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Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 905243744]

Publisher Routledge

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Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713433350>

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Online Publication Date: 01 January 2009

To cite this Article Cook-Martin, David and Viladrich, Anahí(2009)'The Problem with Similarity: Ethnic-Affinity Migrants in Spain',Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,35:1,151 — 170

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13691830802489309

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830802489309>

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The Problem with Similarity: Ethnic-Affinity Migrants in Spain

David Cook-Martín and Anahí Viladrich

Politics that give a privileged migratory or citizenship status to individuals abroad because of presumed common origins with a granting state's people foster the expectation that ethnic affinity facilitates social and economic integration. However, a growing literature has documented a mismatch between the social and the economic expectations of people defined as co-ethnics by these policies. Relying on a study of Spanish-descent Argentines who have 'returned' to Spain, we argue that the effect of perceived ethnic affinities varies by social context. While ethnic similarity with natives may offer an advantage to migrants in search of housing or educational opportunities, it can hinder entry to the job market. From an employer's standpoint, what makes 'traditional' immigrants suited to these positions is their willingness to put up with low wages and poor working conditions in anticipation of future economic and status payoffs in the homeland. To the extent that ethnic-affinity migrants are oriented primarily to the local economic and status structure, their access to entry-level jobs may be impeded and/or they may be forced to compete with natives for skilled or professional jobs precisely because they are not different in the sense valued by employers. In a concluding section, we measure insights gleaned from the Spanish case against the experiences of ethnic Germans and Japanese-descent Brazilians and conclude that ethnic-affinity migrants' orientations are shaped by the terms on which policies allow access to destination countries and to citizenship.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Spain; Migration Policy; Labour Market; Citizenship Policy; Local-Level Policies

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What makes immigrants desirable? An elderly person concerned about property values and crime rates, a municipal official worried about declining school enrolments, and the owner of a landscaping business in need of workers will have different views of what constitutes a 'good' immigrant, depending on their location in concrete economic and social domains. And yet the pervasive assumption is that the closer an immigrant's profile is to that of the native population, the more desirable the newcomer. Indeed, when the desirable immigrant fails to meet expectations generated by this assumption it has stirred popular and scholarly curiosity. Immigrants who receive a privileged migratory or citizenship status because of presumed common origins with a receiving state's people are a case in point. The *Aussiedler* or ethnic Germans, and members of the Jewish diaspora are among the best-known examples of people affected by these ethnic affinity policies (Joppke 2005; Levy and Weiss 2002), but there are many other instances: Latin Americans descended from Italian, Japanese and Spanish emigrants, ethnic Hungarians in Eastern Europe, descendants of the Irish in the Americas, and Estonian-descent West Siberians (Corcoran 2002; Kulu 1998; Rhi Sausi and García 1992; Tsuda 2003). In virtually every case, the literature cited describes an expectations mismatch between new arrivals and natives that results in aggravation, conflict and new migrations. Existing studies document a range of frustrated expectations and related consequences, but fail to offer an explanation.

What accounts for the expectations gap between people legally and popularly presumed to enjoy considerable affinities and good prospects for mutual acceptance? Drawing on a study of Spanish-descent Argentines in Spain we argue that, contrary to conventional knowledge, the effect of perceived ethnic resemblance varies across social contexts. It can be an asset for Spanish-descent Argentines looking for housing, access to education, friends, dates or even a marriage partner in Spain, but it can be a liability in the labour market, where access to the first rungs of the occupational ladder is often reserved by employers for newcomers valued precisely because their work orientations differ from those of natives. A willingness to endure low wages and sub-par working conditions in view of a potential economic and status payoff in the homeland—what social scientists have called a *dual frame of reference*—has been a key feature of immigrants' appeal to employers. To the extent that ethnic-affinity migrants are orientated primarily to the local economic and status structure, employers may not view them favourably and their access to entry-level jobs may be hindered and/or they may be forced to compete with better-positioned natives for skilled or professional jobs. Herein lies the problem of assuming that similarity offers benefits across the board.

The next section describes what we mean by ethnicity, and how it can shape job-market orientations and employers' evaluation of prospective workers. We then explain the rationale for including two cases of ethnic-affinity migration to Spain and delve into the historical and institutional bases of presumed commonalities. An analysis of these two cases is the empirical core of our argument. In a discussion section, we test key insights gleaned from the Spanish cases against observations from

studies of ethnic Germans in Germany and Japanese-descent Brazilians in Japan. We conclude that ethnic-affinity migrants' orientations are shaped by the terms on which policies give them access to destination-country labour markets and citizenship.

Ethnic Affinity, Job-Market Orientations and Tractable Labour

In this article, ethnicity refers to social relations premised on a 'subjectively believed community of descent' or origins (Weber 1978: 387). Bases of this belief can be multiple and include, but are not limited to, phenotype, customs, or memories of colonisation and migration. In the case at hand, Spanish policies reflect a belief in common origins with (a) descendants of former colonial subjects who at times have been viewed as belonging to a state-transcending community of Hispanic nations¹ and/or (b) descendants of recent Spanish emigrants to the Americas, Africa and Europe. Ethnicity can be the means to effect monopolistic closure around scarce goods, in this instance Spanish (and European) labour markets, and social welfare resources. Ethnic-affinity policies are laws and related official practices through which one state (e.g. Spain) gives prospective migrants living in other countries (e.g. Spanish-descent Argentines) a privileged migration or citizenship status based on perceived common origins. Ethnic-affinity migrants—the beneficiaries of these policies—have access to much the same social and economic goods as their legally defined 'co-ethnics', at least on paper. Ethnic-affinity laws are part of an official discourse to bring into existence the very distinctions they treat as natural and self-evident (Bourdieu 1991: 223). For instance, the legal category 'emigrant returnee' applied to people who may have never set foot in Spain and have another nationality represents a claim on them by virtue of history and familial ties. It is analytically important to recognise these policies and related categories as ones used by participants in struggles to define national insiders and, by default, outsiders, rather than as reflective of 'objective' distinctions.

State actors in developed economies are often caught between two competing impulses. On the one hand, there is a persistent emphasis on maximising social cohesion within a territorially circumscribed population, which often entails state efforts to minimise difference. On the other hand, embeddedness in an economic system that relies on the availability of ever-cheaper labour means workers are often from abroad. Ethnic-affinity migrants appear to reconcile these contradictory impulses: they are more likely to share linguistic competencies, religion, customs, orientations and possibly phenotype with natives—and they would presumably fill entry-level jobs not taken by natives, at least for a time. The tacit assumption is that ethnic affinity refers to similarities among natives and newcomers that traverse multiple social contexts and ease mutual acceptance.

Economic scholarship on migrants, however, suggests that similarity may actually be problematic in the work domain. Employers who hire for jobs commonly available to new arrivals expect a deferential disposition unlikely to be found among co-ethnics who share with natives social characteristics, expectations and legal rights. Analysts

have long argued that what makes migrants desirable as workers is their tendency to use a *dual frame of reference* to interpret their experience and orient their action (Massey *et al.* 1987; Piore 1979; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). This dual frame consists of a willingness to accept low status and poorly paid jobs in the receiving context in view of expected financial and social-status returns in the homeland. Employers interpret this disposition as deference and it becomes part of their assessment of workers as suitable for particular jobs. Employers also understand that natives orientated to the local status structure are unwilling to fill entry-level positions. Because migrants often think of the *here and now* in terms of the *there and then*, they also tolerate living quarters and everyday hardships they might not have endured in the homeland. To be sure, migrants' orientation towards the context of settlement changes, but this is a process that unfolds over time.

So long as there is a steady supply of foreign, tractable workers, employers are likely to continue to hire them. Indeed, economic sociologists have argued that, all things being equal, employers are likely to hire the same people today that they hired yesterday (Tilly and Tilly 1998: 195). However, if workers' tractability in a particular sector is diminished in noticeable ways—say through unionisation—employers may replace them with a new category of workers. This is what has been happening, for instance, in the strawberry sector in Southern Spain: male Maghrebian workers who had harvested this 'time-sensitive' crop since the late 1980s became politically mobilised and employers began to replace them with Eastern European and Latin American female workers touted as more reliable, deferent and 'better suited' to this delicate fruit (Migration News 2002; cf. Pedreño Cánovas 2000). When tractability is threatened, employers are likely to replace one category of newcomer with another comprising more deferential workers.

Ethnic-affinity migrants have all the makings of less-pliable workers. They have the same formal rights and privileges as their native hosts, access to similar jobs and probably similar work expectations. Even when they do not, prospective hosts may assume they do and conclude that they are unlikely to be compliant workers. Native employers do not, for the most part, want to hire ethnic kin to do the dirty, dangerous and difficult (3D) jobs they have to offer at very low wages, but prefer strangers. This is why we argue that, while ethnic similarity may suggest mutual acceptance in some domains, it is not necessarily so in the sphere of work.

Data and Methods

We test the argument outlined earlier by examining two case studies of Argentines whose migration to Spain has been facilitated by ethnic-affinity policies. These are key cases because observers and participants alike generally assume a high degree of affinity between these migrants and their supposed Iberian kin and expect that this ethnic affinity will facilitate mutual acceptance and ease the transition to Spain. These presuppositions are understandable given the historical, cultural and organisational

links between Spain and Argentina since the mid-nineteenth century. Ethnic-affinity migration should work here as conventionally anticipated.

To establish the baseline of conventional knowledge, with its implicit expectation of mutual acceptance, we examine the discursive construction of the case of Spanish-descent Argentines and their hosts in Aguaviva, a small town in the rural Spanish region of Aragon. The analysis rests on a close interpretive reading of 257 articles compiled by the authors between 2000 and 2005 from the Spanish, Argentine, North-American and European press. The authors collected articles with specific references to ethnic-affinity migration from Argentina to Spain and those that specifically referred to Aguaviva (a fifth of all items compiled). Our interpretive approach was to situate authors, characters, plot and language in their respective local, regional, national and supra-national contexts, to note common assumptions and to contrast implicit and changing claims about ethnic migrants. This case serves as a window into the sometimes conflicting expectations of Spanish-descent Argentines and their co-ethnic hosts as viewed by journalists from different national standpoints, but who take for granted the commonality between people in these categories and what this implies for mutual acceptance. The case is also a strategic site because it reflects broader Spanish and European concerns about declining populations and about immigration as a solution to demographic dilemmas.

To examine 'on the ground' dynamics between natives and ethnic migrants, and in particular their mutual acceptance in a range of contexts, we then secondly turn to a qualitative account that draws on observations and interviews carried out between June 2001 and September 2003 among Spanish-Argentines in Ría, pseudonym for an industrial port city in Galicia, Spain. One of the authors (Cook-Martín) carried out a dozen intensive interviews with ethnic-affinity migrants. He selected initial participants from a list of names given by three independent contacts in the community. In turn, these participants each provided a list of other potential interviewees from which additional names were drawn with an eye to maximising differences in participant characteristics and experiences. Fieldwork also included observations and less-formal interviews with participants at work, at home and in recreational venues (e.g. a local café patronised by Argentines and cultural events that attracted people who had lived in Argentina).

The selection of an urban instance (Ría) and a rural one (Aguaviva) allows us to control for the possibility that the observed expectations mismatch is an effect of rural-urban differences among newcomers and natives. More importantly, it underscores that, while there are two distinct types of ethnicity at work in these cases, they both shape expectations in remarkably similar ways.² In Aguaviva, the belief in common origins is sustained loosely by a narrative of *hispanidad*, bolstered by Spain's history of emigration. Institutionally, this *historical legacies* flavour of ethnicity has informed Spanish immigration policies that have contained preferential provisions for Latin Americans, and more recently nationality policies that give preferential status to anyone who can document links to a Spanish parent or grandparent (Reino De España 2002). In Ría, ethnicity refers to concrete kinship ties among newcomers

and natives rooted in migration flows that linked Galicia and Argentina well into the 1970s. This conception is taken for granted, if not validated, by regional official policies for *retornados* (returnees) which offer assistance to Galician emigrants or their descendants. Thus, a third methodological component of this study is an analysis of policies that reflect and shape relevant notions of ethnicity.

The Foundations of Ethnic Affinity

Over a century of substantial migration between Argentina and Spain, related cultural and organisational links and legal mechanisms have sustained the widely held assumption of common origins. As part of a larger wave of European migration, 3.17 million Spaniards migrated to Argentina between 1857 and 1975 and just over half remained (Dirección de Inmigración 1925, 1927–1939; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 1982). The people who moved back and forth between both countries built the networks characteristic of most migrations. This included hometown and/or mutual assistance associations that were especially prevalent among Galicians—over 45 per cent of Spanish migrants to Argentina (Álvarez Silvar 1997). By the 1920s, there was a sufficient number of associations to justify a *Federation of Galician Societies* (FGS) (Fernández Santiago 2001). These associations not only met migrants' material and cultural needs in Argentina, but linked them to sending areas and channelled crucial resources to the homeland. In recent years, associations have served as sources of homeland information for those interested in the possibility of migrating to Galicia. In Buenos Aires, the FGS has continued to bridge the cultural and political lives of its members and Galicians in the homeland.

The very possibility of reclaiming Spanish citizenship a generation or more after the last emigrants arrived in Argentina speaks to the tenor of legal mechanisms developed under very particular circumstances. Specifically, migration between Argentina and Spain coincided with nation-state building and consolidation processes in each country. Central to these processes were efforts to constitute national populations by identifying people as members subject to official administration and by gaining people's allegiance to a patria. Vastly under-populated, Argentina faced the challenge of attracting people to feed labour demand and to call its own, while Spain had to make Spaniards of a highly mobile and diverse population. Migration and nationality law were concrete mechanisms through which these countries competed over the same migrants and their children (Cook-Martín 2008). The outcome of these struggles has been a pattern of ethnic-affinity policy as defined earlier.

Argentine expressions of this policy pattern include longstanding dual-nationality agreements and official preference for Spanish migrants, especially in the inter- and postwar years (Cook-Martín 2005). Dual nationality agreements have allowed citizens of Argentina and Spain to maintain legal affiliations with both countries without the effects of conflicting citizenship obligations. Commercial and migration treaties have made possible the entry of Spaniards on privileged terms, especially

since the 1940s (Quijada Mauriño 1989). Spanish manifestations of ethnic-affinity policy include right-of-blood (*ius sanguinis*) nationality laws and, more recently, central-state and regional migration policies. Since the nineteenth century, the Spanish Civil Code has conferred citizenship on the children of Spaniards, regardless of birth place, provided that administrative requirements are met. Modifications to the Code introduced in 2002 have made nationality provisions even more expansive towards the descendants of Spaniards (Reino De España 2002).

Since its inception, Spanish immigration law has included positive preferences for 'Ibero-Americans', other former colonials, historically-wronged communities and citizens of strategic regions (Reino De España 1985). Despite a recent convergence towards a liberal-democratic norm with its emphasis on universalistic admissions criteria (Joppke 2005), some positive preferences persist in the most recent iteration of Spanish immigration law (Reino De España 2003).³ More importantly, preferences have migrated to nationality law as described above and are still operative in immigration administrative practices.

Flows and stocks of immigrants in Spain support this last point. While the supply of North African migrants is plentiful, it is the stock of Latin Americans that has grown the fastest in Spain over the last five years. Until recently, Moroccans and other North Africans have constituted the main contingent of migrants to Spain. In 2003, Moroccans accounted for just over 20 per cent and all Africans for just over 26 per cent of immigrants in Spain (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales 2004). However, recent figures show that Ecuadorians, documented or otherwise, have surpassed Moroccans as the largest group of foreigners in Spain. The total number of foreigners in Spain has been estimated at 2.6 million in 2003 or 6.2 per cent of the total population. According to these data, Ecuadorians and Colombians account for almost a quarter of all foreigners in Spain. Spanish Social Security data show that there are almost 250,000 Ecuadorian registered workers and approximately 130,000 Colombians (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales 2005). The most recent and comprehensive study of the Argentine-born in Spain show that they number just over 250,000 (Actis and Esteban 2006), though the population has been historically undercounted because of their privileged legal status and administrative treatment.

Notwithstanding the universalistic cast of immigration law, the preferential treatment of Spanish-descent Latin Americans in nationality law and actual administrative practice—at the 'border' and in the implementation of 'regularisation' programmes—has resulted in an immigrant population that models Spanish ethnic preferences (Cea D'ancona 2004; Cook-Martín 2002; Izquierdo Escribano *et al.* 2002; Retis 2003; Solé and Parella 2003). In a fascinating policy 'shell game' driven largely by European Union pressures, positive preferences for Latin Americans—especially those from former emigrant-receiving areas in South America—have shifted from one legal domain to another. To the extent that nationality policies constitute a back door to membership in European Union member polities, however, pressure is mounting to change them.

Local- and regional-level migration policy also evidences positive preferences. The cases described in this article illustrate two patterns of ethnic-affinity policy applied at the sub-national level.⁴ In a first pattern, municipal governments leverage the privileged migration status available to Spanish-descent foreigners through aggressive recruitment in culturally Spanish enclaves abroad. Local governments from Spain use what had been largely dormant associational ties to get the word out to prospective eligible migrants and to select according to other criteria (age, familial status, skills). Municipal-level governments work within existing central-state laws, but accentuate selectivity according to local needs and preferences, and even organise associations of governments with these objectives.

In a second pattern, regional governments design laws and related official practices to facilitate co-ethnic 'return'. Often the prospective beneficiaries are considered as citizens by other states and do not necessarily identify affectively with the ancestral homeland in question. Policies of the Autonomous Region of Galicia discussed below are an example of this second pattern. Like central-state policies, the legal right of return is supported by invoking an historical-cultural rationale. However, the argument is specific to a Galician history of emigration and is associated with access to material and symbolic resources. The latter include officially sanctioned identification with Galicia (Parlamento de Galicia 1983), and the former access to resources for returning emigrants (Conseillo de Emigración 2006). In this case, ethnic selectivity is bolstered by regional government institutional, financial and organisational resources.

This overview underscores the historical and institutional bases of a widespread presumption of affinity among Spaniards and Latin American migrants, especially Argentines. The following sections demonstrate the shortcomings of the underlying 'family resemblance facilitates integration' rationale.

Aguaviva: Frustrated Expectations and Ethnic Redefinitions

A small town located midway between Madrid and Zaragoza, Aguaviva has gained notoriety since the turn of the millennium as the site of an innovative programme to fight depopulation through the selective recruitment of Spanish-descent migrants in South America. Its experiment with *immigration by design* has received considerable attention from the Spanish, European and Argentine press because it resonates with broader concerns, firstly, of European states perceived to be in demographic decline or in a so-called 'second demographic transition' (Kligman 2005; Pérez Leira 2002), and secondly of relatively new, economically-ailing emigration countries like Argentina (Actis and Esteban 2006; Lattes *et al.* 2003). The Aguaviva story is captivating precisely because it purports to be a win-win encounter of sending- and receiving-country needs. From the sending-country standpoint, under- and unemployed citizens are able to access European labour markets, and perhaps even send remittances (Calvo 2005). From the receiving perspective, a diminishing population is replenished with people who make possible the reproduction of European polities

and economies. The crucial point is that these newcomers presumably bear a family resemblance to natives and are therefore thought more likely to fit in easily. A comparison with other prospective migrants who are linguistically, religiously, racially and culturally more distant from the native norm, and thus less amenable to integration, is tacit in this understanding (Gil Araujo 2004). Thus, the selective immigration programme undertaken by Aguaviva is newsworthy as a proactive and innovative approach to dilemmas faced by European receiving and Latin American sending states, and not because of its exceptionality.

Contrary to expectation, however, family resemblance has not assured acceptance. Many Spanish-descent Argentines recruited to Aguaviva have shunned the jobs and accommodation offered them. Native hosts, on the other hand, have been glad of the demographic replenishment, but have questioned newcomers' work ethic and compared them to Romanian immigrants who have unexpectedly met and exceeded local hopes. For observers and participants this has been a puzzling turn of events that motivates print-media narratives. To explain this outcome, we review the Aguaviva case in detail and make the argument that ethnic affinity varies in the extent to which it eases mutual acceptance across social contexts.⁵

By the late 1990s, Aguaviva's mayor, Luis Bricio, had concluded that small towns like his would disappear within a generation in the absence of drastic measures. Aguaviva had the lowest birth rate in a country with the lowest birth rate in the world (Fernández Córdón 2001). In conversation with other mayors from his region, Bricio founded the *Spanish Association of Municipalities against Depopulation* (AEMCD) of which he has remained president. The objectives of the AEMCD were to foster economic development while promoting selective immigration (Bricio Manzanares 2004). Concretely, towns would sponsor preferably large Latin American families of Spanish descent. Interest settled especially on Argentina since many of its Spanish-descent citizens had begun to apply for Italian or Spanish citizenship in the wake of economic crisis. Migrants would enter a contract with each municipality, committing to stay for a period of five years. For their part, municipalities would front relocation costs and provide housing and work.

In July 2000, Bricio travelled to Argentina to select a dozen pioneer families. Working through local chapters of the Spanish conservative *Partido Popular* in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Mar del Plata, he announced several blue-collar openings for couples under 40 with at least two children (Carricart and Litvak 2000; Monserrat 2000). He appeared on a local radio programme, *Galicia Oxe*, and at least two large media outlets picked up the story. The widely disseminated announcement received an overwhelming response and, within two days, the *Partido Popular* offices processed 5,000 inquiries (Ortega 2001). By April 2001, ten Argentine and two Uruguayan families had settled in Aguaviva, adding 34 children to the local primary school with a previous enrolment of 50 children. They were mostly from middle-class, urban backgrounds, and many had managed small businesses during the most recent economic crisis in Argentina. The families arrived with much fanfare, and rosy assessments of Bricio's initiative were the order of the day. Newcomers to Aguaviva

celebrated their good fortune and the generosity of their hosts in multiple interviews with the Spanish and Argentine press. It seemed that there had been a happy meeting between the demographic needs of rural Spain, and the economic needs of Spanish-descent Argentines. Subsequently the repopulation programme was expanded to include families from other Latin American countries and Eastern Europe, primarily Romania. In all, about 25 families arrived in Aguaviva, raising its total population to over 700 people, and doubling its school-age population (Daly 2003).

Despite the auspicious beginnings of the Aguaviva initiative, half the Argentine families had left or were considering leaving within a year of arriving. They all had Argentine and Spanish nationality, which allowed for movement within the European Union. Most claimed that Aguaviva had not met its promises of providing adequate housing, and especially work. New arrivals felt entitled to the same treatment as natives, for which they adduced two entwined rationales. The first was historical. Newcomers invoked narratives of aid rendered by Argentina to Spain's past emigrants, including their own ancestors, to imply that contemporary Spaniards maintained an outstanding debt with Argentina that could be repaid by giving its citizens a comparable hand. Jorge López (40, laid off as a technician with 3M in Buenos Aires) held that: '... my grandfather left Spain because he was going hungry. And he arrived in Argentina looking for a better life. Now, history repeats itself, but the other way around ...' (Carricart and Litvak 2000).

The second rationale for treatment on a par with natives was legal. Since many migrants had or were in the process of acquiring dual Argentine and Spanish citizenship they felt entitled to the same rights and privileges as other Spaniards. Therefore, dual nationals were not willing to take menial, dangerous or poorly paid jobs just because they offered nominally more compensation than those available in Argentina. When access to other jobs proved problematic, newcomers felt duped. For instance, several participants in the repopulation programme complained that the jobs they had been promised before coming to Aguaviva required Spanish certifications, such as commercial drivers' licences, at a significant cost. Unable to complete the coursework and pay the fees, they were forced to consider what, from their perspective, were underpaid and dangerous jobs at the local sandpit (Montserrat 2002; Webster 2001). In addition, most newcomers came from urban contexts and thought the housing supplied by locals was substandard and lacking in basic amenities.

The townspeople shared with Spanish-descent migrants a sense of cultural affinity and the expectation that this would facilitate the settlement process. 'If it were simply a matter of finding workers', Mayor Bricio had said of his programme, 'we wouldn't have travelled so far to find Hispano-Argentines' (Carricart and Litvak 2000). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, there were many migrants from other parts of Latin America and from North Africa available for employment in Spain (see Gil Araujo 2004). 'But it's a matter of finding people who will come to Aguaviva with the intention of staying forever', he continued. 'For this, the capacity to integrate and adapt to our customs are key, so the natural candidates should be the descendants of Spaniards'.

From the community's perspective, it was important to find the right *kind* of worker: those similar to Aguaviva's residents, and who could presumably reproduce their way of life. Moreover, townspeople underscored their willingness to settle a historical debt with Argentina, a country that in the past had dealt generously with Spain by receiving its emigrants.⁶

However, when it came to work and housing, Aguaviva natives held the same expectations of Spanish-descent Argentines as they did of immigrants generally, a point amply illustrated by frequent comparisons with Romanian immigrants. After the municipality sued several newcomers who left Aguaviva allegedly in breach of contract, the mayor left no doubts about native work expectations: '[we brought them] not to be princes, but to work and earn a living'. When newcomers refused to do available work, their moral orientation was called into question. In interviews shortly after the arrival of Spanish-descent Argentines, the mayor noted that the Latin Americans had 'a different concept of work' than local residents (Webster 2001: 24). In this and other interviews, natives invariably contrasted Romanian and Argentine migrants, and presented the former as examples worthy of emulation. Locals observed that, despite religious and linguistic differences, Romanian immigrants were 'more like us' [than the Latin American newcomers] in their ethic of hard work and modest expectations (Daly 2003; Voss 2003). Indeed, Romanians' willingness to do hard manual labour and to live in what their urban-origin Argentine counterparts considered as substandard housing emerged repeatedly in native narratives. The upshot of the Argentine–Romanian comparison is that, while natives were willing to overlook linguistic and religious differences, they were less forgiving with unmet expectations in the occupational realm, and reassessed the 'real' bases of affinity accordingly.

In this reassessment, cultural affinity has not been discarded, but rather moved down the list of factors likely to enhance natives and newcomers' mutual acceptance (Bricio Manzanares 2004). Spanish nationality allows prospective migrants to make the first cut, but their perceived work ethic and skills that match available jobs head the list of favourable factors, followed by family size, rural origins and an attitude of 'peaceful coexistence'. Mayor Bricio and town residents have come to advocate a more exhaustive vetting process at the point of origin that pays particular attention to these criteria. According to Bricio 'integration doesn't depend on the language, nor is it guaranteed by a shared Spanish heritage . . . *What really matters is the work ethic and that the skills they come with match the sort of jobs we can offer here*' (emphasis is ours; Voss 2003). In this reconsideration of factors likely to facilitate integration, there is an implicit recognition of the limits of similarity. The point is not that newcomers should be like natives linguistically or culturally, but that they match available jobs both in skills and in a disposition to do them, as perceived by native employers. It is all well and good to prefer people who speak the same language, worship at the same altar and share historical experiences of solidarity, but these do not automatically make for desirable workers. As the evaluation of Romanians suggests, what constitutes a good worker is a willingness to do jobs that the natives are not doing.

Notwithstanding natives' moral discourse about work orientation, they actually share with their fictive Argentine kin an aversion to the types of job now filled by Romanians. The 'problem' from a work perspective is not that they are different in their attitudes towards particular jobs, but that they are too similar.

If this interpretation is correct, then selecting migrants who are like prospective hosts in every respect would not help, and would possibly hinder, the matching of ethnic-affinity migrants to jobs generally available to them; unless, as we will argue in another section, some basis exists for limiting labour market expectations. To probe this claim further, the following section recounts the experience of Spanish-descent Argentines in Ría, pseudonym for a city in the ancestral homeland and traditional emigrant-exporting region of Galicia. Ethnic-affinity migrants in this instance more closely resemble natives along several dimensions, and from a conventional perspective this would suggest better integrative prospects.

Galicia: Better a Stranger than a Distant Cousin?

The outcome of the Aguaviva story was not simply an artefact of rural-urban differences among migrants and their hosts. The people interviewed in Galicia shared natives' urban origins, had family ties to Galicia, arrived in a context with longstanding institutional links with Argentina, and benefited from sub-national government policies favouring returnees. Despite this advantageous convergence of factors, Spanish-descent Argentine migrants to Galicia often found their expectations and aspirations at odds, if not in direct conflict, with those of natives, again especially in the occupational domain.

The 'urban origins' alluded to earlier subsume several dimensions of possible commonality among immigrants and hosts: educational profiles, the closeness of worker-job match, and infrastructural expectations. Interviewees had similar educational attainment or skills as their hosts (Algañaraz 2006). Those with some university and professional aspirations in particular competed with similarly trained, but locally qualified natives, and faced the most difficulties in finding jobs matching their formal training and professional aspirations. Skilled workers were in greater demand, but had to contend with locals whose nationality and papers were never in question. A study commissioned by the *Xunta de Galicia*⁷ found that, while almost 35 per cent of Galician-descent Argentines had a college education that prepared them for the professions, the demand in Galicia was for skilled workers (Heguy 2003). In terms of infrastructural expectations, newcomers from large cities like Buenos Aires, Rosario and Santa Fe were likely to find housing, transportation and a cultural life comparable to those in Argentina. In addition to having urban profiles in common with Galicians, those interviewed often had parents and grandparents who hailed from Galicia and even Ría. Thus, returnees frequently had kinship ties to natives, even if distant, and so the metaphor of relatives fallen on hard times had more literal underpinnings here than in Aguaviva. A kinship network was important in helping ethnic migrants find housing or a job, although the latter was less frequent than one

might expect, since native relatives were often elderly and disengaged from the labour market or had to worry about their own children's placement. At an affective level, newcomers were able to connect with the place reminisced about by their parents or grandparents. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of newcomers to Aguaviva whose links were relatively more contrived.

As mentioned, a sense of affinity among Spanish-descent Argentines and native Galicians is aided by historical, institutional and organisational links to Argentina. The historical legacies of migration to Argentina and other Latin American countries pervade many aspects of Galicia's contemporary, social and political life, so that a sense of connections to *retornados* is robust compared to what one might find in a place like Aguaviva, which experienced emigration but no significant return migration. The names of city streets and businesses, schools and cultural institutions founded with past remittances from Argentina and Cuba, the influence of Galician voters abroad as reported in the local media, and the recognition of emigrant intellectuals as architects of regional identity serve as reminders of Galicia's emigration history and its ties abroad. A sense of connection to returnees is also nurtured by the activities of associations, some with a long tradition of fostering ties to Galician communities abroad and some new. From an institutional perspective, the government of Galicia has defined the very category of 'returnee' and has developed policies and administrative structures to serve eligible individuals (Xunta de Galicia 1981).⁸ These regional policies operate within the framework of central-state counterparts, but dedicate financial and organisational resources to those who avail themselves of Spanish citizenship and immigration preferences for emigrants and their descendants. The *Consellería de Emigración* is the administrative entity which coordinates official and non-governmental organisation support for returnees.⁹ In the fiscal year 2006, the regional government allocated 17 million euros to programmes for return migrants, including monies to fund job placement, housing and education (Conseillo de Emigración 2006). The most recent institutional development has been the proposed passage of a new *Statute of Citizens Abroad* which would recognise rights and privileges for the estimated 1.5 million Spaniards abroad, including those of just over 900,000 Galicians (Abejón 2006; Cortes Generales 2006).

It stands to reason, given these linkages, that the arrival of Spanish-descent Argentines would be viewed rather like a homecoming and their acceptance as unproblematic. And indeed, ethnic-affinity migrants are portrayed sympathetically in the press as co-ethnics returned from a long sojourn abroad. For their part, ethnic-affinity migrants report a sense of being accepted by native Galicians. Sofia (40, a registered nurse from Córdoba, Argentina) relates that she encountered some initial reserve among Galicians, but she attributes this to a general distrust for outsiders, including Spaniards from other regions. She cites as an example of Galician hospitality the childcare assistance received from neighbours when she and her husband first arrived from Argentina in 1990. Other Spanish-descent Argentine

youths and their native peers tell of the popularity of Argentines on the local party scene and in local football clubs.

However, in the realm of work, assessments are more negative. The dedication of resources to facilitate returnees' labour market integration attests to the regional government's preoccupation with employment problems observed among Latin American returnees (Conseillo de Emigración 2006; Pérez Leira 2002). Local media has also given wide coverage to returnees' downward occupational mobility. In field interviews, Spanish-descent migrants report a range of problems in the occupational sphere. A salient complaint concerned job aspirations that overlapped with those of other Spaniards. For instance, Manolo (late 20s, student, unemployed former hotel worker) wants to find work in 'administration or marketing', but has been unsuccessful since arriving two months earlier. He is part of the 23 per cent of returnees who are the foreign-born children and grandchildren of Galicians and have Spanish citizenship. As a citizen, he thinks he should have access to the same jobs and pay as any other Spaniard. To date, the jobs offered to him are ones he considers to be below his abilities, experience and pay expectations.

On the other hand, natives tacitly expect that newcomers will gratefully take available unskilled and semi-skilled jobs at modest wages, since even highly skilled and qualified native workers have had to migrate to other parts of Spain and Europe in search of work. Marisa (35, an employer and daughter of a prominent Galician leader in Buenos Aires) worries about the cavalier attitude of many returnees who, like Manolo, have a disposition ill-suited to someone in search of work. Some newcomers even tell demeaning jokes about their hosts and prospective employers. In her view, this does not bode well for Argentine job-seekers. In her assessment of Spanish-descent migrants the comparison is to other immigrants willing to humbly accept the opportunities offered them and to Galicians who, as past emigrants, sacrificed abroad in order to make a better life for themselves and their families at home.

And yet, when ethnic migrants are willing to do jobs for which they are overqualified employers sometimes make assumptions that exclude them from these positions. For example, Claudio (mid-20s, truck driver, son of Galician emigrants), and his brother-in-law, Juan (mid-20s, truck driver, married to a Galician) are desperately seeking employment at a local union office and tell of their dilemma. On the one hand, since they have not yet received their national identification cards, employers are reluctant to hire them for highly regulated driving positions when there are other, fully documented drivers. On the other hand, employers are unwilling to hire them for less-qualified work once they learn that Claudio and Juan are Spanish citizens. A local union representative who helps to place workers like Juan and Claudio believes that employers assume that, as Spaniards, such workers will not really be willing to do unskilled, poorly paid jobs. Thus, workers' own aspirations, and employers' notions of who is suited to what jobs, can effectively frustrate ethnic migrants' job search.

One alternative for Spanish-descent migrants is to enter an emerging ethnic employment niche. Pablo (55, bartender) tells of returning to Ría after 45 years in Buenos Aires and not being able to find steady employment. He is eligible for some government assistance, but is making ends meet by tending the bar in a café that caters mostly to Argentine expatriates. As an older returnee, it is unlikely that employers would select him for entry-level positions and he does not have the educational credentials to fill skilled or professional openings. However, the commercial sector that serves immigrants is still relatively small and is unlikely to offer jobs which are attractive to most ethnic migrants.

For the most part, ethnic-affinity migrants face barriers to entering the local labour market because of expectations that overlap or clash with those of natives or because of employers' notions of which prospective workers dispositionally fit what jobs. The employment history of Sofia, a Spanish-descent migrant mentioned earlier, clearly illustrates these hurdles and in particular the crucial difference that citizenship status can make in workers' and employers' dispositions and job-matching processes. Although a registered nurse in Argentina, Sofia was hired as a nurse's aide at the local hospital and for a few years she worked off the books. She had not revalidated her Argentine degree, and the hospital was content to have her work at lower pay. At the time she was not a Spanish citizen. When she applied for residency papers, the hospital issued a contract for the authorities confirming contributions to the social security system on Sofia's behalf. They then deducted this money, which they were contributing for native workers, from her salary each month. Sofia felt there was no alternative and thought it part of paying one's dues in a new country. Once a Spanish citizen, she was no longer dependent on the hospital's contracts to show continuous employment, a requirement for the periodic renewal of residency permits, and felt entitled to better pay, which the hospital resisted. Sofia eventually went on disability leave and then was laid off, but received unemployment benefits from the government. By this time, her husband had become captain of a merchant marine ship and they were able to make ends meet. She continued to work for local hospitals on a part-time basis because they would not hire her full-time to avoid paying benefits. Ironically, the change in expectations that accompanied Sofia's change in citizenship status put her in a precarious employment position.

The consensus among Spanish-descent migrants interviewed was that formal citizenship did not translate into the substantive rights they envisioned for themselves in the job market. Aspiring to the same jobs as their co-ethnic hosts, they became frustrated with settlement in Ría. Galicians found these expectations unrealistic and arrogant. To the extent that newcomers were not willing to do entry-level jobs they were cast as undesirable workers. On the other hand, newcomers felt that, even when they were willing to do low-paying and low-status jobs, employers were likely to assume no interest or that these jobs were beneath newly arrived co-ethnics. It was the legally defined similarity of Spanish-descent Argentines that underlay the expectation of landing native jobs, and hindered the maintenance of a dual frame

of reference which in turn led to employers' categorisation of newcomers as workers ill-suited to available positions.

Shades of Similarity and Difference

A fundamental insight of this study is that migration and nationality policies play a critical role in shaping the terms on which ethnic-affinity migrants and natives approach the labour market, a crucial sphere of integration. In the instances reviewed here, they interfere with the dual frame of reference that generally makes migrants desirable workers. A brief consideration of other ethnic-affinity migrations shows that this dynamic and this rationale apply beyond the case developed here.

Indeed, a comparison with other instances confirms that the fit between native and newcomer work expectations varies according to the extent to which official policies foster or hinder a dual frame of reference and, in turn, this accounts for differential labour outcomes. The impact of these laws and associated official practices on expectations brought to job-matching encounters is the operative mechanism.

Two cases support this claim and point up the need for additional research along these lines: ethnic Germans (*Spätaussiedler*) and Japanese-descent Brazilians (*nikkeijin*).¹⁰ The Japanese government grants *nikkeijin* a preferential, but still temporary migratory status and does not easily confer citizenship even to co-ethnic newcomers. In addition, Japanese-descent workers are recruited abroad and come with a time-limited contract that carefully dictates the terms of work and residence. Indeed they are referred to as *dekasegi* or temporary migrant workers (Tsuda 2003). The residential segregation of newcomers further accentuates distinctions between natives and newcomers. Combined, these factors sustain a dual frame of reference among Japanese-descent migrants that makes them willing to endure downward mobility in view of a material and status payoff in the sending country, and thus more exploitable and desirable as workers. By contrast, ethnic Germans constitute a legal category of individuals with the same rights and privileges as any other German. Although the number of people classified as ethnic Germans eligible for entry and citizenship has declined significantly over the last 18 years, those who have entered in the past have the same rights as their co-nationals and access to language training, job-placement assistance and welfare benefits (Oezcan 2004). By definition, *Aussiedler* policy fosters an orientation towards the German economic and status system. We posit that this orientation makes ethnic newcomers less like other immigrants willing to do 3D jobs, and hence less pliable or exploitable from the perspective of native employers. In sum, it is the content of policies that shapes the labour market insertion of ethnic-affinity migrants.

Conclusion

The analytic upshot of this article is that students of ethnic-affinity migrations should uncover rather than take for granted what officially defined commonalities portend

for the mutual acceptance of natives and newcomers. As we have shown, vague presumptions of similarity and implied social acceptance are inconsistent, especially with actual experiences in the world of work. To take state-generated claims of affinity for granted not only gives scientific legitimacy to official visions of how the social world is parsed, but hinders knowledge about how and why states make such claims and with what consequences. An exclusive focus on the positive preference for co-ethnic migrants, for instance, may elide a tacit exclusionary flip-side. In Spain, the dark side of ethnic-affinity policies has been the replacement of North African migrants with Latin Americans. Another example includes taking at face value participants' reappraisals of ethnic affinity in the wake of conflicting expectations. While these reassessments may contain accurate insights—Mayor Bricio's recognition that newcomers should be well-suited to locally available jobs—they are simply new chapters in an ongoing struggle of who will be categorised into what class of people and to what ends. Reinterpretations of affinity are not adjustments of group definitions to more accurately reflect the boundaries of real entities. Ethnicity is, after all, about relationships, not substances (Bourdieu 1985). Analysts would do well to remember this as they interpret conflicting or unmet expectations born of the mismatch between formal and substantive rights and obligations.

Acknowledgements

Cook-Martín thanks the UCLA Center for European and Eurasian Studies, the Berkeley Institute of European Studies, and the National Science Foundation (No. SES-0512080) for their support. Thanks also to Ödül Bozkurt, David Fitzgerald, Jon Fox, Sandra Gil Araujo, Takeyuki Tsuda and anonymous *JEMS* reviewers for their invaluable comments. Viladrich thankfully acknowledges the support of the Urban Public Health Program, the School of Health Sciences, the School of the Health Professions (CUNY) and the partial support of the Rousseau gift from Hunter College. Above all, we thank the people who shared with us their life experiences.

Notes

- [1] On the historical meaning of *hispanismo* and *hispanidad* see Balfour (1996), Diffie (1943), Gomez-Escalonilla (1991) and Rein (1991). See also Joppke's (2005: 114–17) more recent discussion with specific reference to this ideology's effect on nationality law.
- [2] We thank one of the anonymous *JEMS* reviewers for encouraging us to draw out this distinction.
- [3] Although these are minor and consist of exemptions from work-permit fees.
- [4] Similar practices are at work in the Italian case and are the subject of ongoing study by Cook-Martín.
- [5] After reviewing an early draft of this paper, García (2007) conducted summer field research in Aguaviva, and confirmed our analysis.
- [6] This perspective is ubiquitous in Spanish public discourse about Argentines (Spanish President Rodriguez Zapatero, cited in 'Leyes de inmigración y los argentinos', *Clarín*, 23 January 2005; Cook-Martín 2002: 23–4; Retis 2003: 15)

- [7] The *Xunta de Galicia* is the regional government organisation. Galicia is one of 17 autonomous communities in Spain and one of four regions with special provisions of autonomy.
- [8] 'Return migration' to Spain comes not only from the Americas but also from other European countries and Northern Africa (Rogers 1985; Vilar and Vilar 1999a, 1999b).
- [9] For a list of non-governmental organisations that serve return migrants see *Fundación Galicia Emigración*: <http://www.fundaciongaliciaemigracion.es/funCastellano/noticia.php?idNoticia=12>.
- [10] *Spätaussiedler* are ethnic-German migrants primarily from the former Soviet Union who arrived in the last 18 years and are eligible for full citizenship status (Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2004). *Nikkeijin* are Japanese-descent individuals not born in Japan (see Tsuda 2003).

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