future. Like 53 per cent of the highly skilled respondents in the study by Enríquez and Romera (2014), Theodor cited 'no future' as a main reason for leaving Spain.

Some of the informants talked about their relationship to the economic crisis somewhat more ambivalently and with more vulnerability than those quoted above. As Atkinson (2013) underlines, even individuals whose class and occupational resources keep them well protected from the crisis can have a significant sense of insecurity and 'threatened privilege', although they do not necessarily fear losing their jobs (2013: 644). Considering the high levels of dissatisfaction with the current situation, the discrepancy between those who view unemployment as one of the three most important problems (80%) in Spanish society today and those who consider it to be a problem for them personally (50%) suggests that it is likely that employed individuals believe they have been affected by the crisis (CIS, 2014).

Although they emphasized that their own job security might not have been threatened, this section of the sample (exemplified by Sebastian, quoted below) typically did not portray their decision to leave Spain as entirely untouched by the crisis. Sebastian, a Stavanger-based informant who brought his family to Norway, summed up his ambivalent relationship to the crisis by alluding to a conversation he had with someone from Norway who asked him whether he came to Norway because of the crisis. Sebastian distanced himself from the economic crisis as a motive by emphasizing that as a

petrophysicist he was *needed* in Norway and well-equipped to provide for himself and his family. On the other hand, he admitted that the crisis had scared him slightly and that it influenced his decision to leave:

> I mean, when people ask, 'OK, you came here because of the crisis?', I have to say, 'yes and no' … I mean, what I say to these people is I didn't come because of the crisis; 'I came because you (the Norwegians or the company here), they need me, and they want me, and they're paying me and my family to come here ….' So, the answer is no, but also I have to say yes, because if the Spanish situation were completely different, maybe I would still be in Spain. I mean, there is a lot … there is a crisis; there is a crisis because of corruption, and there is a high unemployment rate, and also, because I have a child. I mean, just thinking about [our child] is … I was a little bit scared. You know, last year, I said, 'OK, maybe what happens if I lose my job?' … So thinking about that, you know, it's complicated. (Geologist and petrophysicist, petroleum sector, Stavanger)

Sebastian's quote clearly demonstrates the ambivalence that some highly skilled Spanish migrants expressed about the crisis as a motivation to migrate. Although unemployment was not the main reason they left, the crisis was still one of the issues that they considered when they decided to leave Spain. In line with Atkinson's (2013) findings on class and unemployment security in times of crisis, this group of highly educated and relatively well-off individuals regarded themselves as well protected from the threat of unemployment, but some of them feared unemployment and the worsening conditions associated with the direction in which they saw post-crisis Spain moving.

To unpack further the rejection of the economic crisis as the main motivation for migration, the following sections analyse how the *social boundaries* erected against those presumed to have come to Norway mainly because of the crisis can add to our understanding of the connection between class, ethnicity and motivations for migration.

## Social Boundaries and Motivations for Migration

Lamont and Molnar (2002) define symbolic boundaries as distinctions used to categorize people and practices over time and *space* (2002: 168). Space is particularly important for understanding international migration. Although migrants may arrive with substantial capital, the journey from one national context to another involves the risk of losing social capital and privilege (see e.g. Lundström, 2010). This makes the distinctions that social actors (such as those interviewed here) use to categorize themselves as different from their crisis-stricken and less fortunate compatriots, as well as other migrant groups, important.

The informants were more likely to refer to symbolic boundaries when recent media coverage of less fortunate Spanish migrants in Norway was mentioned during the interviews and when the discussion turned to what constitutes a migrant. While discussing the media attention focused on Spanish migrants in Norway, Blanca (an academic in Bergen) described exactly what she saw as the main difference between herself and the Spanish migrants portrayed in the media:

> It's been in the newspapers, here and in Spain; lots of Spanish people coming with nothing and making a life out of picking up cans. It's not my situation … Well, most people [think that] if you're an immigrant, it's the open hand going to NAV and getting money [receiving social benefits] or working in the fish market … I'm not in the Spanish community; I'm not doing the ghetto thing or only going out with Spanish people. (Researcher, public sector, Bergen)

Although Blanca emphasized that she did not consider it bad, she clearly indicated during the interview that she did not regard being a 'typical Spaniard' positively. She described the 'typical Spanish' migrants as noisy, disrespectful of Norwegian social conventions, working in less-skilled sections of the labour market and only socializing with other Spanish people. When she described her own life in Norway, she distanced herself from all that is 'typically Spanish', indicating that she had nothing to do with the 'ghetto thing' that she associated with Spanish people in Norway. Thus, Blanca draws a symbolic boundary between herself and the 'typical Spaniard' and, implicitly, 'the typical migrant' who is either a welfare recipient or works in low-skilled jobs (in this case, at the local fish market). By doing so, she clearly attempts to distance herself from what Bosworth and Guild refer to as the lumping together of so-called 'economic migrants' and all other non-citizens (2008: 703). Blanca's 'Western' appearance and respectable job in academia enables her to distance herself from the highly politicized figure of the migrant as a poor and culturally distinct 'scrounger' (Briggs and Dobre, 2014).

For Roger, an engineer living in Oslo, stories in Norwegian and Spanish newspapers about Spaniards who come to Norway with their families to find work made him feel *embarrassed*: 'the way that some people try to come here with no information, just going on an adventure, I think it is crazy … that's not the way; it's embarrassing somehow'. During the interview, Roger compared his own situation with that of less successful Spanish migrants. Like them, he took a chance and arrived in Norway without a contract. He took on low-skilled work to learn Norwegian and finally gained entry into the upper end of the labour market. He emphasized that, in contrast to those who bring their families to Norway with no plan for how to manage, he had very little to lose and could easily have gone home to his family to start again. Roger does not distance himself from those in manual jobs, but he draws a clear symbolic boundary between himself and less resourceful migrants by constructing an image of 'other migrants' as subaltern and irrational, similar to those images currently found in politicized debates on migration throughout Europe.

Different versions of symbolic boundaries were manifested in the migrants' reluctance to be labelled as having left Spain because of the economic crisis. This reluctance tells us something about what being 'struck by crisis' entails socially. As the analysis shows, these highly skilled migrants engaged in boundary work by referring to their reasons for leaving Spain and coming to Norway. These boundaries were frequently evoked by references to their own carefully considered decisions, underlining the element of *agency* in their decisions to migrate. Several highly skilled interviewees juxtaposed these representations of themselves as resourceful agents with the desperate migration decisions made by their less fortunate compatriots.

Drawing on the work of Atkinson (2013), Lamont and Molnar (2002) and Bosworth and Guild (2008), this analysis emphasizes the importance of class and ethnicity, both

with respect to the informants' actual resources and in the boundary work they performed, to understand why they insisted that they did not leave because of the economic crisis. As the last part of the analysis will show, however, we must also ask what is actually meant by the crisis in order to gain a fuller picture of the migration motivations of people who are currently leaving Spain. To do this, we must examine the crisis beyond the unemployment that it has caused.

## *Anomie* as a Motivation for Migration

Digging deeper into the informants' non-economic explanations for leaving Spain, it becomes evident that although they often strongly refuted the idea that they left because they were unemployed, many informants left because there is something *wrong in Spain*. Several of the informants used the phrase 'a place with no future'. To such highly skilled migrants, this lack of a future seems to be less about their personal employment security than it is about the state of Spanish society more broadly. Although the extremely high unemployment rates were clearly relevant when they spoke about the future of the country, they were just as concerned about corruption at all levels of society, increasing social inequality and decreasing personal security. These descriptions correspond very closely with the reasons for leaving Spain cited in Enríquez and Romera (2014). I suggest that these negative developments that the Spanish migrants describe can be labelled societal *anomie*.

Disagreements with, and even resentment towards, the sort of society that Spain is becoming were very prevalent in my interviews. Perhaps Miguel, a 40-something computer engineer who came to Norway in 2012 with his wife and children, voiced this attitude most emphatically. He related his decision to leave Spain to conditions in the labour market, but not because he did not have an interesting, secure or well-paid job when he left. Miguel made it clear that he had a secure job and a privileged financial position when he decided to leave Spain. He did, however, regret not being able to spend more time with his children because of long working hours, and he feared that the economic crisis would exacerbate what he described as family-unfriendly working conditions (see Platin, 2007 for a discussion of class and fatherhood). Miguel's interview is replete with reflections on what he dislikes about Spanish society and why he moved to Norway when he sought an alternative. In addition to labour conditions, he was concerned about corrupt politicians, public safety and, above all, the lack of communal spirit:

> In Spain, we have a cultural issue: we don't have a good sense of community. For example, if something is in the street [in Spain], it belongs to nobody; but in Norway, for example, if something is in the street, it belongs to everyone.

Durkheim (1951[1897]) maintains that anomie arises in a society when moral individualism is replaced by economic individualism. Weakening community ties allow for the increasing importance of, and striving for, monetary values. Thus, as a societal diagnosis, anomie captures what Spaniards such as Miguel cite as reasons for leaving:

> Overall, for me, it's the respect—people who respect each other—and I didn't find that in Spain. I didn't find any respect. Politicians are lying every day, and whatever they do, they do it openly, without secrecy. They don't even bother to hide what they are doing because nothing ever happens … You have other examples related to the level of corruption in Spain. If you are the president of your community of neighbours, it is typical that when you do some work around you get extra money because the company tells you, 'OK, if you just choose my company, I will give you some money'. And it's not just a little money.

In contrast, Miguel described his new country of residence as a purer and more civil place than Spain: 'I have the nicest water in the world. I have milk. I started drinking milk again; I stopped drinking milk in Spain because it was disgusting.' What is clear from Miguel's overtly positive image of Norway is that his move was a quest for a different life, not for money.

Daniel, another Stavanger-based engineer, emphasized career opportunities in the Norwegian labour market more strongly than Miguel when he explained why he had come to Norway. However, his reflections, which start with a gloomy interpretation of the future of Spain, contain similar descriptions about what is wrong in his home country: 'The future in Spain? Now I don't see the future in Spain, not my future, and not the future for Spanish people either. The way I see it, the future is very bad, very gloomy.'

Durkheim maintains that the state of anomie in society creates feelings of discontent, meaninglessness and a sense of injustice (1951[1897]: 253). Although Durkheim did not address corruption as such in his text on anomie, the economically oriented and unsocial currents that caused such distress among the migrants interviewed here indicate how the integration of market forces into social relations can make societies difficult to live in:

> The main reason to leave was to work here, but there's a lot of things. The reason that Spanish society and Spanish people are at this point … And, I'm really sad to say it, but also the high level of corruption in Spain. Everybody is making money, so they have a great tolerance for corruption. And when things started to get worse, corruption started flowing, and it's really annoying and it's, sometimes you cannot breathe because the situation is really, really bad, and all of these people are stealing lots of money from the administrations. As you see, there are lots of cases. What I mean … so this is the result of bad politics and corruption. (Daniel, engineer, petroleum sector, Stavanger)

Durkheim notes that the lack of organization in economic life that characterizes anomic societies tends to become so 'inbred' that people take it for granted and increasingly come to tolerate it (Durkheim, 1951[1897]: 257). This, in turn, causes feelings of discontent, hopelessness and a sense of injustice among the members of society. Large-scale popular protest (see e.g. Campos Lima and Artiles, 2013) indicates that a proportion of the population objects to using economic logic as the main organizing principle for society by using their *voice* (Hirschman, 1970). If we unpack the exact nature of the 'dissatisfaction' that the informants described, *anomie* captures the wide-ranging hopelessness and lack of belief in politics, governments and the future that influence some people's decisions to *exit*.

## Conclusion: A Crisis of What?

This analysis suggests that three central factors influenced the informants' reluctance to cite the economic crisis as the main reason they left Spain. First, it was clear that the abundant monetary, educational and symbolic resources that these highly skilled, white migrants possessed protected them from the key economic effects of the crisis, such as unemployment and personal debt. Second, these highly skilled informants used symbolic boundaries to distinguish themselves from their compatriots who left Spain for economic reasons, which allowed them to maintain their privileged status and distance themselves from stigmas related to the main effects of the crisis (e.g. unemployment, economic hardship and stereotypical images of 'the migrant'). Thus, the importance of social and ethnic boundaries is critical to understanding why highly skilled migrants so strongly rejected the notion of having migrated for economic reasons. Third, in discussions about the crisis in Spain and elsewhere in Europe, the focus has been on its economic consequences for states and individuals. If we are to understand highly resourceful migrants' reasons for leaving Spain in the aftermath of the economic crisis, however, we must examine the crisis more broadly; we must understand it as a societal shift that affects people beyond their personal economic insecurities.

Drawing on Emile Durkheim's description of the break-down of society's purpose and ideals, which is especially palpable during times of economic booms and crises, I have conceptualized the commonalities in the interviewees' descriptions of Spanish society as *anomie*. The content implied by this label is similar to the elements of dissatisfaction described in the literature on pre-crisis motivations for migration (see e.g. Hadler, 2006). My intention in this article has been to suggest an analytical label for a specific set of migration motivations, namely, what Triandafyllidou and Gropas describe as an 'overall disillusionment and the lack of hope with regard to the overall prospects in their country of origin' (2014: 1622). The term anomie provides a conceptual tool for capturing how the societal situation and mood of a country can become important, non-economic components of people's reasons for leaving. Such non-economic dimensions are especially apparent in the reasons that highly resourceful migrants cite for leaving, because often they are still employed when they decide to leave. However, I suggest that examining motivations for migration that are rooted in perceived societal ills (in addition to economic considerations) has the potential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of people's reasons for migrating from southern Europe after the crisis.

The white, relatively resourceful and articulate migrants who contributed to this study can be said to represent the 'good' and 'acceptable' faces of migration. In political and media debates, in the EU bureaucracy and in parts of the research literature on intra-European migration, they are referred to as 'mobile Europeans' or 'free movers' rather than migrants, even when they stay for several years. Thus, the mobility of these 'Western', white and highly skilled migrants is implicitly and explicitly contrasted (both in the interviews analysed here and in the wider discourse to which the interviewees allude) with social imaginaries of welfare-scrounging Romanians, asylum seekers and poor 'economic migrants' (Bosworth and Guild, 2008; Briggs and Dobre, 2014). Insisting on a separation between (highly skilled, white) 'mobile professionals' on the one hand and (poor, subaltern) 'migrants' on the other can potentially contribute to cementing the

boundaries between the 'mobility' of travellers in more privileged positions and the 'migration' of those less privileged. It is probable that people from all walks of life are experiencing anomie in southern Europe at the moment, and some choose to leave while others do not. To address these issues further, however, more research is needed.

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## Notes

1. The title of Chapter 13 in Favell's Eurostars and Eurocities is 'Anomie'. However, the concept is not mentioned beyond the chapter title. The chapter deals with the strains of mobility: 'inflections of darkness or discord in an otherwise sunny eurolandscape' (2008b: 203).
2. http://mareagranate.org/?page_id=249 (accessed 8 January 2015).
3. Aftenposten, 24 November 2011.
4. Aftenposten, 25 November 2011.
5. Labour migration in uncertain times: Migration from Spain to Norway

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