“It’s not a vacation, it’s your life”

Privileged identities, ageing experiences, and migration projects of British retirees on the coasts of Spain

Emma Fàbrega Domènech.

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Doctoral Thesis

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Cultural and Social Anthropology
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Abstract

This doctoral thesis investigates identity, ageing, and migration through an intersectional approach to retirement and later life migration from the UK to Spain. Through an in-depth exploration of the experiences of British expatriate retirees in Costa del Sol, Andalusia, and Costa Brava, Catalonia, Spain, the thesis analyzes the generation of experiences between privilege, vulnerability, and precarity, and its contingent effects on the construction of these identity processes. The trend of British retirees moving to Spain has a long-standing history and has been studied in Anthropology, Gerontology, migration studies, and more. Yet, in the period between 2019 and 2020, when this research took place, the confluence of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic reinvigorated the field of study. Said geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts put the experiences and identities of British expatriate retirees in question; altering the material foundations upon which their privileged migration life projects were constructed. Like this, creating a unique context where privilege and uncertainty meet in the crux of intersecting experiences of migration and ageing. Through the latter, the thesis contributes to anthropological debates on the contextualized construction of identities between the self and society; on Global North ageing discourses and its' effects on later life identity projects; and questions the use of migration categories on the ground. Since identity, ageing and migration are polysemic concepts that have mutated over time with their subsequent analytical repercussions, this thesis adopts an intersectional lens that recognizes and develops the debates these terms are involved in, as well as captures the everyday connections between micro experiences and macro structures that evidence relationships of power and the perpetuation of inequalities. This involves the study of labels and their adjacent prejudices and stigmas, exposing how these travel from one sociocultural context to another, while also exploring how feelings of belonging are built abroad. By examining through the seemingly privileged retirement migration experiences of informants, this doctoral thesis exposes the intricacies between privilege, vulnerability, dependence, and precarity through the minutiae of the quotidian, contributing to wider empirical and conceptual debates regarding identity, ageing, and migration.
Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral investiga la identidad, el envejecimiento y la migración a través de un enfoque interseccional de la gerontomigración y la migración en etapas vitales tardías des del Reino Unido a España. Al explorar en profundidad las experiencias de jubilados expatriados británicos en la Costa del Sol y la Costa Brava, España, esta tesis analiza la generación de experiencias entre el privilegio, la vulnerabilidad, y la precariedad, y sus efectos contingentes sobre la construcción de estos procesos identitarios. El fenómeno de jubilados británicos que migran a España tiene una larga historia y se ha estudiado en antropología, gerontología, estudios de migración y más. No obstante, en el período entre 2019 y 2020 cuando se llevó a cabo esta investigación, la confluencia del Brexit y la pandemia de COVID-19 revitalizó el campo de estudio. Dichos cambios geopolíticos y sociosanitarios cuestionan las experiencias e identidades de los jubilados expatriados británicos; alterando los cimientos materiales sobre los que se construyeron sus privilegiados proyectos de vida migratoria. Así, creando un contexto único donde el privilegio y la incertidumbre se encuentran en la intersección de experiencias migratorias y de envejecimiento. A través de esto último, la tesis contribuye a debates antropológicos sobre la construcción contextualizada de identidades entre el yo y la sociedad; sobre los discursos acerca del envejecimiento del Norte Global y sus efectos en los proyectos identitarios en la vejez; y cuestiona los usos de las categorías migratorias tradicionales sobre el terreno. Dado que la identidad, el envejecimiento y la migración son conceptos polisémicos que han mutado a lo largo del tiempo, con sus subsecuentes repercusiones analíticas, esta investigación adopta una aproximación interseccional que reconoce y desarrolla los debates en los que están involucrados estos términos, y, asimismo, también capturando las conexiones entre las micro experiencias y las macroestructuras que evidencian las relaciones de poder y la perpetuación de desigualdades. Esto implica el estudio de etiquetas y sus prejuicios y estigmas adyacentes, apuntando cómo éstos transitan de un contexto sociocultural a otro, además de explorar cómo se construyen los sentimientos de pertenencia en el extranjero. Al examinar las experiencias migratorias de jubilación aparentemente privilegiadas de los informantes, esta tesis doctoral expone las complejidades entre el privilegio, la vulnerabilidad, la dependencia y la precariedad a través de las minucias de lo cotidiano. Así contribuyendo a debates empíricos y conceptuales más amplios en torno a la identidad, el envejecimiento y la migración.
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Chapter 1
Opening a dialogue between identity, ageing, and migration

1.1. Personal background and the thesis’ main objective

Throughout my academic career I have long been interested in anthropologically investigating old age. This interest existed well before I started my undergraduate degree, going back to when I was 15 and began volunteering at a hospital’s day center for elderly patients, who needed physical and mental stimulation to recuperate from various illnesses and injuries. I volunteered there until my early twenties, writing my first ethnographic research on ageing based on that experience for my undergraduate final project. Throughout the years I developed an interest in how ethnographic methods could be used to capture the ageing experience, which is a sociocultural phenomenon as well as an exceptionally embodied experience.

In 2016, I was at the University of Manchester studying for my master’s degree in Anthropological Research, where I was continuing to pursue this interest. In this endeavor, many of my colleagues would ask me why I had left sunny Spain for gloomy Northern England. In one of these exchanges, a British friend of mine said the following in passing: “why study old age in rainy England when so many of our elderly are in Spain?”. The idea that the British were exporting the ageing to Spain was widespread. It was something that came up recurrently when speaking about old age in England, with even my master’s supervisor suggesting I explore this path of research after my master’s was completed.

The phenomena of British retirees in Spain posed many questions that had long captivated me regarding how old age was experienced and ageing identities were constructed, while also adding new layers of complexity. For instance, it allowed an entry point into the power relations between the United Kingdom (from now on UK) and Spain, as well as questioning global migration hierarchies that inform migration policies and shared social imaginaries at large. Additionally, investigating the British in Spain presented a unique opportunity for me to employ both my North American and Spanish background in a field of research that benefitted from my bilingual upbringing. Furthermore, the case study allows for old age and migration to be studied in relation to privilege, when normally these are solely associated with precarity. Ultimately, this pivoted my focus from general old age to how it intersects with migration and identity; composing the pillars that now hold this thesis together.

This doctoral research adopts a critical anthropological and intersectional approach at empirical and conceptual debates about identity, ageing, and migration. The thesis purposely explores how the two latter intersect in identity (re)construction processes that generate and perpetuate situations of privilege and inequality. By speaking of ‘identity (re)construction’, the continuous and constant way identities are both constructed and reconstructed on an individual and collective level is emphasized. These (re)constructions are explored through the prism of British expatriate retiree communities on the coasts of Spain, specifically Costa del Sol, Andalucía, and Costa Brava,
In the quotidian lives of British expatriate retirees, the intersections of migration and ageing in the discursive and the practical can be pinpointed. This not only gives an understanding as to how identities are (re)constructed in later life abroad, but also leads towards discussions regarding identity-linked incongruity, changing privileged migration categories, and what being old really means in Western societies.

Through this investigation, the thesis dialogues with various anthropological debates regarding its' three pillars: identity, ageing, and migration. These three concepts are very wide and have mutated through time, something which this thesis recognizes by developing the anthropological perception of said terms through an understanding of the debates these are involved in. The following section will introduce the three pillars and the debates they interpellate, providing an overview of its theoretical framework. Following sections introduce the case study of British expatriates purposely retiring to Spanish coasts, reviewing the British retiree's presence in Spain and its connection to anthropological studies. This is followed by an examination of the thesis objectives, which review how the polysemic concepts of identity, ageing, and migration are approached intersectionally in this thesis by questioning identity-linked practices such as labelling and belonging in a grounded manner. Finally, the introduction concludes with a brief presentation of the thesis' structure.

1.2. Presenting the field of research

Identity is a contentious topic in anthropological studies, as it has a lynchpin positioning between the self and society that has garnered much debate, which will be later explored in detail in Chapter 2 (Lawler, 2014; Jubany, 2020a). In this research, identities are understood as sites where intersections of difference are materialized between a constant dialogue of the self and society. This liminal positioning of identity is what makes identity such a captivating research topic. Especially in the current state of globalization, uncertainty, and risk, particularly found in the Global North, where multiple and conflicting identities thrive (Bauman, 2004). Considering the latter, this thesis enters debates regarding identity construction, exploring how identities must be constantly assembled, broken down, and assembled again to navigate said conditions. As Terradas states, "identities change as much as life does" (2004:67). This continuous (re)construction occurs in the space between the self and society, dependent on a myriad of factors including categories of difference like gender, age, and race, personal life histories, shared social imaginaries, sociocultural discourses, practices, and sociohistorical matrices of meaning (Brah, 1996). These give context and ground identities in a particular time and space, highlighting the multiplicity and malleability of identities that change from context to context. Hence, this thesis explores the interplay between the self and society when constructing identities.

To enter these debates, ageing and migration act as ideal entry points that epitomize the growing multiplicity and flexibility of current Western identities. Both

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¹ Maps of the coast's locations within Spain can be found in Appendix 1.
topics are explored in terms of their effects on identity construction, particularly linked to how belonging is constructed and how labels interact with lived realities; all of which are recorded through ethnographic methods.

Ageing is approached in this thesis as a stage of the life course that is largely forgotten in academic work as well as socially misconstrued in Western social imaginaries (Hockey & James, 1993; 2003; Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Calasanti & Giles, 2018). As such, it is a life stage in which identities must deal with conflicting discourses and practices that either vilify old age or problematically uplift it (Lamb, 2014). Both approaches are rooted in a capitalist neoliberal approach to life that highly values individualism and independence, meaning these discourses and practices participate in the perpetuation of various inequalities and privileges (Calasanti & King, 2017; Lamb, et al. 2017). This results in an ambiguous understanding of what old age is, leading to ageing experiences that do not meet social expectations and misplaced norms, hindering the possibility of meaningful decline in Western societies (Degnen, 2007; 2012; Lamb, 2014). By keeping the latter in mind, this thesis participates in debates regarding ageing, ageing identities, and intersectionality in a Global North context. Aiming to connect ageing experiences to wider social inequalities and reveal through the quotidian that which is invisibilized.

Retirement and later life migration and mobility practices present a unique way to explore ageing identities. As moving to a new context puts ageing discourses and practices into question, problematizing what it means to be old in different places, spaces, and lived experiences.

This leads to this thesis’ final pillar, which is migration and mobility. These have become increasingly complex concepts in the current globalized world-context where various migration trends have appeared beyond the traditional dichotomized elite global travelers and the precarious migrant other (Croucher, 2012). There is a growing heterogeneity that has yet to be properly reflected in traditional migration categories, which are mistakenly reinforced by the large amount of migration studies that focus on precarity and migration (Jubany, 2017). This participates in the reproduction of inequalities and hierarchies of difference through migration practices and its’ categorization (Kunz, 2016; 2020). The need for these migration categories to be rethought becomes evident when exploring how migrants (re)construct their identities abroad in relation to certain labels. This comes to light when discussing retirement migration, the heart of this thesis. Due to its intersection of migration and ageing, these migrants have experiences that shift between privilege, vulnerability, dependency, and precarity. In this manner illustrating the sea of greys that exist in migration and mobility practices, even those considered to be privileged. By putting precarious and privileged migration and mobility studies in dialogue, this thesis enters debates regarding traditional migration categories, dispelling associations between the label immigrant, disempowerment, and inequality (Kunz, 2016).

On their own, these three topics are controversial and everchanging, but when discussed together their nuanced intricacies are heightened to reveal discussions pertinent to each. Ageing and migration are vital parts of the life course and, thus, are
agents of change within identities (Hockey & James, 2003; Lázaro, 2014). On the other hand, since identities are composed by narratives and everyday actions, these act as the canvas upon which ageing and migration can be ethnographically explored in quotidian practices and discourses (Hall, 1996; Lawler, 2014; Jubany, 2020a). Additionally, both ageing and migration are concepts that are highly susceptible to external changes like, for instance, changes on a legislative level, concerning pension schemes and immigration laws, or personal and familial changes, like the death of a family member and loss of a job. These deeply affect life project planning, lived experiences, and, ultimately, identity construction. Hence, this thesis adopts an ethnographic and intersectional approach that appreciates nuance, context, and structural power relationships in order to properly broach all three concepts.

Intersectionality is a heuristic device that this research uses to enhance the data gathered through literature reviews and ethnographic fieldwork (Davis, 2008; MacKinnon, 2013). This approach understands that identity categories of difference interact in individual lives, social practices, and discourses, in terms of power as well as institutionalized structures (Davis, 2008). This approach is pivotal within this thesis, as it has driven the data collection process to be mindful of structures of power and inequalities that partake in the everyday (re)construction of identities and its’ intersections with ageing and migration. Through an intersectional approach, identity, migration, and ageing can be explored together in a more nuanced and contextualized manner that gives this thesis texture and historicity.

The migration flow of British retirees to Spain has been described as part of a long-standing retirement migration phenomena between the UK and Spain that is simultaneously privileged with possibilities of precarity, especially as a migration life project progress (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Hall & Hardill, 2016; Hall, 2021). As such, it concerns all three pillars of this research. Firstly, as a trend tied to lifestyle migration, it is highly reflexive and engages in active (re)constructions of life projects and identities abroad. Secondly, since its migration subjects are retirees, it concerns ageing and old age discourses and practices. And, finally, this group pushes at the boundaries of traditional migration categories and experiences. All due to its privileged categories of difference, like their whiteness and geopolitical positioning, that find themselves intersected with their ageing condition. In following pages, this case study is further explained, exploring its connections with the thesis three pillars, and the key concepts that will appear throughout the thesis.

1.2.1. Case study introduction: British expatriate retirees in Spain

When Spain joined the European Union (from now on EU) in 1986, the burgeoning tourist sector boomed, welcoming many Northern Europeans to their coasts. In the long term, this touristic contact led to residential tourism and retirement migration. The warm weather, low property values, low cost of living, and overall ‘slow-paced’ lifestyle, attracted Northern Europeans past the age of retirement to Spain as a space where a ‘better’ ageing experience was readily available (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009:4-6). Gradually,
the presence of Northern Europeans on Spanish coasts grew, with Britons taking the lead. Currently, British residents are the third largest community of migrants and the largest European migrant community in Spain (INE, 2020). In fact, Spain is the fourth country in the world where British citizens migrate to, being most popular between those over the age of 44 (United Nations, 2022). This exemplifies the magnitude of this movement, tying Spain and the UK together through tourism and retirement and later life migration and mobility.

Said British expatriate retirees in Spain are, thus, guided by the search for a ‘better’ life after retirement, to fulfill socially influenced expectations within their ‘ageing better’ life projects abroad. These expectations are subjective and comparative, explaining the use of quotations in the word ‘better’. The lifestyles these groups lead is often characterized as being on ‘a permanent holiday’ because of the touristification of Spanish coasts like the Costa del Sol and Costa Brava, where this research takes place (Torkington, David, & Sardinha, 2015). However, their ‘ageing better’ lifestyles are constructed as a period of freedom in which one can reap the rewards of hard work and gain what lacked in their previous life stage: autonomy over one’s own time. The subjects of this research resort to migration and mobility to break with one’s past in a meaningful manner, leading to the relatively privileged lifestyle phenomena of retirement and later life migration and mobility (O’Reilly, 2000; Green, 2015). As such, British expatriate retirees represent the impact of globalization and display reflexivity, product of an increasingly flexible and liquid modernity, while simultaneously highlighting the influence of geopolitical and socioeconomic privilege on migration processes (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2002; 2004). In fact, the group’s privilege is already hinted at by the category of practice ‘expatriate’ that is commonly used to define this group and appears as an emic concept in this research.

Aside from the group’s generalized and perceived privilege, this trend finds itself at the heart of welfare debates due to the connection it has with increasing longevity, most notably across Europe, North America, and Japan. Old age and widespread longevity have commonly been referred to as a “mixed blessing” because of its indication of a rise in quality of life and its’ creation of new pressures onto existing welfare systems, due to the biological repercussions of ageing (Phillipson, 2013). Retirement migration exemplifies the issues of such “mixed blessing” on a larger scale, involving countries that send retirement migrants and those who receive them. These flows tend to be from North to South, representing global inequalities (Hayes, 2018). Geopolitical relationships and its’ impacts on migration flows, make retirement migration increasingly complex, becoming a space where the materialities of old age intersect with fluctuating globalized power relationships that, in turn, directly impact the identities and lived experiences of retirement migrants. To the latter socioeconomically privileged backgrounds must also be added, including whiteness and nationality, which greatly impact policy, border control, and subsequent migration experiences (Bauman, 2000; van Houtum, 2010). Therefore, retirement migration represents a unique intersection between privilege, vulnerability, migration, and mobility, due to retiree migrants’ ageing condition.
Another critical aspect to explore in relation to how retiree migrants experience ageing abroad, is the successful ageing paradigm that so greatly shapes the Global North’s old age perceptions (Rowe & Khan, 2015; Lamb, 2017). This paradigm calls for individuals to increase their social, mental, and physical activity in old age to counteract ageing’s negative effects such as ill health, dependence, and isolation (Lamb, 2014; 2019). This discourse is promoting the postponement of old age and characterizing dependency and vulnerability as socially unacceptable (Hazan & Raz, 1997; Lamb, 2014). Said paradigm creates a sense of agency between the able-bodied socioeconomic elite who can afford to postpone old age’s associated characteristics. This is attempted through a range of practices like migration and mobility or anti-ageing science, medicine, and cosmetics (Vincent, 2007). Meanwhile, those with lower incomes are left feeling increasingly powerless and responsible for their old age-related demise (Lamb, 2019).

The influence of this paradigm on retirement migrant’s life project planning is such that it can lead to instances where privilege, vulnerability, and even precarity come to a head in unexpected ways. This is especially true for those migrant retirees with less socioeconomic resources, attempting to pursue a ‘better’ ageing lifestyle abroad. They may encounter difficulties when creating and maintaining social support networks abroad, accessing housing, experiencing age-related health issues, accessing medical services, death of a partner and more. Those with more resources are also faced with these issues abroad, but their impact on lived experience differs from their less privileged counterparts. Retirement migrants represent a privileged form of migration that is relatively affluent. However, as any other categorization of migrant, this too is much more heterogeneous than what has been implied in past research and in shared social imaginaries, especially when it comes to British expatriate retirees in Spain (O’Reilly & Benson, 2009).

Retirement migration within the EU is accessible to its’ citizens due to the Free Movement of Person’s Act. This Act, which was originally created to support the circulation of workers throughout the EU, allows EU retirement migrants with sufficient economic funds to cross borders and pursue a ‘better’ ageing experience in countries like Spain. The ease with which Northern European retirement migrants’ cross borders is a demonstration of how whiteness and national origin contribute to an invisibility and homogenization that is generalized and privileged (Pease, 2010).

Geopolitical, and socio-sanitary shifts, like Brexit and the spread of COVID-19, have placed unexpected pressures on retirement migration’s steady flows; particularly re-shaping how British expatriate retirees experience these migration processes and thus identity formation in later life. These contextual changes put into question long awaited retirement-life plans and how these used to be valued in terms of personal freedom, independence, and later life purpose, sharpening pre-existing experiences of vulnerability and even precarity.

Therefore, the phenomena of British expatriate retirees in Spain gives an entry point into the intersectional discussion of ageing and migration within identity construction. Intersectionality acts as a key heuristic device within this research, making visible the connections between structures of power, categories of difference, and
different lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). These intersections help understand how identity is constructed in the space between the self and society, emphasizing the situatedness of identity construction as well as its complexity (Lawler, 2014).

1.2.2. Objectives

To question anthropological debates around ageing, migration, and identity as well as capture the complexity of British expatriate retiree ageing experiences in Spain, this thesis follows a set of leading objectives:

1. Analyze the (re)construction identity processes that occur in retirement migration from the UK to Spain.
2. Examine the concept of old age and ageing in relation to socio-historical constructions of gender, socioeconomic class, and nationality/origin; unpacking how ageing experiences are recognized and organized within migrant retiree communities.
3. Explore identity development while ageing abroad through labeling processes and the creation of feelings of belonging.
4. Study the role of privilege and vulnerability within migration experiences in later life abroad, considering changing geopolitical and socio-sanitary circumstances that condition lived experience.
5. Investigate the impact of geopolitical and legislative shifts on life project planning and identity (re)construction.
6. Explore the intersections between old age, privileged migration, and mobility practices, especially related to the initial stages of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic.

These objectives are related to one or more of the three pillars that sustain this thesis: identity, ageing, and migration. These reflects the intersectional approach this research undertakes, leading towards a grounded discussion of the British expatriate retiree in Spain phenomena.

The objectives that refer to the COVID-19 pandemic were added after the onset of the socio-sanitary crisis in 2020 (objective 4 and 6). These objectives were revised to expose the effect this event was having on ageing populations. As the ‘at risk’ groups to contract the then novel virus were those over the age of 60, which was the mean age of most research participants. These objectives also encouraged a critical look at how privileged migration and mobility practices were affected by the pandemic, giving the opportunity to question traditional migration hierarchies and power relations that were subverted during that time.

These objectives have changed overtime but their roots in the theoretical pillars of this research remained throughout. Thus, these objectives represent a road map this thesis has followed. Said objectives posed questions that have informed the way in which
the theoretical and methodological framework were crafted and guided me throughout the process of data processing and analysis. Furthermore, these objectives push towards questioning realities collected, leading towards topical debates regarding old age and ageing in the Global North, as well as migration categories and hierarchies, drafting connections between both.

1.3. Thesis structure

This thesis starts with two theoretical chapters that explore the pillars of this research, showcasing the foundation upon which data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 2 introduces key concepts regarding two of this thesis pillars: identity and ageing. The chapter starts by depicting the current state of uncertainty and risk in a globalized setting that has broken with traditional identity categories linked to place of birth, economic status, or gender (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004). Taking this backdrop into consideration, the thesis introduces belonging and labelling as triggers of identity (re)construction. Meaning they are concepts linked to continuous actions and discourses that push individuals and communities towards constructing their identities repeatedly in the quotidian. These concepts are key within this research and appear throughout. Highlighting the importance of grounded-ness in terms of social, political, and historical matrices of meaning that saturate the actions and discourses in the field (Goffman, 1956; Gardner, 1994; Brah, 1996). Through the latter, intersectionality is introduced as another recurrent concept that drives this thesis, as it encourages said holistic grounded view.

This chapter also delves into old age and ageing within Western societies, exposing how ageing is often overlooked as a category of difference within identity construction. It presents the two most popular discourses that exist around old age in the Global North, observing how these unravel within ageing ethnographies, illuminating incongruences between discourse and experience (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Degnen, 2007; Phillipson, 2013; Calasanti & Giles, 2018; Lamb, 2019). The ethnographies explored all benefit from using an intersectional approach, adequately capturing this gap between old age discourses and ageing experiences, and how that affects identity formation.

Following this review of identity (re)construction and old age and ageing in Western societies, Chapter 3 discusses the third and final pillar: migration. As briefly mentioned, migration is a process that changes those who undergo it in various ways (Lázaro, 2014). It is pivotal to the life course, life projects, and identity (re)construction. However, migration studies are constantly explored through a lens of precarity, as exemplified by the othering linked to the label ‘immigrant’. Thus, Chapter 3 questions traditional migration categories by exploring other, more privileged, migration practices and its associated categories like that of the expatriate; a term that is omnipresent throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, the chapter explores the intricacies of retirement and later life migration and mobility trends. These flows, which are generally from the Global North to
Global South, represent an increasing complexity of global mobility and commodification of lifestyles. However, they also represent the rising uncertainty and risk that drive individuals towards a search for a maximization of their privileges elsewhere (Kunz, 2016; Hayes, 2018). These practices comment on growing global inequalities and highlight the counter-intuitive ties between personal lifestyle aspirations and retirement migration with neoliberal consumerism (Giddens, 1991; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Croucher, 2012). Thus, retirement migration isn’t only possible due to discourses and individuals who interact with them. This migration and mobility trend is possible thanks to infrastructures, legal parameters, and economic interests that facilitate it and find themselves supported and connected to larger discourses and sociocultural imaginaries (Mancinelli, 2021). Accordingly, the chapter details these structures, parameters, and interests in a European context that aid the maintenance of retirement migration trends from Northern Europe to Southern Europe.

After detailing the theoretical framework that constructs this thesis, Chapter 4 presents the methodological framework employed, delves into the case study at hand, and introduces the ethnographic spaces frequented through the data collection process. The chapter explains how ethnographic methods can be used to capture tensions in the field and question them; especially through data triangulation using participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Through these methods a comprehensive understanding of the retirement migration trend in Spain and its connections to wider Anthropological debates is developed.

These ethnographic methods were utilized in two communities of British expatriate retirees on two coasts of Spain: Costa del Sol, Andalucía, and Costa Brava, Catalonia. Costa del Sol is the most well-known and studied coast, while Costa Brava is lesser known, especially in terms of retirement migration. However, both coasts are notable beach touristic destinations, found on opposing ends of the Spanish peninsula. These coasts were chosen to give a wider overview of the retirement migration phenomena in Spain. Within each coast a myriad of sites were visited, with some becoming key factors in contacting informants, like the Costa del Sol Club or the Costa Brava Organization. These entities were spaces that offered opportunities to employ participant observation while also meeting community members, who would later participate in interviews or focus groups. The confluence of the methods employed, and the spaces chosen, resulted in an ethnography that illustrates the heterogenous reality of British expatriate retirees in Spain, nuancing what it means to age abroad in a country that isn’t your own.

Moving from the theoretical, to the methodological and into the empirical, Chapter 5 constructs a bridge towards the ethnographic portion of the thesis. It sets the geopolitical and historical backdrop against which the following chapters unfold. Chapter 5 investigates the unequal relationship between the UK and Spain, exploring how tourism ties both countries together. Accordingly, this relationship informs a construction of Spain as a holiday and retirement destination, where feelings of entitlement might appear (O’Reilly 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This affects the life project plans of British expatriate retirees, whose judgement is clouded by this relationship, driving them
towards certain destinations and practices when crafting their retirement migration lifestyles in Spain. By grounding this research within a particular geopolitical and historical context, the connections between said backdrop and the actions of its’ actors comes to light. Setting the scene for the intersecting peculiarities of identity, ageing, and migration found in this case study.

Chapters 6 through 8 are the ethnographic heart of this thesis. Within these, connections between the theoretical framework and fieldwork data are made. This way exposing several debates regarding the thesis three pillars.

Chapter 6 is the first fully ethnographic, empirical chapter of this thesis, exploring how old age and ageing are perceived and experienced in British expatriate retiree communities. First, it illustrates how old age discourses interact with ageing experiences, leading to practices that control how old age is perceived in oneself and others (Degnen, 2012). These mutually construct a shared sense of what it is to be old within British expatriate retiree communities in Spain. Despite these mutual and communal constructions of old age, a significant factor within ageing experiences is found in the particular personal experiences’ informants had with work and retirement. Accordingly, the chapter explores different life histories ranging from women who were stay-at-home mothers, to men and women who still held paid jobs well into retirement. Most women who worked in retirement did so out of economic necessity in informal jobs that weren’t socially well regarded. Additionally, most of these women had migrated on their own. This illustrates how the structural gender inequality women face throughout their lives travels into retirement, and becomes more pronounced as old age sets in. In the exploration of these life stories, a recurrent theme within the ethnography appears: the thin line between privilege, vulnerability, and precarity when old age and migration intersect. It is here where experiences related to COVID-19 are articulated, further demonstrating the paradoxical proximity to precarity British expatriate retirees experience despite their privileged migration and identity categories.

After Chapter 6 sets the foundations for how old age discourses and ageing experiences pierce British expatriate retiree identities, Chapter 7 examines the group’s relationship with paperwork and bureaucracy. Due to Brexit and COVID-19, there have been many changes in bureaucratic processes British expatriate retirees must undergo. Meaning, these geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts mark a before and after in British expatriate retiree lives. These events have revealed the taken for grantedess with which many informants engaged in these processes. Thus, the chapter further illustrates the heterogenous experiences informants have with privilege and precarity, using informants’ relationships with paperwork and bureaucracy to pinpoint where feelings of risk and uncertainty appear versus expressions of entitlement. This emphasizes differences in categories of difference such as socioeconomic class and gender. Through this analysis, the chapter criticizes traditional migration hierarchies and categories, examining how migration and ageing intersect to generate experiences of privilege and near-precarity in Spanish coasts.

Chapter 8 is the last ethnographic chapter. It uses emic concepts that appeared throughout previous chapters to explore how British expatriate retirees (re)construct
their identities and belonging in relation to the labels ‘tourist’, ‘expatriate’, and ‘cosmopolitan’. These labels, and their adjacent shared social imaginaries, are intricately tied to the groups’ privilege and the UK’s sociopolitical scene, which the chapter investigates. Said exploration of how labels are used on the ground reveals British expatriate retirees’ privileged capability of choosing between migration categories. However, it also illustrates how they must simultaneously deal with stereotypes and prejudices surrounding British behavior abroad. Informants used the notion of “integration” to navigate this privilege of choice and the stigma of labels and stereotypes. Emically “integration” was understood and measured by one’s willingness and capability to bond with locals, learn Spanish history, and/or eat Spanish food as an indicator of belonging to the wider British expatriate retiree community and Spain as a retirement destination. Through this measuring of each other’s “integration”, informants ascribed socioeconomic class and constructed their versions of ‘ageing better’. In turn, this fostered feelings of belonging and triggered identity (re)construction. Thus, exemplifying the complexity of identity (re)construction in later life, joining notions of labelling with discourses and practices of ageing abroad explored in previous chapters.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis with a review of the results presented throughout. This offers a brief overview of the utility of this research and its relevance when discussing anthropological debates regarding identity, ageing, and migration. It presents a space for final remarks as well as an opportunity to revisit ethnographic sites and its’ informants, illustrating the changes that have transpired since this research started until its’ end.
2.1. Exploring the space between the self and society

Ageing and migration are life course altering processes that push and pull at people's identities. They trigger identification in the face of others, starting a conversation between the self and society (Degnen, 2012; Lázaro, 2014). This thesis explores identities, and their (re)construction, through ageing and migration experiences. These avenues of research highlight the complex, multiple, and malleable nature of identity (re)construction in Western societies, where risk and uncertainty prevail due to increasing individualistic tendencies tied to neoliberalist and capitalist agendas (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2004). Ultimately, this approach not only illustrates how identities are (re)constructed, but also generates a broader commentary on Western societies and their relationships with ageing and migration. In this chapter, identity and old age are explored, illustrating how identities are constructed intersectionally and how ageing experiences are useful openings to explore identity (re)construction through.

As institutions aim to maintain certain hegemonic standards, and a progressively uncertain globalized world-context prevails, identities are becoming increasingly complex, multiple, and malleable (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2004). Currently, identities are fragile and must be acted upon continuously. The use of the parenthesis “re” when speaking of identity (re)construction highlights this fragility. Thus, identities are conceived in this research as the site where intersections of difference are embodied and acted upon regularly in a dialogue between the self and society. Bringing the social, the cultural, the structural, the institutional, the collective, and the individual together (Jubany, 2020a). This understanding of identity allows for an ethnographic approach that opens spaces in which the hegemonic can be questioned and relationships of power are revealed; all done through the observation of actions and discourses that participate in identity (re)construction processes in the quotidian. Thus, special attention must be paid to how feelings of belonging are constructed and to how labelling processes take place. Belonging and labelling are processes that trigger identity (re)construction, highlighting its malleability and context, and illustrating how identities are constructed in the space between the self and society.

Old age and ageing experiences present a unique way of exploring identity (re)construction processes, exposing their fragility and malleability. Ageing experiences are extremely relative and context dependent. Ageing is experienced differently depending on how it intersects with categories of difference and how these are interpreted by a wider society, as well as the contexts’ sociocultural discourses, values, and morals around what it means to be old. In Western societies, old age discourses are either positive or negative, leaving little space for nuance (Hockey & James, 1993; Degnen, 2007). This generates a gap between old age as discourse and ageing as experience, leading to multifaceted identity (re)construction processes that must navigate this gap. Not only does this gap affect individual ageing experiences, but they
also affect how they are experienced collectively, leading to a puzzling interplay between the self and society. By researching ageing subjects and the ways in which they rearticulate their identities in later life, both the ageing experience and the ways in which identities are crafted in Western societies is simultaneously investigated.

Through an ethnographic approach to British expatriate retirees in Spain, this thesis understands identity as multiple, ever-changing, and processual. Thus, identities must be acted upon continuously, both individually and collectively, operating as the connector between the self and society. As such, identities are the sites where intersections of difference, oppression, and privilege are embodied, mapping out power relations within them. Moreover, tensions and dissonance within identities and between the self and society are constant and accepted, triggering identity (re)construction through them. This approach to identity re-situates the individual and the subjective dimension within a composite of forces regarding society and its institutions, structures, historical memories, sociocultural customs, general discourses, and matrices of meaning (Brah, 1996). It highlights the complex and fluid dialogue between the self and society and brings to the forefront the power plays those individualistic discourses hide in Western societies.

It must be noted that the ageing subjects this thesis investigates - Northern European retiree migrants and more specifically, British expatriate retirees - are normative and relatively privileged within a Western context, due to their whiteness, socioeconomic resources, and nationality. This must be kept in mind while reading this chapter, as it pays specific attention to how normative identities and identity categories are constructed. Attention is also paid to how said normativity is countered by ‘otherness’, especially how it is categorized into a hierarchy that values some identity traits over others. This is important as the subjects of this thesis experience both privilege and vulnerability in their ageing experiences abroad. Therefore, this chapter presents how both privileged normativity and ‘othering’ vulnerability are constructed into identities within Western contexts. Through this, it sets the scene for the ethnographic chapters that explore the intersection between privilege and vulnerability in more detail.

The following sections briefly trace the development of identity formation through Social Sciences. Then, different forms of identity (re)construction found in everyday life experiences are broached. Leading into how belonging and labelling reflect the feedback between self and society when it comes to identity formation and the construction of intersubjective realities. Ultimately, intersectionality and its’ utility when investigating identity (re)construction processes is explained, highlighting its’ importance when understanding relations and structures of power in action. This review presents the lens through which this thesis understands identity formation and its’ mutually constructive relationship with society, illustrating the tools with which identity (re)construction of retiree migrants is analyzed coming chapters.

2 The case study this thesis features is discussed in Chapter 4.
2.1.1. A review of identity: from stability to uncertainty

In Western societies' studies prior to the twentieth century, identity was spoken of in terms of human 'essence'. Pursuing the 'nature of being' and generating an essentialist, biologized and determinist hegemonic view of what constituted identity (Jubany, 2020a). Later, studies explored how normative identities were created through notions of deviance, prejudice, stereotypes, and labels, also exploring what roles institutions played within these processes that ultimately perpetuated structures of power and oppression (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Goffman, 1967; Becker 1973). Identity's position between individual and society has historically been placed at the epicenter of debates in the realm of politics, kinship relations, migration, gender, sexuality, and more; as what is an identity, how it is crafted and by who, is an elusive topic that defies definition (Brah, 1996; Lawler, 2014). This lynchpin positioning represents a unique connection between the macro sociocultural structures and institutions and the micro of personal experiences, marking identity as a fundamental methodological and theoretical tool when exploring social relations and structures (Jubany, 2020a).

From the twentieth century onwards, identities have undergone a deep paradigm shift regarding how these were individually constructed and socioculturally conceived. First, identities were thought to be bound by factors like place of birth, socioeconomic class, or gender, which were constructed as permanent at the time (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004). These approaches were grounded on the concept of a clear-cut coherent single identity, in and within itself, presenting an almost seamless dialogue between the self and the society one belonged to (Van Meijl, 2008). In the mid-late twentieth century, identity was widely considered to be a stable entity tied to belonging in a particular delimited space and a community rooted in shared history and culture (Erikson, 1959; Tajfel, 1982). The nation-state had a strong role in maintaining this illusion of stability, as it naturalized feelings of belonging tied to the birthplace, socioeconomic class, and gender through things like nationalism and class consciousness (Skeggs, 1997; Bauman, 2004; Valluvan, 2019). In turn, the involvement of the nation-state legitimized some identities over others, particularly signaling 'men' (white, heteronormative, catholic, middle class, able-bodied etc.) as the way of ‘being’ and identifying in society, while other identities were marginalized and 'othered' (Jubany, 2020a). Within this context of a play between power and exclusion, a sense of unity and belonging was created, reproducing relations of power through identification processes, and naturalizing the presumed 'normative' identities through institutionalization (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Hall, 1996).

Stable identities experimented a grave shift when risk and uncertainty became the norm due to technological advances, globalization, and the current neoliberal capitalist socioeconomic context, especially pronounced in the Global North (Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1998). The ever-increasing flexible demands of a risk society made the existence of stable linear work careers, traditional family trajectories, and same place bound 'cradle to grave' life histories almost incognizable (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1998). This was further exacerbated by extending lifespans, changing traditional experiences of age-related milestones, like becoming a parent or grandparent, generating more difference
between lived experiences (Hockey & James, 1993). The ‘naturalness’ with which certain identities occurred dissipated (Bauman, 2004). This especially affected identities associated to family and life stages, like parenthood or retirement. Even though the boundaries between one life stage and another have become blurrier, many chronological expectations remain, challenging identities constantly (Hockey & James, 2003). Other naturalized identities, like those attached to birthplaces and the nation-state, were also severely affected as people moved more and their attachments to place changed, resulting in the destabilization of before-assured sources of community (Brah, 1996).

The stability and coherence of identities was put in question, illustrating how identities aren’t a single unified closed-off entity (Gergen, 1991; Bauman, 2007). From that change of paradigm, identities began to be perceived as a project not as an end (Bauman, 2004). Thus, identities are currently perceived as a continuous project of the self: vulnerable to change, prone to dissonance, forcing individuals to continuously craft and manage them, keeping them open-ended, plural, and maintaining a flexibility that allows space for change (Bauman, 2004; Van Meijl, 2008; Lawler, 2014).

The continuous work that modern identities require is exacerbated by the increasing individualization that affects neoliberal and capitalist societies, leading to uniquely self-aware and self-reflexive experiences of identity (re)construction (Giddens, 1991; Sweetman, 2003; Lawler, 2014). Within these, the importance of personal choices throughout the life course is heightened, choices which are meant to promote the types of identities people aspire to (Giddens, 1991; Hockey & James, 2003). Thus, lifestyle choices become a landscape of identity (re)construction, fulfilling utilitarian needs, and giving material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (Giddens, 1991:81).

Within the frame of consumer capitalism, this focus on individual lifestyles has resulted in a commodification of lifestyles choices. Meaning that some aspects of an individual's crafted self-narrative and identities are part of a process of personal appropriation of standardized consumption (Giddens, 1991). This illustrates how individuals must construct their identities within the society they are in, managing and navigating societal perceptions that affect identity construction (Goffman, 1956). Individuals, and their identities, are embedded within society, constructed in a context-specific manner dependent on discourses, matrices of meaning, and historical memories (Brah, 1996; Sweetman, 2003). Consequently, identities change from one circumstance to another, with individuals putting forth different parts of them in different instances, flexibly (re)constructing them through everyday interactions (Lázaro, 2014:29). This may lead to potential dissonance between personally desired identities and those ascribed and adjudicated by society, something which individuals must learn how to live with (Van Meijl, 2008). Despite individualism and the power of reflexive lifestyle choices, identities are made between the self and society. Illustrating the delicate balance that exists between identities as choice and identities as socially and structurally determined (Sweetman, 2003). There is a dialogical, mutual, and interdependent relationship between the self and society with identity as the lynchpin that holds both together.

Moreover, identity's essential positioning sutures subjectivity and discourse together, hailing people into place as social subjects’ part of general discourses and
shared realities (Hall, 1996). This suture implies a stratification of identities within general discourse, where some identities are preferred over others due to their recognition within that context (Bauman, 2004). Those with recognized identities have the privilege and power to choose from a universal pool of identities available to them, while those who do not are given and assigned identities, with not much power to repel them. Most people lie somewhere between those two poles, leading to what Bauman calls “wars of recognition” to become the preferred identities (Bauman, 2004: 38). These wars take place in the constraints of power between those who are denied identity as a choice and those who do have that privilege (Bauman, 2004; Wacquant, 2009).

Bauman’s “wars of recognition” illustrate the power imbalance that lies within individualist discourses that prioritize individual agency and freedom as a way of shaping identity in the face of uncertainty (Bauman, 2004; Korpela, 2014). These discourses minimize the role society, its’ structures, institutions, and sociocultural norms play within identity processes. Simultaneously, it doesn’t account for the power and privilege needed to choose an identity through lifestyle choices (Bauman, 2004; Korpela, 2014; Lázaro, 2014).

Such focus on personal lifestyle choices and individualist discourses, especially those tied to consumer attitudes, are extremely prevalent in the context of the Global North. An example of its prevalence is found within lifestyle migration and mobility practices, like retirement migration. This lifestyle phenomenon is built upon individual lifestyle choices strategically made to maximize and express their self-identities in the face of uncertainty and risk (Mancinelli, 2021). These subjects tend to be extremely reflexive and self-aware of how they are perceived (Giddens, 1991). This is partly because of their middle to upper class backgrounds that allow them to partake in certain consumer habits. Giving way to reflexivity as a response to a particular sociocultural and historical instance in which career flexibility is highly valued, and consumerism abounds; meaning reflexivity can be a sign of power and socioeconomic class (Sweetman, 2003). Reflexivity highlights some aspects of the dialogical relationship between the self and society, as it makes individuals aware of how their actions and habits are perceived by others. But, due to its ties to individualism, reflexivity obscures the importance of social and structural factors that influence identity (re)construction (Sweetman, 2003). Consequently, both individualism and reflexivity complicate the relationship between the self, society, and its’ resulting identity (re)construction processes.

Stemming from this reflection, this thesis explores identity through the lens of retirement migration from the UK to Spain. This phenomenon captures how identities are crafted in a context of risk and uncertainty, underpinned by individualist discourses and consumerist habits that engender reflexivity. For these individuals, their experience of uncertainty and risk is tied to a variety of factors which include their ageing and migrant condition, geopolitical instability caused by Brexit, and the COVID pandemic. Meanwhile, their relatively privileged positioning due to their whiteness and nationality, illuminates the ways in which identification processes play with power and stratified identities; especially when considering the heterogenous socioeconomic backgrounds of the trend. From this unique positioning these groups construct an intersubjective reality and
(re)construct their own identities, dialoguing between themselves and society, using their lifestyles and life projects as their most valued tools. Therefore, retiree migrants highlight how identities in Western societies are now a performative task that everyone must carry out daily through their choices: “there is no choice but to choose” (Giddens, 1991:81; Mancinelli, 2021). While also highlighting how these choices are embedded within a greater society, where identities are remade in a context-specific manner, reproducing notions of power in the process (Brah, 1996; Sweetman, 2003).

2.1.2. Identity (re)construction and its’ triggers

Throughout the study of identity, a long-standing question has been what shape identity (re)construction takes in everyday life. Identities are acted into being by actions, practices, discourses, and ambiguous identity categories, used by individuals and groups alike. These are context-specific, setting the scene in which individuals understand themselves and (re)construct their identities daily (Butler, 1990; 1993; Gergen, 1991; Brah, 1996). It is through this action and discourse that identity is remade in the quotidian, while also participating in a shared intersubjective creation of realities. Exemplifying the push and pull between the self and society that identification needs.

Several academics have explored how repeated actions and practices inform and (re)construct identity (Goffman, 1956; Bourdieu, 1989; Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996). Goffman spoke about “performances”, using the metaphor of a theatre, and its’ stage, to illustrate how actions create expectations and construct identities in the societal eye and on an individual level (1956). Meanwhile, Butler spoke of a “stylized repetition of acts” that might seem mundane but, slowly, configure the identity of an individual in society's eye through everyday practice and action; to the point of naturalizing it (1993; Hall, 1996). Alternatively, Bourdieu addressed identities in terms of being negotiated, created, and recreated through social relationships (1989). This paired with Bourdieu’s star concept of habitus, a set of ingrained habits and dispositions product of contact with social structures and its generative powers, underlines the importance of practice within identity formation through daily actions (Sweetman, 2003; Bourdieu, 2007). These authors point at how these actions or relationships do not only concern the individual, but they also concern an ‘audience’, a social structure, or overall society (Goffman, 1956; Bourdieu, 1989; 2007; Butler, 1990). Being observed is part of the action that is repeated, triggering identity (re)constructions and reaffirmation through how said actions are received (Goffman, 1956; Bourdieu, 1989; Butler, 1990). It is through this repetition of embodied acts over time that cement certain behaviors as intersubjectively constructed ‘truths’ like, for example, what in Western societies is understood as ‘femininity’, ‘masculinity’, or ‘old age’ (Butler, 1990; Freeman, 2010). Daily repeated actions stitch the subjective and the discursive, the material and the narrative, together resulting in identities being constructed and remade (Hall, 1996). Utilizing an ethnographic approach to explore identity is fundamental when understanding how repeated actions are linked to identity (re)construction and its connection with wider social meanings, structures, and institutions (Wacquant, 2009; Jubany, 2020a).
On the other hand, identity is also (re)constructed through narrative and general discourse. When individuals speak of themselves, they are narratively exploring their identities, actively making sense of them (Ybema et al., 2009; Lawler, 2014). In these discursive practices of identity, ‘sameness’ and ‘uniqueness’ are simultaneously expressed, creating a sense of what is ‘other’ through them (Van Meijl, 2008). The power of difference is key within these identity discourses. It marks the limits of an identity, establishing what an identity is not (Hall, 1996). These identity discourses take place within other discourses, not outside of them, reproducing specific modalities of power that mark difference and exclusion against a general stratified social norm (Hall, 1996). Therefore, the latter are instrumental in both the reproduction, legitimation, and challenging of hierarchies of power (Ybema et al., 2009: 307).

Identity discourses and narratives tend to be rather essentialist and deterministic, reducing identity to a simple group of traits that are presented as immutable (Bauman, 2004). When explored in practice, the stability and unity identity discourses and narratives project is revealed to be an illusion (Beck, 1994; Hall, 1996; Ybema et al., 2009). This is necessary when reproducing hierarchies of power, especially those that want to appeal to longstanding histories and sociocultural roots that give legitimacy and power to the identities they construct. That is why ethnography is such a useful tool to study identity, as it dismantles from the ground up how identities establish themselves within a particular context, revealing power relations that function below it.

To understand how identity (re)construction occurs in day-to-day life, through practice and discourse, the concepts of belonging and labelling must be explored in detail. Experiencing feelings of belonging, ascribing a label to others or yourself, or acting upon prejudiced beliefs, are all triggers to identity (re)construction found in the quotidian. These concepts explicitly illustrate how identity functions between the collective and individual, highlighting “wars of recognition” that lead to a shared stratification of differences, dependent on contextual hierarchies of power (Bauman, 2004). In this thesis, belonging and labelling practices are key because of the role they play in the creation and configuration of migrant communities and identities. This is particularly true for ageing and/or privileged identities as exemplified in studies by O’Reilly, who explores how belonging is fostered within British communities in Costa del Sol, Spain, or Monnet, who studies how labels and prejudices are assigned and experienced between tourists and locals in Barcelona, Spain (2000; 2001).

The act of establishing feelings of belonging, or not, is inherently an act that triggers identification, designating who is ‘us’ and who is ‘other’, and why (Gardner, 1994; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). For example, asserting one’s birthplace as a significant part of one’s identity is a way of establishing belonging and affirming similarity and shared life experiences within a group that shares that trait (Bauman, 2004; Degnen, 2012). This is manifested through self and collective histories tied to place and community that construct identity, as well as similar behaviors that characterize a group; behaviors which are reproduced through social relations that construct a sense of belonging and, thus, a sense of identity (Mead, 1934; Bourdieu, 1989; Degnen, 2012). The most pronounced example of this type of belonging, and hence identity construction, is nationalism, a
traditional way of constructing belonging along the political spectrum (Valluvan, 2019). Nationalism has been a great identity tool in modern times, organizing, reproducing, and legitimizing power relations through it. It must be noted that nationalism is currently resurfacing in association with conservatism, as evidenced by a myriad of political changes like Brexit in the UK (Valluvan, 2019). It’s conservative resurfacing is tied to nostalgia and particular historical retellings that present the opportunity for stable and familiar identities in a context of change and uncertainty.3

The traits that trigger feelings of belonging are extremely varied, encompassing great groups of people, like in the previous example of nationalism and nations, to smaller more niche ones, like fandoms of tv shows, music groups, books and more (Yodovich, 2020). Therefore, belonging is no longer solely bound within a physical group or place, it can be found within an ‘imagined’ community through shared social imaginaries4 (Brah, 1996). This is rather common in transnational migrant communities, who construct an idea of community that transcends a particular place or group of people, establishing an ‘imagined’ community between their country of destination and country of origin (Brah, 1996).

Belonging can also be established by rejecting certain traits conceived to be outside of one’s self-prescribed group. Constructing ‘otherness’, while simultaneously constructing ‘sameness’ in one same instance (Hall, 1996). This is also called dis-identification, illuminating the relational nature of identity (re)construction (Lawler, 2014). Consequently, there is a mutual reading of traits, or identity categories, that marks whether an individual does or does not belong to a greater group, categorizing their culturally and socially constructed ‘sameness’ within a hierarchy of differences and its’ associated social meanings (Douglas, 2008). These identity categories include a variety of things as broad and impactful like skin tone, age, gender to seemingly less important traits like taste in clothes, forms of speech, and what one does during their leisure time. Identity categories are used to establish a person’s belonging within existent power structures that organize a society; backed by institutions that legitimize certain traits over others (Lázaro, 2014:62). The ways these identity categories are interpreted when ascertaining categorical belonging is contextual and relative; meaning they can be read in different ways depending on the context and its’ actors. This is because identity categories are ambiguous with blurry edges that, when put into practice, act contextual power relations into being (Saldanha, 2007). Thus, categorizing ‘otherness’ or ‘sameness’ is never static or fixed, but fluid and changing (Monnet, 2001).

The afore-described process of reading these ambiguous identity categories are the first steps towards labelling practices. Labels are a society’s way of creating normativity and difference through identity categories, giving them social meaning

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3 This is something that will come up later in Chapter 5, when speaking of the historical and geopolitical context of this research.

4 Imaginaries are understood in this thesis as “culturally shared and socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making devices and world-shaping devices” (Salazar, 124:2014).
(Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1963). These are built upon prejudices, or preconceived notions of others, constructing stereotypes over time within a particular sociocultural and historical setting (Gardner, 1994). Labels are mutually constructed around what is considered 'normal' and what is excluded from that prescribed normalcy. That is why labels are such interesting subjects of study. Despite their essentialization and simplification, labels, and its’ prejudices and stereotypes, offer a "shorthand" towards navigating contemporary society; organizing people into groups and territories and revealing the worldviews of those taking part in labelling others, as well as those who receive labels and how they navigate them (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Rapport, 2020: 95).

Through labelling practices, identity (re)construction is triggered, as feelings of belonging are constructed through ‘sameness’ or ‘otherness’ that influence identification. Consequently, labels have tangible effects on people’s lived experiences, identities, and life projects (Becker, 1973). These effects are two-fold: generating exclusion and ‘otherness’ or generating belonging and ‘sameness’.

In academia, labels and labelling practices have traditionally been associated with the negative effects of ‘otherness’, exploring how labels constrain a person’s experience to a single essentialist label that does not encompass the multiplicity of their lived experiences (Goffman, 1963; Becker, 1973). This focus on the negative was exacerbated by the groups investigated, who were often perceived as precarious and powerless groups, which was understandable considering these studies stemmed from Criminology interests (Goffman, 1963; Becker, 1973). Said negative ‘othering’ caused by labels is called stigma (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatization is the process in which one group imposes their power onto others, successfully devaluing them. Goffman’s original view of stigma was rather static and passive, but currently the concept has grown beyond those limits to recognize the agency stigmatized individuals and groups must use to navigate labels, as well as the power relations these reveal (Zanna & Olson, 1994; Link & Phelan, 2001; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Thus, stigma clarifies the meanings attached to labels, and how these respond to larger projects of power and governmentality searching for what is ‘normal’ (Lawler, 2014).

Yet, labels do not always have negative effects. They have also been known to generate feelings of belonging within a same social category, allowing people to rally within it and, in some cases, leading towards social recognition based on specific identity traits. This is what Spivak is referring to with the concept of strategic essentialism, where groups downplay their internal differences to create a sense of unity to gain recognition (1988). Strategic essentialism was created to speak of subaltern groups suffering from stigmatization and how they attempted to strategically gain power through unity; normally utilizing labels as a banner to unite under (Spivak, 1988). Strategic essentialism has its issues, as it can lead to an erasure of difference within a group in the name of strategic unity, reflecting the twofold nature of labels in practice. Examples of said two-fold nature are observed in many different terminologies like those regarding mental health and illnesses, LGBTQ+ groups, or even migration categories.
When exploring labels’ quotidian uses, not only does this two-fold nature arise, so does the agency needed to deal with labels. There is a common misconception that labels render its’ receiver passive, as labelling is generally associated with a show of power of one group over another (Zanna & Olson, 1994; Link & Phelan, 2001; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). This doesn’t account for the passivity of the beholder of prejudice, who is reinforcing normative worldviews as evidenced when interacting with others. Meanwhile, the person who receives a label must decide how to navigate that process. They must use whatever resources available to them - socioeconomic, physical traits, language skills, educational backgrounds etc. - to dialogue with said label. It must be noted that not everyone can respond in the same way to labels due to varying categories of difference like gender, socioeconomic status, race, and much more. Meaning that someone in a more privileged position can make certain decisions when responding to labels that others less privileged cannot (De Certeau, 1984; Pease, 2010).

This is also exemplified through studies on racialization (Solomos, 2003; Fanon, 2004; Jubany, 2020b). Being racialized is a way of reading another individual’s outward identity categories and giving them certain meaning and value within a general structure that views ‘white’ as the norm. This means that those outside of ‘whiteness’ are labeled and stigmatized as ‘other’, with varying prejudices depending on what those identity categories are. Simultaneously, these ‘not white’ ‘othered’ labels are used to generate belonging within a same group, as exemplified by a variety of social movements like USA’s Black Lives Matter (Stone et al., 2020). The baggage each racialized label carries is different depending on the context, as each country and region has different relationships and histories with colonialization, racial and ethnic equality, and migration. In this thesis the subjects are all white, however, their whiteness is seldom used to establish belonging within a greater group. This is because whiteness is a trait, an identity category, that is often overlooked (Pease, 2010). Whiteness is an identity category that is experienced as ‘normative’ and, as such, is implicitly erased from identity construction and isn’t even seen as a label. Nevertheless, whiteness is key when it comes to understanding certain life experiences, like migration (Saldanha, 2007). Someone who is read as ‘white’ and, for example, receives a label concerning their gender or socioeconomic status can use their whiteness to their advantage when navigating that label. Meanwhile, others read as ‘not white’ must resort to other resources available to them to address the label socially imposed on them (De Certeau, 1984). Racialized labels are often used to show the intricacies of labelling practices and its’ relationship to identity (re)construction. These illustrate how labels perceptibly affect lived experience, leading to ‘othering’ that can be potentially life-threatening while also leading to belonging with others who share that same racialized identity category. They also illuminate the power relations that come into play within these practices and experiences, contextualizing identity (re)construction in a particular time and place.

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5 This is tied to intersectionality, which is introduced in the coming section and is explored throughout the thesis.
An often-overlooked example that can similarly illuminate identification processes through their labelling practices is old age and ageing. Old age and ageing are identity categories and lived experiences that are often made invisible, especially in Western societies; something explored in detail in coming pages (Hockey & James, 1993; Phillipson, 2013). Old age associated labels carry significant weight and have a noteworthy capacity of eliciting belonging. For example, terms like ‘retired’ or ‘pensioner’ are used in social clubs and groups with the aim of creating a feeling of belonging between people in later life stages. Meanwhile these same terms can also be used in a derogatory way, as shown in politics and media that aim to blame an ageing demographic for issues with the welfare state (Hockey & James, 2003). Moreover, labelling another person as ‘old’ or ‘ageing’ occurs rather frequently in a variety of social scenarios in Western societies, like giving up one’s seat on the bus for a seemingly older person. The individual on the other end of these labelling practices must learn how to navigate these kinds of scenarios, managing them through a variety of strategies and tactics to adjust or overcome them (Zanna & Olson, 1994; De Certeau, 1984; Oyserman & Swim, 2001).

Labelling practices can potentially have deep repercussions in individual’s lives, dictating whether they have access to certain opportunities or even placing them in life-threatening situations. Nevertheless, many labelling practices are mundane and recurrent, questioning identities daily through these seemingly ‘normal’ actions that suggest ‘otherness’ and force identification. Thus, old age and ageing as an identity category to explore is useful when investigating identity (re)construction processes, as it encompasses labelling practices as well as elicits feelings of belonging and signals to underlying power relations that are often overlooked.

So far it has been argued how, regardless of growing consumer capitalism and increasing individualizing tendencies of Global North societies, identities aren’t built in a social void (Van Meijl, 2008). Feelings of belonging and labelling practices illustrate the importance of observing the interactions between the self and society and how this triggers identity (re)construction processes in a way that engenders multiplicity and fluidity. This emphasizes identity’s processual nature at the crux of individual agency, contextual power relations, and hegemonically normative identity categories, revealing power relations behind social ‘normativity’. The latter demonstrates how identity categories, classifications of normativity, and ‘otherness’, take shape in belonging and labelling practices, becoming instruments of inequality (MacKinnon, 2013).

2.1.3. An intersectional approach

Identity (re)construction processes, like eliciting feelings of belonging and labelling practices, illustrate how individual identities are constantly (re)constructing themselves in response to hierarchies of power that encroach upon intersectionally lived experiences. By focusing on how identities are (re)constructed in everyday life, insight can be brought onto how hegemonic structures of power work and how they are contested, reaffirmed, or reevaluated through lived experience. This is where the intersectional approach to identity (re)construction becomes essential. Within the
framework of this thesis, intersectionality is used to refer to the interaction between “gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008:68). As a heuristic device that appreciates power in action, intersectionality is used to detect privileged and vulnerable experiences that can simultaneously co-exist within life courses and communities. It is also used in a manner that facilitates the creation of situated knowledge, acknowledging context and other interacting factors that construct different experiences and identities (Haraway, 1988).

Intersectionality’s conceptual origins date back to 1989, when Kimberle Crenshaw first coined the term to make visible the distinctive discrimination suffered by Black women in North American courts of law (1989). Crenshaw utilized intersectionality to comment on how certain identity traits interacted and created a particular kind of oppression beyond a single aspect of a person’s being. She exemplified this through Black women’s racialized and gendered identities that trigger power structures involving racism and sexism that pierce the experiences of Black women in different ways resulting in specific kinds of exclusion and/or oppression. Therefore, intersectionality was created as a tool to expose oppression in all its complexity.

Presently, intersectionality is used as a heuristic device through which webs of power can be revealed and understood; illustrating how they interact, produce, and transform societies and identities, while also making visible the struggles and marginalization of vulnerable groups (Davis, 2008; MacKinnon, 2013). It has gained significant recognition in recent decades and has infiltrated mainstream debates beyond feminist theory (MacKinnon, 2013). The concepts’ success is widely debated, with some claiming that its success lies in its capacity to encourage reflexivity and complex thought, while also being an incomplete term with malleable meaning (Davis, 2008). Amid this popularity, intersectionality has also been misused and misunderstood, sometimes mistaking intersection for addition. Identity traits that are used as categories of difference are not fixed, they are dynamic and dependent on a particular time and space, and so cannot be added onto each other (Magliano, 2015). Assuming that certain discriminations are fixed, and can be added onto each other, ignores this liquid uncertain reality that imbues the current Western social context and inadequately disconnects labels, prejudices, and their associated discourses of power from lived experiences (Magliano, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016). The value of intersectionality lies in the way it conceives power structures as manifesting their presence within people's lives through the ways in which simultaneous but different identity traits are read within certain contexts.

Intersectionality is also a useful tool when taking into consideration the increasingly complex backdrop against which identities are currently constructed (see sections 2.1., 2.1.1, and 2.1.2 of this chapter). The ways in which identities are negotiated and continuously crafted is influenced by an individual’s socioeconomic class, nationality, age, health, work life, gender, sexual preference, access to formal education, and many other categories of difference. This becomes clear when intersectionally observing how belonging, labels, or prejudice are established and contested in discourses and practices.
For example, when an individual must answer a negative labelling instance, their socioeconomic status, gender, or nationality may constrain or open certain avenues of action accessible to them (De Certeau, 1984). If they are heteronormative, able-bodied, white men, with a middle-class background, they have many more strategies to contest a label. Meanwhile, those with other identity traits have less options to choose from. This is because of the privileged vantage points each person has depending on their identity traits and how they mobilize them (De Certeau, 1984). An intersectional approach to these sorts of identity (re)construction processes opens the opportunity to explore power relations triggered by people’s multiple identity traits and how these are read, used, and received; illustrating where privilege lies and its’ connections to power.

Intersectional approaches to lived experiences allow for the complexity of flexible and liquid identities to be appreciated, observing how various identity factors converge, trigger different power structures in certain spaces and how these are made evident through personal experience (Davis, 2008; Lázaro, 2014). As such, placing an intersectional lens upon identity formation encourages reflexivity and complex thought concerning how identity is crafted and experienced, illustrating through these everyday identity processes how power is present in the mundane (Magliano, 2015). Intersectionality calls for grounded contextualized observations of identities and their construction, considering the historicity behind social classifications and how these are constructed in relation to other concrete positions and social relationships (Magliano, 2015).

Old age and migration have distinctively fraught relationships with power structures, holding a contested space within Western social imaginaries. Thus, resulting in an onslaught of labels and prejudices that lead to unexpected identity (re)construction processes. When old age and migration intersect, they trigger power structures in a different way than when on their own. Being an ageing migrant is an identity trait that can be read in different ways, depending on the context. In the case of retiree migrants, especially Northern Europeans who enjoy geopolitical and white identity privileges, their conditions as ageing migrants lead to unique experiences of privilege and vulnerability. This is because of the power structures their intersecting ageing and migrant conditions trigger within their home and destination countries. Despite retiree migrants being perceived as overwhelmingly privileged, an intersectional approach to their identity (re)construction processes illustrates how simultaneously privileged and vulnerable their experiences of ageing abroad can be. This appreciation for nuance within power structures and power relations is what makes intersectionality such a useful tool in this thesis.

2.2. Ageing identities in Western societies

Age is often overlooked when speaking of identity construction because it is naturalized, bonding together life stages with chronological age, behaviors, and appearances, labeling them as ‘normal’ (Hockey & James, 2003). These are validated by formal, even legal, age norms that dictate ageing experiences, like not being able to drink alcohol, drive a car, or
vote until a certain age in early adulthood or having to wait until another age to be able to benefit from governmental pension schemes in later life (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Hockey & James, 2003). These formal age norms are upheld by informal ones, like what women should or shouldn’t wear in ‘old’ age, illustrating how age and its life stages are effectively a social and cultural construct that is product of a particular historical and socioeconomic context (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). In LGBTQ+ studies this is called chrononormativity, which are “forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege” (Freeman, 2010:3). Chrononormativity sets expectations as natural goals bound to life stages, making those who stray chronological ‘others’ (Freeman, 2010).

However, the chronological ties of age to certain life stages, and its’ respectively assigned behaviors, are being stretched and blurred by the current rising longevity of populations across Western societies. If people live longer, life stages start to become less clear, leading towards a diversification of the ageing experience while also generating even more uncertainty in an already fluid risk society (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004). Despite this, chrononormativity continues, hanging on to significant life milestones, like becoming a parent or grandparent or undergoing age-bound rites of passage to perpetuate these norms (Radcliffe-Brown, 1929; Turner, 1969; Hockey & James, 2003). There are many of these that are tied to religions, like christenings or bat/bar mitzvahs; while others are tied to education, like graduations, or productive work, like retirement. This affects identity (re)construction processes, as it inserts another aspect of uncertainty and constrains the process of constant identification that modern societies inspire.

Rising longevity has particularly taken a toll on later life stages or old age. It has generated a new social category defined by their advanced chronological age, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic class (Myerhoff & Simic, 1978:245; Phillipson, 2013). This has led to the fragmentation of later life stages into multiple stages that appreciate the heterogeneity of longer lives, speaking of the ‘young old’ and the ‘old old’, the ‘deep old age’, or ‘advanced old age’ (Degnen, 2018). In Gerontology, these distinctions can be found in the separation and creation of the third and fourth age, which have been argued to be more of a cultural field than an actual life stage, with third age being the rejection of decrepitude and morbidity found in the fourth age (Jones et al., 2008; Gilleard & Higgs, 2010). These distinctions make evident that, despite there being a consensus that old age epistemologically does exist, it is hard to discern who is ‘old’ and what makes them so in practice (Degnen, 2018; 2012). Becoming ‘old’ isn’t a linear straightforward process, there isn’t any single event, milestone, or physical change that makes an individual ‘old’. Old age is intersubjectively assigned through interpersonal interactions, creating a relational idea of what old age is depending on context (Degnen, 2007; 2012; 2018). Thus, it is also very important to speak about ageing, as this terminology considers the processual reality of how one comes in and out of ‘old age’, evoking the continuous and ambiguous characteristics of later life stages. It also involves the corporeality of ageing and how it is an embodied process involving biological and natural ageing processes as well (Lamb, 2019). That is why this thesis refers to ageing identities and ageing life
projects, making explicit the processual characteristics of old age that are experienced in an embodied manner.

Despite studies that show the socioeconomic, cultural, and historical heterogeneity of ageing experiences (see for example Degnen, 2007; 2012; 2018; Lamb, 2000; 2014; 2017; 2019), longevity has led to an increase in older individuals that has generated a false notion of a single social group labelled as ‘old’, ‘elderly’, ‘third age’, ‘fourth age’, ‘seniors’, ‘retirees’, ‘pensioners’ and more mentioned above (Jones et al., 2008; Gillear & Higgs, 2010; Degnen, 2018). These labels are used both in public discourse and policy, referring to biological age, implied physical decline or denoting a lack of work activity (productive or reproductive). These homogenize ageing experiences, while ageing individuals themselves hardly use them, as historically old age in Western societies has been associated to dependence, debility, and fragility (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Degnen, 2018). This shows an internalization of ageism, which is the oppression of people considered ‘old’ because of the frailty and long-term care needs old age implies for societies and the welfare state (Phillipson, 2013; Calasanti & King, 2017). In fact, several gerontologists point at the dichotomous construction of the ‘third age’ and ‘fourth age’ labels as a means of illustrating this internalized ageism, as third age social policy assumes agency of consumption, excluding those who do not have those capabilities (Jones et al., 2008).

Old age as a life stage, and ageing as a process, has come to be associated with many identity-shifting and life project altering changes, like changes in economic and social roles or changes in physical characteristics and capabilities (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). As a social, cultural, and historical construct, being ‘old’ has been both well received and condemned depending on the time and space it is in. However, due to Western societies’ current aversion to old age and decline, there are sociocultural implications to physical decline that in turn shape identity (re)construction and later life experiences (Hockey & James, 1993; Hazan & Raz, 1997). That is why exploring ageing identities in Western societies is so captivating. Ageing individuals undergo many changes, something which directly contradicts social imaginaries of ‘old age’ as stagnant (Degnen, 2012). These changes must be accommodated into their identity (re)construction processes that are also pierced by other intersecting identity traits that affect their lived experience, while also having to dialogue with discourses on ‘old age’ as undesirable (Lamb, 2017). Thus, investigating ageing identities has captured the attention of anthropologists and sociologists. These explore a variety of issues like how ageing identities that were previously perceived as fixed are now made flexible and commodified in lifestyle markets, how normative discourses affect ageing experiences and generate phenomenological gaps or explore the implications of searching for ‘agelessness’ in an ageing body (Kaufman, 1986; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1989; Katz, 2000; Degnen, 2007; Jones, et al. 2008; Lamb, 2017).

Building on this body of literature, this thesis continues to explore how Western ageing identities are crafted, particularly following in the footsteps of Cathrine Degnen and Sarah Lamb’s ethnographic works (Degnen, 2007; 2012; 2018; Lamb, 2014; 2017; 2019), who have grounded ageing experiences and practices in everyday life. These types
of ethnographic works highlight the inherent ageism found in old age discourses in Western societies and the repercussions they have on ageing identities and experiences. Degnen particularly looks at how belonging is crafted in communities with ageing individuals in England, seeing how certain markers for ‘old age’ are read and interpreted depending on the circumstances, denoting belonging or not to an overall group (2012). Meanwhile, Lamb explores old age discourses in North America, comparing it to her other studies on ageing in India to highlight the frustrations American ideals of ageing generate (2014; 2017; 2019). These works highlight the relativity of old age as a life stage while illustrating how ageism is generating frustration within Western ageing experiences and identities.

This thesis ethnographically grounds ageing in a particular time and place within British expatriate communities on Spanish coasts. These communities (re)construct their identities and later life projects, with the aim of ‘ageing better’ as well as gaining autonomy over their leisure time, while dialoguing with Western discourses on ageing that disregard the intersectionally lived heterogenous experiences of ageing individuals. This case study reveals the conflicting lived experiences old age discourses generate, while commenting on the social inequalities in Western societies ageing experiences highlight. The following pages review the existing discourses on ageing in Western societies, the gap with lived experience they create, and how to appreciate this gap when other intersected realities come into play.

2.2.1. What does it mean to be old? Western discourses on ageing and the gap with lived experience

Currently, old age is perceived in Western societies as a “mixed blessing” because it is a product of medical advancements while simultaneously applying pressure on the welfare state, presenting the threat of becoming a ‘burden’ to society (Phillipson, 2013). The introduction and institutionalization of retirement into the welfare state has an important role in this approach to old age, as it placed a clear chronological marker on when economic productivity should end, creating a type of dependence based solely on age (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001: 20). This prompts older people to be viewed as a social category, homogenizing their heterogenous experiences and facilitating the creation of prejudices and stereotypes based on chronological age.

Being old has historically and socioculturally elicited many different responses (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Degnen, 2018). For instance, in Japanese culture throughout centuries elders had great societal power, meanwhile in the 17th century United States elders had power and respect but not affection, creating tensions between the old and the young (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001: 15-16). Currently, Lamb’s work in West Bengal, Boston, and San Francisco shows present juxtaposing ways of understanding old age depending on the sociocultural context, illustrating how West Bengalis were better at accepting dependence and decline than their North American counterparts (Lamb, 2000; 2014). Evidencing how old age is socially constructed, reflecting individualistic and collectivistic
cultural orientations, and how human transience and inter-dependence are socially received.

Nonetheless, in contemporary ethnographies of ageing conducted around the globe in very different contexts, old age universally poses dilemmas (Degnen, 2018). These dilemmas are context and socioculturally dependent. One could argue that the current Western aversion to old age and decline is part of a wider and more complex web of historical and sociocultural discourses that stem from setting middle-aged able bodies as the norm; othering those who do not fit within that category, while also building discourses that encourage the maintenance of this normativity and the subordination of older people (Hockey & James, 1993; 2003; Jones et al., 2008; Calasanti & King, 2017). These are upheld through moral and economic undercurrents that sustain ageist views through time.

To understand these old age discourses, the social relationship between body and bodily behaviors, which are learnt when becoming a social subject within a particular sociocultural context, must be discussed (Mauss, 1973; Foucault, 1975; 1982). The way one carries and conceives of their body is biased by sociocultural frameworks that are learnt throughout one’s lifetime (Mauss, 1973). Thus, the physical experiences of the body are modified by social categories and frameworks (Douglas, 2004). In Western societies, there has been a long-standing Cartesian divide between mind and body that has been passed on through these learnt behaviors and techniques, modifying lived experience. The Cartesian divide between mind and body highlights the mind as the center of the individual, even more valued than the body (Degnen, 2018). These are spoken of as if they were separate entities, evidenced when observing discourses around illnesses, pain, and other embodied experiences that evoke expressions like “mind over matter” that imply a separate control of the mind over the body (Kaufman, 1986; Csordas, 1994; Desjarlais, 2003). As Mary Douglas emphasizes in Natural Symbols, the physical body is a microcosm of society, meaning the social body constrains the physical body’s perception (2004: 80). Consequently, the more distance there is between the physical body and the social body - in the sense of disembodying bodily behaviors like eating through a smoothing of the action – the more social pressure there is, illustrating one’s societal classification (Douglas, 2004). Regarding the Cartesian divide in Western societies, this framework reveals a deep societal pressure to heavily control one’s bodily reactions, thus modifying one’s physical experience.

The Cartesian approach to the mind and body has been questioned through ethnographic approaches of embodied experiences like dementia, chronic pain, and old age (Csordas, 1994; Degnen, 2018). These types of ethnographies highlight the importance of the body within everyday experiences and identity (re)construction, trying to reconcile the separation of mind and body, as well as recognize the frustrating lived experiences this Cartesian dualism can bring (Csordas, 1994; Degnen, 2007).

Ageing and old age have fallen within this divide, as illustrated in common expressions like being “young at heart” which imply that one’s mind can be discordant to one’s body. This suggests that the ‘true’ self is a ‘young’ self, regardless of biological age or bodily state (De Beauvoir, 1972; Kaufman, 1986; Degnen, 2012; 2007; Lamb, 2014).
Different academics have called the latter phenomena the ageless self or permanent personhood (Kaufman, 1986; Lamb, 2014; Degnen, 2018). These concepts both suggest that the ideal person is one that maintains the self of one’s earlier years intact, while avoiding or denying processes of decline and mortality (Lamb, 2014:45). This highlights how, in Western societies, being able-bodied and middle-aged is the norm, while bodily decline is considered ‘other’, even if it is due to inevitable biological ageing processes (Hockey & James, 1993; 2003).

This brings us to one of the most prominent Western discourses on ageing and old age, the decline narrative: a discourse that gives ageing and its late life stage side effects negative connotations (Hockey & James, 1993). The salience of this discourse is tied to the great value given to independence and individuality that skyrocketed with capitalist and neoliberal agendas, which can be traced back to industrialization and the shift it created towards valuing individuals for their constant productivity (Myerhoff & Simic 1978; Hockey & James, 1993). If independence is highly regarded, dependence becomes its most unattractive antithesis, associating it with a lack of productivity and the possibility of becoming a burden to society (Hockey & James 2003). This must also be contextualized within an increasingly globalized and liquid risk society marked by social and economic crisis, where flexibility is a synonym of youth and rigidity a synonym of old age (Sennett, 1998: 97). It is these sorts of prejudices that draw distinctions privileging younger adults at the expense of older ones (Calasanti & King, 2017). Hence, the stigmatization of old age markers, or identity categories, ranging from grey hair, wrinkles, to bodily and mental fragility and vulnerability, as well as life milestones and roles like being a grandparent or going into retirement (Vincent, 2007). Furthermore, anti-ageing science, medicine, and cosmetics make evident the societal aversion to old age, encouraging men and women, in significantly different gendered ways, to present themselves as not old, masking their oldness (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Vincent, 2007; Whelehan, 2013; Calasanti & King, 2017). These practices are then intersected with growing consumerist tendencies, that commodify the desire to not age - particularly that of women attempting to ascribe to culturally imposed beauty standards - joining in one practice consumerism, gender inequalities, and ageism (Jones et al., 2008). Thus, marking the persistent presence of the Cartesian divide between body and mind when experiencing ageing and illustrating how the physical body is constrained by the social (Douglas, 2004). Throughout the ageing process, people are continuously asked through different social cues, depending on their categories of difference, to demonstrate they are not old, prompting ageing individuals to describe themselves as having ‘young’ inner selves, despite their ‘older’ biological exteriors (Degnen, 2012; Calasanti & King, 2017). This then encourages the monitoring of old age between peers, as well as on a wider societal scale, encouraging anti-ageing practices and behaviors (Degnen, 2012). Ultimately, this enshrines ageist behaviors as ‘natural’ within certain life stages and stigmatizes certain old age markers.

Overall, the decline narrative generates conflicting and complex ageing experiences, as ageing individuals must navigate the negative associations society has with old age whilst ageing themselves. Since the physical body, which ageing affects, has
a deep social importance that is imprinted upon it, admitting that one is ‘old’ is admitting the loss of certain social privileges (Mauss, 1973; Douglas, 2004; Calasanti, Slevin & King, 2006). Furthermore, the Cartesian divide between body and mind adds complications to this experience, as conceptualizing ageing in a holistic and embodied manner is dissuaded by this hegemonic way of thinking in Western societies. This creates tensions between the mind that refuses to admit oldness, while the bodily effects of ageing take their course under the watchful eye of society (Calasanti, Slevin & King, 2006). The decline narrative has permeated Western society’s way of viewing ageing and old age, illustrating the existing overall fear of frailty, dependence, and vulnerability, and how that fear has turned into ageism found in social relationships and institutional approaches to ageing individuals and groups (Grenier, Phillipson, & Settersten, 2020).

Despite the prominence of the decline narrative, there was a clear paradigm shift in the 60’s onto the 90’s from the field of Gerontology that attempted to reframe old age in a more positive manner by introducing the idea of successful ageing, coined by Robert Havinghurst and then developed further by Rowe and Khan (Rowe & Khan, 1998; Lamb, 2014). Havinghurst first presented successful ageing as a ‘solution’ to welfare issues posed by increasing longevity, stating that if individuals took on the responsibility of having healthier ageing lives this would then relieve the welfare state (Lamb, 2014:44). Rowe and Khan developed this idea further by focusing on the power of individual lifestyle choices and the effects these could have in delaying or postponing old age (Rowe & Khan, 1998). Successful ageing is meant to give agency and control to ageing individuals, reframing old age as a life stage of possibility and not necessarily as a life stage characterized by loss and human transience (Lamb, 2017). Instead, one can choose to age well through lifestyle choices that involve keeping an active mind and body, while also maintaining social engagement (Rowe & Khan, 1998).

The latter paradigm shift must be contextualized within North American ideals of independence, individualization, and meritocracy. In Europe it took on new terminologies that were more accommodating to European ageing ideals, like active ageing or healthy ageing (Lamb, 2014:42; Lamb et al., 2017). Nevertheless, successful, active, or healthy ageing are all discourses based on neoliberal notions of responsibility, valuing independence and permanent personhood or an ageless self above all else (Martin et al., 2015; Lamb et al., 2017). Community and family ties fall behind, and the importance of remaining independent at all costs persists, revealing the Western ethnocentricity of this approach to old age (Calasanti & King, 2017). This is related to successful ageing being part of wider growing biopolitical projects in Western societies, where health is constructed as an individual moral obligation (Hurtado, 2010). Said biopolitical project takes on a greater importance in later life when being a ‘burden’ to society is perceived as an impending threat. This compounded with how the paradigm doesn’t take into consideration socioeconomic, gendered, and biological factors that impede access to certain ‘ageing better’ experiences and practices, it generates unrealistic ageing expectations that aren’t accessible to all (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). This is what triggered a second paradigm shift within Gerontology, leading to the “cultural turn” that
Notwithstanding, successful, active, and healthy ageing was a revolutionary concept that rapidly spread beyond Gerontology into the realm of public policy and shared hegemonic social discourse across the world, especially in the Global North. The positive spin on ageing brought on by this shift made successful ageing the new norm, resulting in the publication of self-help books, radio shows, or podcasts giving tips, hacks, strategies, and advice on how to effectively age successfully, healthily, or actively (Lamb, 2017). It also became institutionalized, influencing public policies in many countries like the United States (Calasanti & King, 2017; Lamb, 2017). In public discourse, the concept became widely understood as ageing without disease or dependence (Martin et al., 2015; Lamb et al., 2017). It must be noted that this isn’t what theorists like Rowe and Khan intended. They explicitly cited that the concept spoke of ageing well, not stopping ageing altogether (Rowe & Khan, 1998). However, the use of the successful ageing paradigm beyond the realm of Gerontology illustrates the inherent ageism found in Western societies. It also illustrates the hegemony of middle-class white men. These are the ones who can afford to invest their time and resources to ward off the heavy effects of ageing during their well-paid retirements (Calasanti & King, 2017; Lamb, 2019). This last critique is the most prominent one successful ageing has faced, resulting in Rowe and Khan themselves revisiting the concept and attempting to resolve it by placing more weight on institutional structures that must accompany ageing individuals to promote ageing well practices across socioeconomic and cultural spectrums (2015). As Calasanti and King point out, the successful ageing paradigm does not question what is considered old, at what point it is designated to whom and by who (2017). Consequently, it is reproducing social inequalities based on ageism, sexism, classism, and racism, despite its' intention to reduce ageing inequality (Calasanti & King, 2017).

The decline narrative and the successful ageing paradigm are two sides of the same ageist argument. Both these discourses uphold middle-aged able-bodied normativity and promote ideas of permanent personhood or ageless selves that are in fact problematic for those experiencing ageing. These discourses frame human transience and decline as failure or burdens and, thus, these must be actively resisted through a maintenance of independence, agency, and personhood long into later life stages at a cost that not everyone can pay; generating socioeconomic, gendered, and racial divides (Lamb, 2014; Degnen, 2018). The moral undercurrents of these discourses generate conflicting ageing experiences, as there is a gap between how ageing is epistemologically understood by society and the pragmatics of it within embodied experience (Degnen, 2007; 2018). The decline narrative constructs an extremely negative view of ageing, as if it were only characterized by fragility, vulnerability, and decline that is devoid of agency; meanwhile the successful ageing paradigm is excessively positive and too focused on personal lifestyle choices that aren’t accessible to all. This leaves very little space for heterogenous ageing experiences to unfold into ageing identities embodied within ageing bodies. Instead, they are constrained by these ageist discourses that construct old age as inherently negative or impossibly positive, branding any form of decline as a
personalized individual failure. This gap makes the ageing experience a vulnerable one that is extremely susceptible to negative social pressures in the form of stereotypes, prejudices and labels that deeply affect identity (re)construction (Degnen, 2007).

Degnen and Lamb have found this gap between discourse and lived experience in their ethnographies. These authors have detected that ageing individuals struggle to identify themselves as ‘old’ because of this disjuncture (Degnen, 2012). Instead, references to past selves and younger selves are made to convey the passage of time, while also attempting to maintain their sense of personhood throughout ageing processes that society assumes takes away that sense of self (Degnen, 2012). This generates frustrating ageing experiences, as people strive to age well and ward off old age’s negative effects but can’t do so ‘successfully’ due to socioeconomic backgrounds or age-related health issues dragged from past work lives (Lamb, 2019). Through their ethnographies, situated in Anglo-Saxon contexts, the detrimental effects of Western discourses on ageing can be appreciated and explored through lived experience. What they also reveal is how old age is not uniformly experienced, despite the uniformity these discourses present (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Degnen, 2018).

Consequently, the decline narrative and the successful ageing paradigm are discourses situated and born in Western contexts that homogenize ageing experiences and do not take into consideration how gender, sexuality, race, or class affect them. These discourses have now become the Global North norm, impacting how old age is perceived and how ageing is then experienced, creating a gap between old age as a concept and as an experience. Ageing individuals, especially in Western contexts, must contend with this gap through their identity (re)constructions in daily life. They encounter prejudices and labels that they must navigate and respond to constantly, forcing them to identify themselves as ‘not old’ even when they are with their peers (Degnen, 2012; Calasanti & King, 2017). Unlike other forms of inequality and oppression, ageism is a type of oppression that everyone may be faced with, at least in some degree, if they live long enough (Calasanti, Slevin, & King, 2006). These debates are fundamental to understand how ageing identities are (re)constructed in day-to-day life, as well as how ageing is experienced because they are bound to affect anyone who ages in Western societies.

2.2.2. Nuancing ageing experiences: illustrating inequalities

The creation of the categorization of ‘old age’, and the discourses that envelope it in Western societies, have homogenized ageing experiences. The decline narrative and the successful ageing paradigm that dominate Western thought on old age, seem to establish that ageing can only be experienced in two ways: through a loss of agency and self while enraptured in vulnerability; or as a life stage filled with agency, freedom, and leisure without the constraints of formal labor and familial obligations. Both these views on old age perpetuate ageism, while ‘othering’ those that do not comply with these skewed social expectations.

Due to the rise in successful ageing’s popularity and its misuse as a trend that morally judges decline as failure without considering systemic inequalities, there has
been a call for more nuanced work on old age that appreciates these differences (Phillipson, 2013; Calasanti & Giles, 2018). This has brought on studies that contextualize current ageing experiences within conditions of risk and insecurity, framing old age as a disadvantaged social position within the parameters of precarity, asking for value to be found in ageing differences, validating ageing experiences, and making later life meaningful (Lamb, 2014; Calasanti & King, 2017; Grenier, Phillipson, & Settersten, 2020). These types of works represent a growing recognition of the complexities of ageing together with other categories of difference that may create inequality within current contexts of uncertainty. These works also advocate for a life-long look at old age, admitting that one doesn’t suddenly become ‘old’, but it is a biological and sociocultural process that intersects with other realities resulting in varied experiences (Grenier, Phillipson, & Settersten, 2020).

The key advancement of these studies is to conceive age as another category of difference that must be considered when understanding lived experience intersectionally, as well as identity (re)construction (Davis, 2008). Since old age is socially constructed in conjunction with other social inequalities, it must be approached through methods that facilitate a situated creation of knowledge, appreciating the differences within ageing experiences. As an analytical tool that recognizes the major axes of social divisions and power such as gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability, coloniality and age, intersectionality allows for an approximation to old age and ageing experiences that is contextualized and grounded (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Through an intersectional approach, social inequalities in ageing experiences can be appreciated, mapping the sites in which power operates, be it through social relations, institutionalized structures, or cultural customs (Calasanti, Slevin, & King, 2006; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Age as a category of difference, and its relationship with others, has gone unexplored for some years in gender studies and racial approaches to social inequalities (Calasanti, Slevin & King, 2006). Similarly, missing from feminist theories, workplace studies, and approaches on socioeconomic standing is how age works in social relations and how it organizes societies, creates identities and power, as well as how it intersects with other systemic inequalities is (Calasanti, Slevin, & King, 2006; Calasanti & King, 2017). However, studies using intersectional approaches to ageing experiences illustrate how people do not ‘age out’ of earlier life social inequalities; these become more acute and complex with age (Calasanti & Giles, 2018: 73). Thus, intersectionality is a key ally to explore ageing and identity (re)construction, social relationships, and interactions with systems of inequality.

Intersectionality’s importance becomes evident when observing the retirement experiences of older women in Western countries like the United States, where a context of neoliberal responsibility and risk make discourses about the successful ageing paradigm more noteworthy. Firstly, North American women’s ageing experiences are significantly more affected by social pressures to aesthetically age ‘well’ because of patriarchal oppressions than their male counterparts (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Vincent, 2007). Meanwhile, they must also grapple with the repercussions of being paid less
throughout the life course. This is due to their gendered engagement in domestic unpaid labor, making them more likely to be economically insecure in retirement (Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Statistics show that single and unmarried women, who do not have to engage in domestic unpaid labor, have higher poverty rates than widowed women (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). It is not the decision to engage in unpaid domestic labor that results in lower pensions in later life, implying that these inequalities cannot be individualized, simplified, and reduced to ‘lifestyle’ choices. This depicts how and why older women in Western societies are systemically oppressed for being at the intersection of gender and old age. The latter example becomes even more complex when race is considered intersectionally with age and gender. It is well debated how Black women are trapped at the intersections of racial and gendered oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Bridges, 2011). In North American contexts it is common knowledge that Black women get even lower pay than their white counterparts. Meaning that, despite their higher rates of participation in the labor force, they suffer higher poverty rates, especially in later life (Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Therefore, even assumed differences in later life based on gender are altered when intersectionality is applied. Intersectionality pushes on taken for granted notions and experiences that hide inequalities; in this case revealing the ignorance of old age as a disadvantaged status that operates just as other systems of inequality and categories of difference do (Calasanti & Giles, 2018).

The intersectionality paradigm is also critical when exploring masculinity and/or socioeconomic barriers. Wentzell illustrates the utility of intersectionality in her approach to erectile dysfunction in Mexican ageing men (2013). Through an exploration of erectile dysfunction drugs and their rejection by certain strata of urology patients, Wentzell’s work emphasizes the intersections of ageing, masculinity, socioeconomic hardship, and sexuality (2013; Degnen, 2018). Finding that socioeconomic barriers when accessing erectile dysfunction drugs, such as Viagra, propelled different understandings of Mexican maturing masculinity that accepted said physical loss as part of becoming a respectable older man (Wentzell, 2013). Ethnographies like Wentzell’s highlight the importance of observing all categories of difference when exploring ageing experiences. Not only is masculinity affected when it intersects with ageing processes, so are socioeconomic backgrounds. These do not necessarily have the effects one assumes, as Wentzell’s work challenges hegemonic notions of Mexican machismo and illustrates other ways of understanding masculinity in Mexican society, especially when old age starts to set in together with financial insecurity (Wentzell, 2013).

Intersectionality has been a particularly illuminating tool when it comes to detecting the social inequalities the successful ageing paradigm unknowingly reproduces (Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Since the paradigm does not question what it means to be old in Western societies, it tends to encourage ideas of old age as something that must be warded off as well as reproducing systemic oppressions (Lamb, 2019). Thus, ageing ‘well’ or ‘successfully’ is associated with privileged physical and social activities like golfing or volunteering, which are only accessible to those able-bodied with sufficient economic resources (Calasanti & Giles, 2019). However, the barriers towards ageing ‘successfully’ are socially minimized by a discourse of personal responsibility and choice that is at the
heart of neoliberal capitalist contexts, ignoring systemic differences and their repercussions throughout the life course. Intersectionality identifies the social inequalities at play both in the creation of this paradigm and how it is experienced by ageing individuals. Lamb’s work on successful ageing in the United States does this well, especially showing how socioeconomic and racial backgrounds affect the ability to age ‘successfully’ (2019). Lamb observes how those from lower-income backgrounds felt qualified for her study on old age at the relatively young chronological age of 60, while those more elite didn’t see themselves as qualifying until their late 70’s to 80’s. This didn’t only have to do with the way they biologically aged due to the access they had to certain services, activities, or lifestyle choices, it also had to do with the way old age was experienced under financial pressure, leading those from lower socioeconomic classes to consider themselves to be ‘old’ before others (Lamb, 2019). The previously mentioned gap between the epistemology and the pragmatics of ageing is experienced in a far more distressing manner when intersecting social inequalities are taken into consideration; especially when analyzing ageing experiences that must dialogue with the successful ageing paradigm.

As a thesis that aims to give a textured account of ageing experiences abroad, intersectionally approaching identity (re)construction in ageing communities allows for situated knowledge to be produced. Through intersectionality, the varying layers of complexity regarding discourses, institutions, structures, and sociocultural imaginaries that come into play when configuring ageing identities and experiences are acknowledged, illustrating its’ intricate connections within lived experience.

2.3. Ageing, migration, and identity (re)construction in later life

This chapter has presented the tools with which ageing experiences and identities abroad will be analyzed in coming ethnographic chapters. First, it established how identity is understood in this thesis; stating that identities are multiple and constantly under construction within a current Global North climate of risk and uncertainty. Identities are constructed through discourses and actions that force identification, like eliciting feelings of belonging with others and/or labelling practices that read identity categories and give them meaning depending on the context. These identity processes generate intersubjective realities constructed from the contact between the self and society. Then the chapter explored how old age is a complex concept and life stage, especially when it comes to identity (re)construction. Despite current iterations spurred by the successful ageing paradigm that have attempted to rebrand later life stages, like retirement, as moments of ‘freedom’ filled with agency, old age still holds negative connotations in Western societies reproducing middle-aged able-bodied normativities. This general aversion to old age as a concept makes ageing identities particularly interesting entry points to analyze identity construction.

This thesis contributes to the academic debate on old age and ageing in Western societies by ethnographically exploring British expatriate retirees. These subjects are at the center of old age discourses and Global North welfare debates. By ethnographically
capturing their day-to-day, this thesis questions traditional notions perpetuated by old age discourses and explores the space where privilege and uncertainty meet in ageing experiences. This will be done through an intersectional approach that gives texture and illustrates the heterogeneity of ageing experiences. Said approach circumvents the two main, and erroneous, ageist conceptions associated with ageing: old age as stagnant and filled with all types of loss; or old age as a life stage that can be filled with activity and gains, if one makes the right individual lifestyle choices. Thus, allowing for simultaneously vulnerable and privileged experiences and identities to be investigated and understood.

This is how retirement migration is approached in the coming chapters, intersectionally exploring how it interacts with age and other categories of difference, like whiteness, socioeconomic backgrounds, and gender. Migration is a life milestone that reflects a change in life project plans that are embodied in the act of moving from one’s home country to another destination, triggering emotions and, thus, identity (re)construction processes (Jones et al., 2014). Within the trend of retirement migration, migration and mobility is presented by retiree migrants as a way of breaking old age norms, subverting labels that associate old age with rigidity and inflexibility. However, old age prejudices and labels, and other categories of difference like class and gender, move with migrants. Taking on new forms and meanings within the communities they construct abroad, finding that their ageing bodies are subjected to a new social body that entail different constraints (Douglas, 2004). Accordingly, when migration intersects with ageing experiences, it presents a unique opportunity to explore identity (re)construction and how these processes travel, how they are reinterpreted, reevaluated, and renegotiated within identities that are constantly under construction (Lundström, 2014).

The coming chapter will explore the existing literature on migration, particularly lifestyle and retirement migration. Establishing the discourses, labels, prejudices, and feelings of belonging that migration generates in Western contexts and how that sets the scene for Northern European retiree migrants on the coasts of Spain.
Chapter 3
Migration and privilege

3.1. Questioning traditional categories of migration through privilege

Migration categories have been developed throughout history to construct a complex hierarchy strongly linked to deservedness, grounded on the motivation behind the decision to move (Jubany, 2017). These have been used to establish legal distinctions between migration categories, impacting the legal protection of individuals and how they will be perceived and received in the country of destination. These distinctions display a rationale that reproduces all kinds of inequalities and otherness. Reflecting the existence and participating in the creation of discourses, prejudices, and labels associated with migration that live within shared social imaginaries, impacting the experiences of migrants. Implicit in these is the connection between being categorized as a ‘threat’ and one’s country of origin, socioeconomic background, and skin color, constructing otherness. Following suit, academia has paid significantly more attention to precarious migrants categorized as ‘threats’ under the law, often omitting the exploration of those categories that are determined by privilege. Despite the value of these studies, the academic neglect of other migration practices propagates the association between immigrant, disempowerment, and inequality (Kunz, 2016).

Academics interested in privileged forms of migration and mobility, including lifestyle and retirement migration, have been attempting to break these traditional categories by positioning their research in dialogue with them, questioning their taken for granted-ness and underpinnings (Croucher, 2012; Benson & O’Reilly, 2016; Mancinelli, 2021). Their research makes evident the intersections of categories of difference within a context of neoliberalism, risk, and colonial sociohistorical pasts, illustrating how current inequalities and asymmetries are reproduced within contemporary migration and mobility trends, as well as governance practices (for example, Kunz, 2016; Hayes, 2018; Benson, 2014; Lundström, 2014). This chapter aims to participate in this category-breaking strand of research that utilizes privileged forms of migration as a way of questioning these set categories in sociocultural and legal terms (Kunz, 2020).

Retirement migration, specifically intra-European flows, have garnered much attention in the last 20 years; with critiques stating that the field was dominated by a Eurocentric paradigm (Mancinelli, 2021). The figure of the Western retiree in Southern contexts has become an archetype within privileged migration studies as well as within shared sociocultural imaginaries, giving way to stereotypes that have inspired television shows like sitcoms, soap operas, and travel shows. This is particularly true for the British retiree migrants this thesis studies, commonly referred to as ‘expats’, whom have been a source of fascination to the British public throughout past decades (O’Reilly, 2000). However, current changes in Europe’s geopolitical order and their mobility regimes, this Western retiree archetype must be reframed.
The current context of heightened uncertainty and risk has presented new avenues through which traditional categories of migration can be questioned by studying retirement migration within Europe. Also, studies like Hayes’s or Benson’s that speak of whiteness, race, and coloniality in North-South retirement migration flows, have shown new ways in which this migration trend can be analyzed; these tools can be applied to the European context, revealing how Southern European peripheries and retirement destinations are constructed in relation to tourism, race, and long-standing geopolitical influences (Hayes, 2018; Benson, 2014). This reveals a textured reality with othering undertones. Origins of which are harder to pinpoint than in North-South retirement migration flows, that can act as an overarching commentary of the ways migration and governance practices reproduce inequality.

As a thesis that investigates retirement migration in Europe, these theoretical and methodological nuances are key to avoid reproducing Eurocentric patterns. Hence, the importance of intersectionality. This epistemological tool aids in the understanding of how identity is (re)constructed in between the intersections of migration and ageing processes, problematizing socioeconomic backgrounds in a productive manner, and assisting in breaking traditional categories of migration.

The coming pages will give a brief context as to how migration is understood in Western contexts, particularly Europe. Next, the often-forgotten privileged side of migration will be explored, illustrating the relevance of these privileged forms of migration and mobility in the current Western context and within migration studies. Accordingly demonstrating the relativity of privilege and the complex uncertainty and risk that hide behind these privileged migration trends, breaking traditional categories of migration in the process.

3.1.1. The stigma of migration: constructing the ‘other’

Migration has always been a way of generating ‘otherness’, as moving from one context to another is bound to stimulate prejudices about what is unknown. However, its origin as a social issue currently dominating political and popular discourse through a mix of notions of fear, threat, and risk, can be traced back to the increased flexibilization of the labor market with technological and transportation advances that lead to more mobility across the globe (Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2002; 2007; Croucher, 2012). Both the flexibilization and globalization of the labor market created a necessity for migrant workers in Global North economies. These needs raised issues regarding national identity, sovereignty and cultural integrity as nation states were faced with difference in unprecedented ways.

Despite the paradigm shift towards cultural relativism in the twentieth century, a monolithic and enclosed way of understanding culture lingered in public discourse and policy into the 80’s and 90’s, with migrants being viewed as direct threats to the integrity of cultures due to their relative cultural difference. This reductionist way of understanding culture inspired popular migration discourses such as ‘integration’, ‘assimilation’ or ‘multiculturalism’. All these discourses had different nuances, focusing
on different ways in which migrants should mold their otherness upon arriving to the receiving country. This influenced public policies that pushed migrants to ‘integrate’ into society, with institutions doing different actions to facilitate the latter; even though it must be mentioned that what ‘integration’ is has been given many different meanings across the EU (Pajares, 2005). These discourses attempted to obscure the race elements of migration policies implying that migrants are judged on their conduct and legality and not on their race (de Noronha, 2019). From now on, this thesis mostly speaks of ‘integration’ because it is a concept that informants used regularly on the field.

In the UK an ‘integration’ discourse was widespread in the late 90’s to early 2000’s, where English proficiency was stressed as a precursor to gain British citizenship. This assumes an English ‘white’ majority and dominance, that gatekeeps against racialized others (Erel et al., 2016). These sorts of practices have spread across Europe, legitimizing racist views, and allowing them to be institutionalized, perpetuating discrimination through political discourse, public policy, and law (Brah, 1996; Solomos, 2003; Pajares, 2005; Jubany, 2017; Erel et al., 2016). Ultimately, these approaches participate in migrants occupying a stigmatized marginal position in society, with precarious jobs that shaped the way the receiving society perceived them (Pajares, 2005). This marginalization allowed the consolidation of the long-existing divide of “insider vs outsider”, constructing ‘national’ or ‘local’ identities against that of ‘foreign’ or ‘outsider’ identities (Terradas, 2004). Migration specific labels are born out of the consolidation of this divide, stigmatizing the ‘outsider’, ‘foreign’, and essentially ‘othered’ figures in society.

In the 1990’s to early 2000’s, this divide intensified as refugees and asylum seekers started to emerge due to widespread geopolitical turmoil (Solomos, 2003; Jubany, 2017). This rise in migration processes brought news ways of experiencing borders as well as creating new diasporas and transnational communities (Brah, 1996; Nowicka, 2007). However, both these concepts were almost exclusively used in European public policy and discourse to refer to ‘ethnic minorities’, another term which is coded post-colonial terminology for citizens of African, Caribbean, and Asian descent (Brah, 1996:183). This ignores the complexity and heterogeneity behind creating a fluid sense of home tied to multiple locations, a practice that isn’t limited to precarious migrant experiences (Nowicka, 2007). Hence, racializing migration through public policies that then affect how migration was perceived and understood on a quotidian basis.

Later, the ‘war on terror’ marked by 9/11 proved to be a key turning point in migration discourse, public and political. It gave momentum to anti-immigration policies fueled by racist and xenophobic rhetoric that served as a justification for the securitization of borders in Europe and the United States of America (Tyler, 2013; Jubany, 2017). With more terrorist attacks in Madrid, London, and Barcelona, and the perceived crisis of migration at European and North American borders, the meta-narrative of border securitization has been reinforced and, currently, is barely contested by either side of the political spectrum whom ignore the violent images that surface from these border practices (van Houtum, 2010; Jubany, 2017; Jones, 2021). The latter coupled with the recent rise of far-right nationalist movements across Europe and the United States,
including events like Brexit, conservative and divisive figures like Marine Le Pen in France, or political parties like the far-right Spanish party VOX, has made anti-immigration policies with racist and xenophobic rhetoric common place in political and public discourse. These have succeeded in conflating the term ‘migrant’ with ‘refugee’, especially in media coverage of the so-called migrant/refugee crisis at Europe’s borders (Kunz, 2020).

These sociohistorical changes are the consolidators of discourses that characterize migrants as a ‘threat’ to national security, identity, and economic stability. This characterization goes beyond cultural difference to physical traits that are measured against the ‘invisible’ normative measuring stick of whiteness, effectively racially othering the migrant figure in the Global North (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Jubany, 2020a; 2020b). This understanding of migration and its’ categories is reproduced in shared social imaginaries and global border-crossing laws (Jubany, 2017). The extent to which this characterization of the migrant as a racialized other is ingrained within the Global North becomes evident when observing border-crossing experiences, where racist and xenophobic behaviors are employed under the pretense of ‘public safety’ on racialized persons from Global South countries (Pajares, 2000; 2005; van Houtum; 2010; Jubany, 2017). Meanwhile, border-crossers from the Global North with white and middle to upper class socioeconomic backgrounds experience borders as a pit-stop within a wider journey, exemplifying how racism and otherness is institutionalized (Croucher, 2012). This seeps into public discourse, where migrants are used as scapegoats for social issues like lacking government subsidies or social and housing services and collapsing city centers, accusing them of taking advantage of what in most cases are deficient social services (Brah, 1996). This constructs a stereotype of the epitome of migrant as not white, legally irregular, with a precarious job, and functioning on the margins of society, whose presence is a direct ‘threat’ to the cultural and economic integrity of the nation state (Croucher, 2012). The label ‘immigrant’ holds this stereotype. Currently the term has become racially charged, associating criminality and illegality to it, and reproducing inequalities through its’ implementation and use.

De Noronha adequately illustrates how this connection between race and migration in border regimes plays out in lived experience, affecting how both race and migration are constructed (2019). He particularly looks at Britain and how race is effectively negotiated at the border and brought into the streets by police officers that routinely bring up migration regimes when interacting with racialized persons, regardless of their migration status (De Noronha, 2019). Thus, marking the importance of migration and border crossing experiences when establishing how race is understood, produced, and mobilized within a particular context.

This perception of the migrant in the Global North as a racialized, othered, ‘threatening’ figure affects how migration processes are experienced across categories of difference. All migrants from different backgrounds and contexts must negotiate with the negative connotations and stigma that accompanies migration and, particularly, the label ‘immigrant’. However, they must do so from different standpoints. As explained in Chapter 2, depending on how certain categories of difference intersect in different
scenarios, a person may be more or less prone to experiencing inequalities and benefitting from privileges (Davis, 2008; MacKinnon, 2013). Therefore, not all migrants deal with the baggage of migration from the same starting point, affecting how they (re)construct their identities through migration, how they establish a sense of belonging abroad, and how they position themselves within their receiving country (Lundström, 2017).

The intricacies of these intersections in migration experiences, and the impact of these migration discourses, is captured when observing intra-European migration flows. Guðjónsdóttir’s research on Icelanders living in Norway after the Icelandic financial collapse in 2008 does just that (2014). She astutely explores the hierarchy of whiteness and otherness imposed by migration discourses by ethnographically capturing how Icelanders attempted to avoid the label “innvandrer”, used in Norway to designate those who do not belong, a label which is usually reserved for racialized migrants. Icelanders generalized whiteness and shared history with Norway allowed them to avoid this label, establishing an assumed sense of belonging in the receiving country. However, those who did not fit the norm of whiteness were othered with the label “innvandrer”; being mistaken for Spaniards, Italians, or Turks because of their comparatively darker skins or hair. These would find ways of communicating their nationality to Norwegians they interacted with to gain symbolic capital associated to that nationality in day-to-day interactions, counteracting their physical traits that set them apart (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014:181). Despite being privileged in their migration experience to Norway, as well as sharing historical and social imaginaries as geopolitical neighbors, Icelanders who didn’t fit the white norm had to reject the “innvandrer” label, and its’ racialized connotations, actively and continuously through daily practices and strategies (De Certeau, 1984).

The subtleties that Guðjónsdóttir’s work reveals white normativity, inof power, and migration discourses in Europe, is very useful to this research. As a thesis that focuses on intra-European flows of migration, these subtle yet relevant differentiations between who is or isn’t categorized as a migrant are telling as to how global inequalities are reproduced through everyday practice (2014). Additionally, her work illustrates the impact of the Global North’s migrant discourse, its’ racist underpinnings, and its’ relationship to geopolitical webs of power; that these Icelanders were unknowingly perpetuating through their daily navigation of their migration experiences in Norway (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014). It also underlines the constant nature of identity construction within privileged migration experiences, depicting how privileged migrants utilize different identity categories within their reach to better their migration experience.

Research like the latter are scarce, as academic debates around the categorization of migration, and its consequences, tend to be largely focused on those categories that aggravate the vulnerability of migrants (Jubany, 2017). However, European discourses that speak of migration as a crisis and the growing stigmatization of the label ‘immigrant’, with its’ racialized and geopolitical underpinnings that generate otherness, set a stimulating scene in which to observe identity (re)construction. European migrants who have privileged movement throughout Europe, must still negotiate with these migration discourses, prejudices, stereotypes, and labels when constructing their identities abroad.
In these new contexts, their bodies and identities are interpreted differently, forcing them to actively reject the ‘immigrant’ label if they want to gain a certain level of belonging and social capital; an action which in and of itself reproduces hierarchies of power and social inequality for the European migrants’ gain (Bourdieu, 1989; Guðjónsdóttir, 2014).

Paying academic attention to these sorts of migration flows and migrant identity (re)constructions is key when dispelling the stereotype of migrants as disempowered, passive, precarious, and from the Global South (Croucher, 2012; Kunz, 2016). With the mobility turn in the early 2000’s to now, said negative stereotype of the migrant figure has been questioned through a lens that speaks of migration in terms of fluidity, flexibility, and multiplicity (Franquesa, 2011). The mobility turn has its’ critiques, as it created a bias towards mobility and a dichotomy between mobility and immobility, assuming that those who are immobile are passive without taking into consideration the uneven distribution of (im)mobility⁶, and its’ intersections with gender, race, class, and context (Mata-Codesal, 2015). Despite the latter, this paradigm shift was a step towards the breaking of fixed migration categories and its’ associated stereotypes. It showed the possibility of understanding migration as both a process and a product of world transformations that was relative and multiple, where people always move but at different and relative rates, in distinctive ways, and for diverse reasons; meaning that preexisting fixed migrant categories weren’t representing these fluid realities (Franquesa, 2011; Schewel, 2020).

Despite the latter, the figure of the migrant continues being othered and stigmatized in Western contexts. This is evident by the continued securitization of European borders and the creation of a meta-narrative of a migration crisis, reinforced by the risk of contagion COVID-19 poses. Social sciences and migration studies are attempting to subvert how migrants are ‘othered’ through new avenues of study regarding migration and mobility. Unfortunately, the construction of the migrant ‘other’ is persistent, and so are its’ associated prejudices and stigmas. In fact, it is what foregrounded the mobility turns greatest critique concerning immobile persons who were recurrently characterized as passive. This construction was reminiscent to that of the stereotyped migrant associated to the label ‘immigrant’.

Consequently, the following section will explore other figures within migration studies, how these are constructed in relation to the migrant ‘other’ within public discourse and academia. Thus, exemplifying through their exploration the importance of studying and understanding other forms of migration and mobility that go beyond marginality, finding nuances in migration and mobile experiences (Croucher, 2012).

⁶ Researchers use (im)mobility to connect mobility to immobility. It is a way to reference both in one term (Franquesa, 2011; Mata-Codesal, 2015).
3.1.2. The other side of migration: privileged migrants

The long-standing tradition of studying marginal and precarious migrants in migration studies, has brought a disproportional focus to production and labor-oriented migration and mobility practices of marginal groups, reproducing, and reinforcing traditional categories of migration (Mancinelli, 2021). Said tradition has been broken within migration studies through the mobility turn. This has highlighted the existence of relatively privileged migration and mobility practices, categories, and labels. These are often invisibilized in academic work and social consciousness because of their assumed whiteness and privilege (Pease, 2010). Examples of these relatively privileged migrant figures are that of the expatriate, the cosmopolitan, the digital nomad, the transnational employee, or the exchange student. These figures are perceived by society as separate from the migrant ‘other’, not supposing the same ‘threat’, and partaking in the reproduction of traditional categories of migration.

This is exemplified in the absence of certain terms, like diaspora or transnationalism when speaking of migrant communities who do not fit the traditional criteria of ‘otherness’ associated to the label ‘immigrant’ (Brah, 1996; Nowicka, 2007; Croucher, 2012). Migration groups who are white, come from a middle to upper socioeconomic class, are migrating from the Global North, or aren’t migrating due to extreme necessity, also present clear patterns of home and place making that are in accord with what is understood to be a diaspora or a transnational community. However, these terms are seldomly used to describe privileged home and place making experiences. This is because of the influence of white hegemonic normativity in the creation of traditional categories of migration and its’ ensuing concepts. Both diaspora and transnationalism are concepts associated with trauma and displacement, or with resisting dominant logics of capitalism in receiving countries, which in turn ties the terms to a particular stereotype of the migrant ‘other’ that is racialized and from the Global South (Brah, 1996; Croucher, 2012). This association limits the way community making across migration categories can be understood. Brah argues in her seminal work that these terms, specifically diaspora, should be used for all types of migration practices to explore what makes them similar and different (1996). Thus, highlighting how these terms allow academics to understand how locations are experienced, how a sense of home and belonging is created, and how certain migration trajectories have a particular history (Brah, 1996).

Similarly, the use of the word ‘stigma’ is rather limited when speaking of privileged forms of migration. This is because ‘stigma’ has been associated to the precarious and vulnerable (Goffman, 1963). As critics of Goffman have highlighted, this is a rather static and passive way of viewing stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001). Labels associated to privileged migration, like the label ‘expatriate’, have negative connotations that affect how these privileged migrants construct their lives abroad. This is how ‘stigma’ is used to describe the label ‘immigrant’. Therefore, not using ‘stigma’ to describe privilege migration patterns where that use is warranted is another way of reproducing traditional categories of migration, forgoing the nuances privileged migration practices have. This limit the
ways in which these communities can be understood and analyzed, both in academia and in public discourse.

By placing privileged migration and mobility practices in conversations regarding concepts like diaspora, transnationalism, or stigma, new opportunities of research are unlocked. These allow for an exploration of the racial, historical, and geopolitical underpinnings of migration and (im)mobility practices, categories, and hierarchies. Effectively critiquing traditional categories of migration, illustrating global relations of power, and exemplifying why studying privileged forms of migration and mobility is essential (Nowicka, 2007; Croucher, 2012; Benson, 2014; Lundström, 2017). But what is considered privileged migration and mobility?

Privileged migration and mobility refer to forms of movement that aren’t completely determined by economic or geopolitical hardship, with a desire to enhance their quality of life, generally involving North-South migration flows (Croucher, 2012). This privilege is relative to contextual intersecting factors like nationality, gender, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation and more (Crenshaw, 1991). These forms of privileged migration and mobility include, and are not limited to, skilled or professional migration, lifestyle migration, retirement migration or later life migration, student migration, migration for love, or residential tourism (King, 2002; Croucher, 2012). These trends and phenomena are great epistemological tools through which longstanding dualisms in migration studies like internal or international migration, legal or illegal migration, temporary or permanent migration, voluntary or forced migration, leisure or work migration, can be broken or at least blurred (King, 2002). These evidence that not all migrants are non-white, non-Western, and lacking privilege (Kunz, 2016).

In fact, those who engage in privileged migration are not necessarily above the socioeconomic norm in their home countries (Kunz, 2016; Hayes, 2018). These migrants are maximizing their privilege elsewhere through movement (Mata-Codesal, 2015; Hayes, 2018). In a context of global risk and uncertainty, these privileged migration practices aren’t as secure and privileged as they might seem. This blurs the lines between migrating for economic pressures and migrating for an autonomous and free search for a better quality of life (Mancinelli, 2021). Thus, traditional categories of migration no longer encapsulate the experiences of migrants. Meaning that migration practices, and its categories, are becoming increasingly complex and nuanced.

Previous studies regarding migration categories suggest that there is a hierarchy or a normative ordering of movement that are based on historical and geopolitical underpinnings (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Lundström, 2014; Erel et al., 2016; Kunz, 2020). Through an intersectional lens, it becomes evident that this hierarchy isn’t fixed. It is fluid and changing depending on intersecting contexts and persons. This is illustrated when the media conflates the term ‘immigrant’ with that of ‘refugees’ or ‘asylum seekers’, showing the malleability and instability of migration categories (Kunz, 2020). This calculated ambiguity found in the creation of migration categories makes the ethnographic examination of privilege migrant identity construction complex and suggestive (Gilroy, 1987).
Despite this fluidity, there are various stereotyped figures, or Weberian ‘ideal’ types, in which different meanings and connotations are placed within this hierarchy of categories (Weber, 1949). The migrant ‘other’, or the label ‘immigrant’, is the founding Weberian ‘ideal’ type of migration hierarchies; being at the bottom. This figure is used to justify anti-securitization measures and other racist and othering public policies and discourses (Pajares, 2000). What is often overlooked is that there are other Weberian ‘ideal’ types, like the ‘expatriate’ or ‘cosmopolitan’. These labels have their own stigmas and prejudices, despite their privileged origins. Exploring how these ‘ideal’ types affect, or not, public policy and discourse reveals the intricacies of global mobility regimes.

Just as other migrants, privileged migrants must navigate these existing hierarchies of migration, dialogue with the categories surrounding them, and establish their identities and sense of belonging through them. By doing so, they are reproducing this hierarchy of migration categories, (re)constructing their identities in a manner that best benefits them (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014). This takes place within a context of risk and uncertainty, that despite their relative privilege, also affects the ways in which they experience migration.

Consequently, privileged migration is vast and heterogenous. However, it’s nuances have been overlooked. The migration experiences of privileged migrants are the sites of change, fluidity, where mobility regimes are reinforced and frameworks of power are revealed (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004). To unravel this complexity, this thesis calls for an exploration of privileged migration in relationship to existent traditional migration categories, especially with the label ‘immigrant’. By making privileged migration and migrant ‘others’ dialogue, the relativity of traditional migration categories can be revealed; as well as their role in identity (re)construction and establishing feelings of belonging abroad (Croucher, 2012; Green, 2015; Kunz, 2016). By observing privileged migration practices and labels, the ties between mobility and power relations are highlighted. Illustrating how these frameworks facilitate and reproduce privileges and inequalities, showing how privilege is contextual (Mata-Codesal, 2015; Kunz 2016; Hayes, 2018; Mancinelli, 2021).

### 3.1.3. The expatriate and the cosmopolitan

Privileged migrants, like the Northern European retiree migrants who are the subjects of this research, understand their own privileged migration experiences and construct their identities abroad in relation to the migration categories, hierarchies, and Weberian ‘ideal’ types explored above. Through their own identity construction, they partake in the creation and perpetuation of migration categories and their hierarchical organization. However, they do so through figures and labels adjacent to the migrant ‘other’: the ‘expatriate’ and the ‘cosmopolitan’. These two are the most recognized figures within

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7 This is explored in Chapter 8, where the variety of labels available to informants are analyzed.
8 These terms appeared in fieldwork emically and are ethnographically approached in Chapter 8.
privileged migration trends. As labels, they also hold stigma and prejudices. The stigma these labels bear is nuanced and relative to the context where they are used, especially when taking into consideration the privileged origins of these terms.

There have been some lifestyle migration literature reviews in which cosmopolitans and expatriates appear and are mobilized by lifestyle migrants in different ways, placing its’ labels, prejudices, and associated discourses, in a context of globalized and fluid migration and mobility practices (Mancinelli, 2021). Nevertheless, ethnographic studies that directly broach how both these categories of migration are connected in migration experiences and identity construction are seldom, generally studying both figures separately (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Hayes, 2018). This thesis bridges that gap specifically in Chapter 8. In the field, research subjects organically use both categories of privileged migration, its’ ideal-type figures, labels, and prejudices, to inform their own migration experiences and (re)construct their identities. All of this while also in dialogue with other migration categories, most notably the label ‘immigrant’. The following paragraphs will explore the origins of both these figures, the use of labels, and the prejudices they hold. This is crucial to understand how these affect the identity (re)construction processes of privileged migrants like retiree migrants.

The figure of the ‘expatriate’ is the privileged migrant by excellence within public discourse and academic literature. In the past, the term has mostly been associated with highly skilled migrants and white male corporate cosmopolitanism holding key positions of power in the global economy (Amit, 2007; Amit & Barber, 2015). However, in its origin, ‘expatriate’ refers to a person living outside of their home country, first used in instances to describe colonial officials. These colonial ties still haunt the contemporary usage of the term, holding strong ties with racial and class biases as well as global power relations (Kunz, 2016:91). Currently, the term is rather contested as a statistic and legal concept as well as a category of analysis in academia (Croucher, 2012 Kunz, 2020). This is because of the shift in its’ usage, with retirement migrants, students, and middle-class workers in unskilled jobs using the term to describe their identities within their North-South migration and mobility practices (Kunz, 2016). Evidencing that the term ‘expatriate’ goes beyond the context of highly skilled corporate elites involved in global economies.

Due to its’ ample and almost contradictory use, the term currently carries positive and negative connotations that has led all types of privileged migrants to both embrace and reject the term (Kunz, 2020:4). Its’ colonial ties, assumed whiteness, and sense of entitlement are its’ most contentious connotations, which is illustrated in this very thesis in Chapter 8. In shared social imaginaries and categories of migration, the expatriate ‘ideal’ type is assumed to be white, have a middle-upper class background, moving from the Global North to the Global South, normally for business reasons. Thus, perpetuating global power relations through their movement, tethering together whiteness, management positions of power, post coloniality and modernity in one figure and category of migration (Kunz, 2020).

To analyze this label within the context of British retirees in Spain, this thesis follows Kunz proposal of approaching the term expatriate as a category of practice (2016). Focusing on the grounded-ness of the label is a distinction that allows a
contextualized and intersectional investigation of it and its wide and contradictory applications. This is important when speaking of British migrants, as there is a particular history between the label ‘expatriate’ and the UK that will be explained later. By contextualizing the label within practices, the labelling process of calling oneself an ‘expatriate’ over other categories of migration can be inspected; exploring the intersections it has with class, race and ethnicity, gender, and nationality (Benson, 2014; Kunz, 2020). This focus on practice highlights the great number of migration categories at play when constructing one’s identity as migrant abroad, going beyond the stereotype ‘immigrant’ to include other malleable and contested labels that speak to different experiences. This is where the figure of the cosmopolitan, as another label employed by privileged migrants, must be introduced.

Within academic literature, cosmopolitanism has a rich past of exploring simultaneous otherness tracing back to many illustrious thinkers like Diogenes and Kant, all who spoke of ‘world citizens’ that transcended nationalist and kinship ties (Beck, 2002; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2015). Hence, the term ‘cosmopolitan’ is linked to contemporary understandings of globalization and fluid mobility, explaining the erroneous connection between ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘citizen of the world’ (Jones et al., 2014).

Like the term ‘expatriate’, ‘cosmopolitan’ started to be used by global elite travelers, transnational professionals, and other highly mobile individuals as a way of describing their privileged mobile migration experiences (Nowicka, 2006). The figure’s ideal type is generally understood as individualistic and rootless, breaking naturalized nation-state bonds, belonging to the world, and being open to cultural diversity (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Jones et al., 2014). Due to the term’s ties to taste and cultural appreciation, being ‘cosmopolitan’ has also been used for tourists who search for varied experiences and cultural difference, tied to consumer culture and exoticism (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). However, being ‘cosmopolitan’ appeals to all kinds of migrants with different experiences, leading to the label crossing social, cultural, and economic lines, beyond elite global travelers (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Jones et al., 2014; Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2014). Thus, ‘cosmopolitan’ is now a fluid terms that can be used in relationship to a myriad of ties created across different spaces and places (Jones et al., 2014).

One of the biggest critiques this label receives is how it superimposes passive immobility onto locals, while ‘cosmopolitan’ mobile travelers are assumed to have agency and power. This reproduces a notion that power is mobile, when in actuality power is the force that decides who is mobile and when (Franquesa, 2011). The issues this label has with assuming immobility onto others hides similar issues present in that of the ‘expatriate’: institutionalized whiteness, post-colonialism, and socioeconomic wealth (Hindman, 2009; Glick-Schiller, 2010; Kunz, 2016). Cosmopolitanism and the label ‘cosmopolitan’ must be contextualized within the mobility turn and its’ relation to space and modernity (Nowicka, 2006). This is because the ‘cosmopolitan’ is a figure that highlights dichotomies like mobility/immobility, presence/absence, and distance/proximity (Nowicka, 2006; Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Glick-Schiller &
As such, the label and its’ associated experiences are used by academics to question these dichotomies, stressing changes in time-space conceptions and globalization (Nowicka, 2006; Jones et al., 2014; Mata-Codesal, 2015; Schewel, 2020). Consequently, the label ‘cosmopolitan’ has proven to be just as malleable and conflicting as the ‘expatriate’ label. As a result, it must be explored as a category of practice, not analysis, making it dialogue with other migration categories; something which this thesis follows (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Kunz, 2016).

Exploring tensions between migration categories, be it ‘expatriate’, ‘cosmopolitan’, or ‘immigrant’, opens productive spaces to analyze identity (re)construction processes. Said exploration must be done with caution. Firstly, studies on privileged migration may perpetuate conceptions of homogenously privileged individuals who are wealthy, white, male, from the Global North. Secondly, creating a dialogue between different migration categories that have varied relationships to power may reinforce stereotypes and labels that dichotomize privileged migration versus precarious and marginalized migration (Croucher, 2012; Kunz, 2016). To avoid these issues, this thesis uses a grounded ethnographic approach to how individuals and groups employ these categories of migration in the field, generating a productive site for analysis.

By calling attention to grounded uses of migration categories, a slippage between migration terminologies becomes evident, showing how concepts, labels, and experiences are viscose (Saldanha, 2007; Kunz, 2020). Viscosity is a concept Saldanha uses in his ethnography on psychedelic drug use in Goa, India, and its ties to whiteness (2007). He uses this term to speak about how certain places, practices, and labels in Goa were predominantly white and Western, but underwent transgressions of those limits continuously (Saldanha, 2007). Saldanha’s viscosity can be applied to the quotidian use of migration categories, especially by privileged white migrants. The concept allows us to think about these categories in a more flexible manner, while still maintaining its’ close ties to its privileged origins. When applying viscosity, it becomes evident that these labels stick to certain people, spaces, and practices while also being used and applied in transgressive ways that infringe the boundaries between categories.

Ultimately, ethnographically exploring labels associated to privileged migration like ‘expatriate’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ as categories of practice that are viscose, gives space for identity (re)construction processes of migrants like the ones’ broached in this thesis to be explored with nuance and context. In turn, this helps break the boundaries between categories of migration, their dualisms and dichotomies, illustrating how migration categories are interrelated and power moves through mobility regimes.

3.2. Choosing a way of life: lifestyle and retirement migration

After establishing why privileged forms of migration are relevant within the existing academic environment, this thesis must be positioned within the literature regarding privileged migration. Retiree migrants, particularly Northern Europeans to Spain, have commonly been framed within the academic literature of lifestyle and retirement
migration, as well as mobility. Thus, this thesis uses lifestyle, retirement migration, and mobility as the theoretical framework that foregrounds this research.

Retirement migration is understood in this research within the umbrella of lifestyle migration and mobility trends. The inclusion of both migration and mobility lenses is important because they allow for a more comprehensive study of retiree migrant experiences. When speaking of lifestyle migration there is an implied desire to settle, crafting linear migration experiences; meanwhile, lifestyle mobilities do not have these desires, viewing travel and movement as an aim within itself (Mancinelli, 2021). Retirement migration has been traditionally catalogued as a migration trend, not mobility, due to intentions to settle within the receiving country. However, in practice many retiree migrants have fluid mobile lifestyles due to their privileged backgrounds that allow them to be mobile when desired. Subsequently, retirement migration can also be understood through a mobility lens. It is useful when capturing the multiple experiences of older people on the move and, also, it breaks the linear focus migration leans towards, giving significance to what happens between movement and travel (Williams et al., 2000). Throughout the following pages, both lifestyle migration and mobility are used to include the wide range of fluid practices that exist in the intersection of lifestyle and travel.

Lifestyle migration and mobility literature has tended to study North-South mobility flows, bringing an analytical eye to the colonial legacies of contemporary mobility regimes (Benson, 2015; Hayes, 2018). It has famously been defined as "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life" (O’Reilly & Benson, 2009:2). Consequently, it is a migration and mobility phenomenon that appreciates privilege and its nuances through a focus on lifestyle, consumption and a desire for leisure, health, and well-being (Mancinelli, 2021). It shares close ties with tourism, retirees and tourists enjoy leisure-oriented lives, and is an umbrella term that encompasses retirement and old age-related mobility, mobility for education, mobile work, digital nomads and more.

This lifestyle focus grew out of the 1990’s rapid globalization, responding to previous tendencies to study migration in relation to production and labor. Lifestyle migration was a way of breaking those traditional categories in a time where globalization was starting to turn migration and mobility tendencies on its’ head. Currently, the differences between production-led versus consumption-led migration and mobility have become increasingly blurry. Lifestyle migration now is a field that explores said blurriness in provocative ways, suggesting that the privilege lifestyle migration involves is an “epistemological frame” that can offer nuance onto contemporary global mobility regimes (Hayes, 2021; Mancinelli, 2021). That is where this thesis positions itself, viewing lifestyle migration and retirement migration as an expression as an opportunity to explore the nuances of privilege in relation to migration and mobility.

Before moving forward, what is a lifestyle must be examined because it is at the core of this branch of migration and mobility studies. Lifestyle is a very broad concept that encompasses individual values and behaviors that are expressed through activities,
personal identification, interaction with other social groups, and, ultimately, how they exercise their freedom of choice (Sharlamanov & Petreska, 2019). Pierre Bourdieu, Ulrich Beck, and Anthony Giddens are the three most well-known contemporary theorists regarding lifestyle and its connections to modernity, informing much of lifestyle migration literature (Sharlamanov & Petreska, 2019). These three theorists highlight how individualist lifestyles have taken over the importance class as an identifying factor that elicited belonging, and introduces the power of the immaterial, personal choice, and consumption within social stratification.

Bourdieu highlights the current complexity of social stratification by going beyond the material and introducing cultural capital, referring to taste and immaterial life conditions (Bourdieu, 1986; Sharlamanov & Petreska, 2019). He encapsulates both the material and immaterial aspects of lifestyles within the idea of habitus, explained briefly in Chapter 2. Having similar habitus elicits feelings of belonging with others, but it isn’t on the scale social class used to do so (Bourdieu, 2007). Beck also addresses diluted class-belonging but through individualization. He explores how it has heightened the importance of personal life projects and choices when creating a sense of identity, creating more difference within and between social classes and effectively diluting a larger sense of belonging associated to class (Beck, 1992). Thus, individuals are responsible for their own life projects in ways they weren’t before. Beck grounds these observations in Western societies, where structural players, like the welfare state, are agents of individualization (Sharlamanov & Petreska, 2019). Finally, Giddens conceives lifestyles as routinized practices, adopted, or handed down, that give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (Giddens, 1991). These three theorists illustrate in varying ways how individuals embedded within individualist capitalist and neoliberal societies must negotiate their lifestyles through consumption, (re)constructing their identities through these daily actions of compulsory choices that are socially given more importance than ever before (Bourdieu, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004). Resulting in a reflexive modernity where personal choice is directly related to social stratification, increasing the differences and inequalities within and between social classes and diluting a sense of belonging associated to that (Bourdieu, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2004).

Identity construction is closely tied to lifestyle migration studies, entailing a reflexive (re)construction of identity through self-narration that informs one’s life project planning decisions. Said reflexivity generates aspirations and goals that are meant to be found in a new place, leading to the consumption of holiday destinations to (re)construct migrant’s identity’s abroad (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). This is commonly articulated in lifestyle migrants’ migration discourses as the search for the ‘good life’.

Searching for the ‘good life’ is an expression that originates from all types of lifestyle migrants, from digital nomads to retirement migrants (Torkington, David & Sardinha, 2015; Mancinelli & Fàbrega, 2020). It is an elusive expression that appears across lifestyle migration discourses, meaning different things to each individual and their own life projects (Salazar, 2014). In fact, this term appears frequently throughout this thesis, as British retiree migrants would use it frequently to describe their lifestyles
in Spain. The term loosely refers to activities, amenities, and opportunities necessary to reset a work-life balance that aren’t available to the migrant in their home country; normally leading to the consumption of a particular place and its’ imaginaries as a holiday destination of relaxation and escape (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Therefore, lifestyle migration illustrates how lifestyle choices are commodified within Global North societies because of growing individualization and consumer capitalism (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991).

In many instances, searching for the ‘good life’ is another way of speaking about finding means to transcend traditional class structures through the consumption of migration (Korpela, 2014; Mancinelli & Fàbrega, 2020). This is called geographic arbitrage, normally presented as an individual strategy used to maximize one’s socioeconomic standing in a lower cost, normally Global South, country (Hayes, 2014; 2018). Geographic arbitrage isn’t available to all, as a key part of it is being able to mobilize the most privileged parts of one’s identity in a new context (Benson, 2015). These traits tend to be whiteness and nationality, which are transformed into social capital within receiving societies due to sociocultural contexts and historicity between sending and receiving countries; like the Icelanders and Norway who mobilized share historicity between sender and receiving countries (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Lundström, 2014; Hayes, 2018). The ties between whiteness, nationality, and lifestyle migration have been downplayed in the past, but recently they have gained more importance. Studies have been placing more focus on how the intersection of whiteness, nationality, and lifestyle migration generates an ethnocentric ‘good life’ based on Western social imaginaries as well as affects the ways in which relationships between lifestyle migrants and locals are crafted (Benson, 2015; Mancinelli, 2021). Thus, placing more importance onto how these categories of difference are interpreted in new contexts post-migration, gaining access to new forms of privilege whilst perpetuating the power relations associated to those categories of difference.

As the search for the ‘good life’ and geographic arbitrage illustrate, lifestyle migration offers the opportunity to access new forms of symbolic capital in significant ways. Symbolic capital is part of Bourdieu’s four capitals, and part of creating a habitus. This concept is at the crux of the material and immaterial, between class and status, being the space where individuals can acquire certain goods that represent a particular value that is not only economic but social and cultural (Bourdieu, 2007). Searching for the ‘good life’ gives meaning to life course transitions by triggering identity (re)constructions through movement and consumption of places that elicit social, cultural, and economic value (Amit, 2007; Bourdieu, 2007; Salazar, 2014). This is palpable in the migration discourses lifestyle migrants craft about their migration experiences, explaining the reasons for their migration, normally involving traumatic life events that led them to search for change and meaning through movement. These events normally involve some type of emotional fall out and/or big life changes, like the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, divorce, or retirement (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Hayes, 2018). In these migration discourses, a migrant (re)constructs their identity in relation to migration and the experiences derived from it as well as the life experiences that brought to it. These create
an intersubjective sense of reality within that migrant group or community, emphasizing shared aspirations, expectations, and experiences that characterize the migration trend and the sending and receiving countries.

In the case of lifestyle migrants, there is a tendency to craft these discourses around traumatic life events and how these led to the search for a better way of life somewhere that provides a break from past pressures or traditional and normative structures of life; like breaking chrononormative\(^9\) expectations in later life by migrating away from them. That ‘somewhere’ tends to be a holiday destination that is marketed as idyllic, relaxing and a place to escape to. This is referred to as an escape narrative, found within migration discourses (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Escape narratives are present in many types of mobility practices, from tourism to retirement migration. They are particularly prevalent in those of lifestyle migrants because of the connection between desiring escape and holiday destination imaginaries, which romanticize ‘greener pastures’ that offer said escape (Salazar, 2014). These narratives intersubjectively generate places to escape from and places to escape to, while also (re)constructing identities of lifestyle migrants as adventurous, travelers, and ‘risk takers’ (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Salazar, 2014; Hayes, 2018). Despite being intimately tied with consumption and reproducing a capitalist neoliberal agenda, lifestyle migration is experienced as an intimate undertaking involving personal desires, giving significance to life events, and self-identification (Giddens, 1991; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009).

Ultimately, lifestyle migration is generally understood as an individual project of self-fulfillment and identity construction that reflects many current aspects of Western societies, such as growing individualization, consumerism, reflexive modernity, and social class differences (Hayes, 2018; Mancinelli, 2021). The latter has marked lifestyle migrants as the epitome of fluid modernity, being constant examples of individualization and neoliberalism. Such fixation on lifestyle and individualization, which the trend does emphasize, neglects external forces that stimulate said migration trends. Mancinelli adequately points out in her review of lifestyle migrations in the Asia Pacific, that these forms of migration and mobility are a product of governmental legal frameworks that enable and perpetuate them, viewing lifestyle migrants as a financial investment that in turn perpetuates traditional hierarchies of migration (2021). Thus, the nation-states and their actions are also an example of neoliberal subjects, like lifestyle migrants. These policies are deemed to be opportunist, but they are perpetuating North-South divides, taking advantage of them for their own benefit, just as individuals do in their migration and mobility strategies through geographic arbitrage (Mancinelli, 2021). Other actors, like solicitors, visa agencies and private healthcare providers, also benefit from these trends and should be inspected as well, being complicit in the creation of these trends (Mancinelli, 2021). Essentially, the critique is based upon the tendency to focus on the individualized lifestyle and identities encouraged through lifestyle migration, without taking into consideration the contexts and structures that inform and shape them.

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\(^9\) Chrononormativity was explained in Chapter 2.
Yet, lifestyle is still a key concept within this thesis and lifestyle migration literature. Contemporary theorists offer a view of lifestyles that is linked to an increasingly complex social stratification, adding in material and immaterial factors that lead to the creation of personal and consumption choices, that configure day to day patterns of action that shape identity construction (Bourdieu, 1986; 2007; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). The focus on identity this thesis assumes is correlative to the importance given to identity within lifestyle migration and mobility. However, there is also a focus on how identities dialogue with communities, belonging, and structures - like legal parameters and touristic infrastructure. This will be illustrated in the following pages in relation to retirement migration, exploring the academic approaches around the trend and the migrant subjects that engage in it, later focusing on European retirement migration and the structures in place that facilitate it.

3.2.1. Retirement and late life migration: academic approaches and migrant subjects

Retirement migration falls within the umbrella of lifestyle migration and mobility because it entails a search for the elusive ‘good life’ through movement. What differentiates it from others is its’ intersection between old age, retirement, and migration. This intersection explains the attention it receives from many academic fields besides migration, like gerontology and public policy. Despite it being a type of migration that is minor compared to other migration flows, it is one of the most significant types of lifestyle migration, statistically and academically (Hurtado, 2010; Mancinelli, 2021). It is a migration and mobility trend that affects the structural demographic of receiving countries in terms of age, it affects urban planning, housing prices, urbanization rates, and land speculation, while simultaneously applying pressure on public services, like healthcare or public transport (Hurtado, 2010).

The trend has been studied under different terminologies, each emphasizing different aspects of the phenomena. Some have approached it by focusing on the flow of migration, calling it international retirement migration (IRM); this is one of the most popular terminologies (Williams et al., 2000; Durán, 2012; Blaakilde, 2013). Others focus on old age and ageing, speaking of young-old migrations and old-old migration or third and fourth age migrations, with others giving it more nuance by calling it later life migration (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; Walters, 2002; Green, 2015; Ormond & Toyota, 2016). Finally, there are those who focus on the settlement of migrants, leading to studies that explore residential tourism, residential migration, and seasonal migration (Gustafson, 2002; Huete & Mantecón, 2009).

This array of terminologies illustrates the wide scope of approaches the trend has gathered across academic literature. One approach is socio-legal, exploring notions of citizenship, welfare systems, and the rights of retiree migrants abroad (see Echezarreta, 2005; 2016; 2018; Ackers & Dwyer, 2002; Durán & Martín, 2008; Durán, 2012; Green, 2015; Moreno-Fuentes & del Pino Matute, 2015; Álvarez et al., 2018). Meanwhile, in Hispanic academic literature the focal point of research is on the receiving country,
considering the economic, environmental, and social impacts produced by tourism, long-term tourism, and residential migration (see Rodríguez, 2001; Casado-Díaz, 2006; Mazón Martínez, Huete & Mantecón, 2008; 2009; 2011; Membrado Tena, 2015). British and North American sociological literature, which has centered its academic focus on lifestyle, identities, privilege, and the ageing process in retirement (see O'Reilly, 2000; King, 2000; Oliver, 2008; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010; Hall, 2011; Hayes, 2014; 2018; Benson, 2015; Hall & Hardill, 2016). Ultimately, it is a complex field of research that explores the mobility practices of older people from multiple perspectives.

In this research I employ the term retirement and later life migration and mobility. These terminologies have been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, retirement migration was a term recognizable to the subjects of this research. Many used it themselves to describe their migration experiences and lifestyles abroad. Conversely, some subjects didn’t consider themselves to be retired or even experienced retirement, thus making later life migration a more appropriate description of the phenomena. Using both descriptors allows a connection to the field and the terms recognized within it, while also giving space to approach different experiences that do not hinge upon retirement as a life milestone.

As a migration and mobility trend, in-nation retirement, and later life migration to costal or rural areas has been well documented since the 1920’s, mostly involving the bourgeoisie and upper classes (Walters, 2002; Warnes & Williams, 2006). The most well-known national retirement migration flows are found in the United States, where older people migrate to the so-called Sun Belt states, with Florida being the most famous retirement destination in the country (Walters, 2002; Hurtado, 2010). Due to the growth of expendable wealth, evolving technologies, and an increasing ageing demographic in Western societies, retirement and later life migration started to become even more pronounced in the 1990’s (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; Williams et al., 2000; Phillipson, 2013). Simultaneously, the Global North was experiencing a shift in how old age and retirement were conceived, leading to more positive understandings of it, with the successful ageing paradigm at the head of this change (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). In this paradigm shift, retirement is perceived as a life-work reward that offers the opportunity for greater freedom from work and family constraints, increased agency, and mobility in the form of the “good life” (Torkington, David, & Sardinha, 2015)10. Accordingly, retirement migration comes to evoke the development of personal self-realization aspirations with utilitarian considerations, also found in other forms of privileged mobility, reflecting today’s fluid and reflexive modernity (Beck, 1994; D’Andrea, 2006; Bauman, 2007; Oliver, 2008; Korpela, 2014).

With increasing globalization, the national North-South flows started to cross borders, becoming a global international phenomenon. This is exemplified in studies regarding intra-European North to South flows like British, Germans, Norwegians, and Danes retiring to Spain, Portugal or France or from North America to South America, with

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10 The problematics regarding this positive and successful ageing paradigm shift were explored in Chapter 2. Here said shift is connected to the migration and mobility, informing the ‘good life’ searched for abroad by older people. This connection is explored ethnographically in Chapter 6.
North Americans including Canadians retiring to Ecuador, Panama, or Mexico (see O'Reilly, 2000; Breuer, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2005; Gustafson, 2008; Oliver, 2008; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013; Benson, 2015; 2016; Hayes, 2018). Recently more attention has been brought to retirement migration and mobilities in East Asia and Asia Pacific, not only involving Northern Europeans and North Americans, but also involving Japanese, South Koreans, and Taiwanese retirees migrating to places like Thailand, Malaysia, or Cambodia (Ono, 2008; Botterill, 2016; Ormond & Toyota, 2016; Mancinelli, 2021). The most studied migration flows are those intra-European ones, with those in Asia being the least explored academically (Mancinelli, 2021). However, the scope of the phenomena across the globe illustrates how varied and complex it is, crossing national borders, sociocultural understandings of old age, and class barriers.

Like other lifestyle migrants, retiree migrants display high levels of reflexivity and self-narrativity, resulting in escape narratives that construct the reasoning for their migration life projects that participate in the creation of an intersubjective reality regarding the chosen destination as a 'holiday' or 'retirement' place, while also shaping their identities as ‘risk takers’ (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Salazar, 2014; Hayes, 2018). Retiree migrants’ escape narratives break many ‘old age’ assumptions, as they reveal a will for change and taking risks that is countered by Western old age discourses. These escape narratives reveal key aspects of retirement migration’s sociocultural underpinnings through the individualistic and extremely personal language used. Illustrating the trends’ assumed separation from other forms of migration, asserting relative privilege, as well as highlighting its’ individualistic tendencies.

To engage in retirement and later life migration, migrants must have enough socioeconomic capital, and possibly other privileges like whiteness, a particular nationality, or general cultural capital, that allows them to be mobile when desired (Bourdieu, 1986; Amit, 2007; Pease, 2010; Amit & Barber, 2015; Schewel, 2020). That is why retirement migration is generally associated with the figure of the 'expatriate' or the 'cosmopolitan', as these migration figures assume privilege related to whiteness and a high socioeconomic standing. However, with cheaper costs of travel and increasing communication technologies that facilitate the maintenance of transnational relationships, retirement migration has become more accessible across socioeconomic classes. This heightening the trends’ heterogeneity and pushed it further form the stereotypically privileged expatriate or cosmopolitan. Now who is a later life retiree migrant is blurry across class and geopolitical lines, as well as other mobility trends.

In fact, recent studies in the field have shown that being able to retire abroad is not a synonym of upper-class mobility patterns, but a comment on mobility regimes, crumbling welfare states, and changing family care dynamics (Benson, 2014; Green, 2015; Hayes, 2018; Giner-Monfort, 2018). Meaning that retiree migrants experience vulnerability in a myriad of ways within their relatively privileged experiences. Frailty and old age dependency, in a context of lacking support networks and foreign health services, leads to unique experiences of vulnerability that tend to be invisibilized by the group’s perceived privilege (Hurtado, 2010; Hall, 2011; Green, 2015; Hall & Hardill, 2016).
Despite these heterogenous and nuanced experiences, and studies that document them, later life retiree migrants tend to be homogenized under privileged migration figures like the ‘expatriate’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ in the social imaginaries of both sending and receiving countries. As mentioned in section 3.1.3., these terms carry prejudices and stigma, that differ depending on context. Simultaneously, as addressed in Chapter 2, retiree migrants must also deal with ageist societies that perceive old age in conflicting perspectives through the successful ageing paradigm and decline narrative, constructing old age as either deceivingly filled with activity of all kinds (mental, physical, social) or only associated to debility, vulnerability, and dependency. This places the retiree migrant in a position where they must continuously negotiate with their perceived privileged and assess their position within migration categories whilst navigating old age perceptions that may contradict their actual experiences of ageing abroad.

Subsequently, retiree migrants are dealing with a significant gap between discourses and social imaginaries around retirement migration and their experiences (Degnen, 2007; 2012). This epistemological and pragmatic gap was commented on in Chapter 2 regarding, but here we can observe how it extends to the intersection of old age and migration. Due to this gap, retiree migrants are constantly (re)constructing their identities abroad. They find themselves faced with conflicting social discourses and experiences, while simultaneously confronting labels and prejudices that they must navigate. This also affects how communities abroad are established and how feelings of belonging are articulated. It is through this gap that this thesis reveals the thin line between privilege and vulnerability retiree migrants walk, underlining the intersections between migration and ageing found in these through an ethnographic and intersectional approach of retiree migrants’ quotidian experiences.

Studies that ethnographically approach the intersections of old age, race, coloniality, and migration and how these generate experiences of privilege and vulnerability within migration experiences exist but are scarce (Benson, 2014; Green, 2015; Hayes, 2018). These intersectional observations comment on broader issues, like mobility regimes, the waning of the welfare state in Western countries, and overall power structures. Intersectionality also illustrates how categories of difference are read in different contexts pre and post migration, highlighting how privilege travels and what stands in its’ way, resulting in vulnerability. Therefore, approaching retiree migrants’ identity construction and experiences abroad intersectionally is a thought-provoking exercise that allows for traditional categories of migration, mobility regimes, legal and governmental frameworks, sociocultural understandings of old age and the life course, to be questioned.

In this thesis said intersectional approach is applied through an ethnographic exploration of retiree migrants’ individual and collective experiences abroad. By contextualizing discourses in everyday practices, we can observe how old age, migration and socioeconomic class labels, prejudices, and pressures travel and are rearticulated within new contexts (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Observing the latter, both collectively and individually, illustrates the constant negotiations retiree migrants must make regarding
their intersecting migration and ageing experiences and how these can be interpreted through a privileged or vulnerable lens.

As a thesis that ethnographically focuses on intra-European migration flows, the current geopolitical and sociosanitary context in Europe due to Brexit and COVID-19 must be noted. These have created a suggestive ethnographic scene through which migration and mobility trends and old age in Europe can be explored and questioned. Thus, reinvigorating an academic field that isn’t novel, as mentioned in section 3.1. When coupled with the theoretical framework presented above, this thesis explores to what extent inequalities are reproduced through mobility regimes and old age discourses. Simultaneously illustrating the intersectional intricacies of identity (re)construction in moments of life course changes like old age and migration. To bring a more complete and contextualized view of retirement migration, the next pages briefly present external and structural factors that currently affect the trend in Europe.

3.2.2 Implications of retirement migration in Europe

As Mancinelli points out, there are infrastructures, legal parameters, and economic interests that facilitate certain migration flows (2021). This reflection pushes towards a realization that retirement and later life migration and mobility should not only be explored from the perspective of individualist neoliberal lifestyles, but also by the structures that allow for these to thrive. By doing so, a broader understanding of the phenomena can be achieved, commenting on mobility regimes and old age discourses enforced and reproduced through it.

There are many factors that participate in the stimulus of later life and retirement migration within Europe that goes beyond the increasing tendency towards individualization and neoliberalism intersected with flipping demographic pyramids. The following pages give an overview of the structures that facilitate the creation and proliferation of intra-European retirement and later life migration that then shape the identities and communities of retiree migrants, thus contextualizing and grounding the phenomena.

Firstly, there is the Free Movement of Persons Act that allows Europeans to move freely between member states of the EU 27 (Ackers & Dwyer, 2004). Despite the desire to promote labor mobility this Act backs, it also lays the legal parameters on which retirement and later life migration within the EU is facilitated. In Chapter 7, the exact legal requirements necessary to migrate for retirement from one EU country to another, particularly the United Kingdom (UK) to Spain, are reviewed in detail. What is important to note here is how easy it is to move within EU borders if one has a European passport and enough economic resources, especially before the COVID-19 pandemic. As individuals who do not plan to work in the receiving country, there is no immediate pressure on them to carry out bureaucratic processes necessary to regularize their status in the receiving EU country. If retiree migrants receive and have access to their pensions, this practice is incredibly accessible, which gives them a sort of legal invisibility that many use to avoid governmental control (Ackers & Dwyer, 2004). Thus, differentiating who is
a retiree migrant and who is a tourist is complicated through quantitative research because official governmental records do not reflect the trend (Durán, 2012; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013; Giner-Monfort, 2018; Hall, 2021). Nonetheless, this illustrates the fluid mobility retiree migrants have thanks to these EU legal parameters.

This also presents another key aspect that influences retirement migration: tourism and its economic pull. Tourists and later life retiree migrants share similar lifestyle practices focused on leisure and use the same infrastructures, illustrating the mobility spectrum tourism and retirement and later life migration and mobility lay on together (Rizoma, 2005; Membrado Tena, 2015). In fact, tourism is the steppingstone towards retirement migration found in many of the escape narratives retiree crafted by migrants. This also highlights the source of income these ambiguous mobility practices bring to EU countries and the economic interests it awakens. Tourism is a key source of income for many EU countries, particularly those in the Southern Europe, like Spain (Durán, 2012). This creates an interest to cater towards tourists and retiree migrants for countries that are holiday and retirement destinations in their social policies and infrastructures. Consequently, the economic benefit of tourism and new residents, like retiree migrants, is considered one of the most important factors when establishing new projects and social policies in local governments of holiday destinations, something which many have criticized (Membrado Tena, 2015).

The welfare state is another aspect to consider. This key structure influences retirement migration because of the advanced age of migrants and their healthcare needs. The EU does not have the same welfare scheme throughout it, with every member state having different welfare structures that affect access to healthcare and pension schemes. There are two general approaches to welfare in the EU: the Bismarckian or the Beveridgean. The first provides social insurance to those who have contributed to the country consistently through paid labor. The second hinges on levels of need, which is assessed through an application process (Dwyer & Papadimitriou, 2007). Due to budget cuts in public funding after the 2008 economic crisis, many welfare systems in Europe switched to a Bismarckian approach (Hall & Hardill, 2016:14). This approach is cheaper to enforce and creates a notion of reciprocity between the state and the citizen as a worker, establishing that paid work is the price for welfare. This negatively affects retirees, as their pensions are tied to their home countries where they have worked (Ackers & Dwyer, 2004). To sidestep this issue, the EU established that if all proper bureaucratic measures are completed in the receiving country, regularizing the legal status of the later life retiree migrant, they can then access welfare benefits. The receiving country does not shoulder the entire burden of giving said welfare benefits, with the home country of retiree migrants paying for the welfare benefits retiree migrants receive abroad. However, the legal invisibility retiree migrants may opt for by not regularizing their legal status in the receiving country means they do not have access to healthcare or other benefits beyond emergency care. This can lead to vulnerability and even precarity.

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11 This connection is explored further in Chapter 5.
12 This agreement varies between countries, but overall, it functions similarly across EU member states.
for retiree migrants in the long term, especially in EU countries where the welfare system assumes family care networks are in place, planning their services accordingly (Hall & Hardill, 2016; Calzada, 2017).

The nuances of this slippage from privileged legal invisibility to vulnerability and precarity in relation to legal parameters and structures, is studied in more detail in Chapter 7, where these issues are explored ethnographically. However, what must be emphasized here is the EU's desire, as a geopolitical and legal entity, to facilitate this type of mobility reflected in their laws and agreements between EU member states. This desire, mostly driven by economic interests, is what facilitates this trend to continue within the EU, especially when accompanied by discourses of successful ageing, growing individualization, and the existing tie between physical mobility and upward social mobility. This exemplifies how individual's self-narratives and life projects, crafted from increasingly individualistic notions of self and identity, are also part of a process of personal appropriation of standardized consumption stimulated by geopolitical and legal entities, like the EU, and private companies (Giddens, 1991).

There is more to retirement migration than the individual life projects that instigate them. Behind these, there are legal parameters, structures, infrastructures, and a myriad of interests that influence and reproduce retirement migration. In the EU, the Free Movement of Persons Act, the economic reliance on tourism-like mobilities, and the welfare state benefits given to EU citizens - if formally registered - are all factors that support intra-European retirement migration. These decisions aren’t simply ‘convenient’, they are strategic in aiding some migrants over others, reproducing hierarchies of power related to migration, mobility, and ageing (Mancinelli, 2021). These factors must be taken into consideration when investigating retirement migration, especially when retiree migrants are so often marked as the epitome of neoliberalism, when in fact they are a part of these broader structures, parameters, and systems that encourage these types of trends.

The following chapters will pay special attention to these external factors beyond individual identities, observing communities to small businesses that act as migration facilitators and overall legal parameters and structures that influence retiree migrants’ experiences of ageing abroad. This contextualizes the realities in which retiree migrants craft their life projects and identities, giving the trend nuance and moving beyond the solely individualistic approaches to it. This is achieved through an ethnographic approach that allows for this nuance to be captured, due to the sensitivity towards difference ethnography has and its capacity to capture discourses and practices of lived experiences.
4.1. Why ethnography?

Retirement and later life migration and mobility comprises a phenomenon that sparks interdisciplinary interest. However, quantitative studies struggle with the irregular mobile practices of retiree migrants, making this trend harder to track especially within the European Union (Durán, 2012; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013; Giner-Monfort, Hall, & Betty, 2015; Giner-Monfort, 2018; Hall, 2021). This gives qualitative approaches an advantage, as they can give a grounded insight into what retirement and later life migration looks like on the field (Breuer, 2005; Oliver, 2008; Hurtado, 2010; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013; Giner-Monfort, Hall, & Betty, 2015). Accordingly, this research advocates for an ethnographic approach to retirement and later life migration that focuses on proximity with informants and their environment, as a way of understanding their reality and the meanings they give to it in times of major life course changes such as ageing and migration (Jorgensen, 1989). This is done by acquiring an intimacy with the field that only ethnography allows through fieldwork; understood here as the prolonged contact with a specific context to understand a foreign reality. Fieldwork explores research questions marked by the ethnographer, while simultaneously establishing relationships with informants that further the ethnographer’s knowledge through their ushering of their own lived context. This is how “social life itself” is accessed as “raw material” needed for anthropological studies (Evans-Pritchard, 1951:74).

Through periods of fieldwork conducted between 2019 and 2020 in different British expatriate retiree communities, participant observation was conducted to acquire said intimacy with the field; welcoming any opportunities to access different facets of retirement migrants’ lives. There was also an express intention throughout fieldwork of creating spaces to inquire about other aspects of informants lived experiences. These spaces could take shape in the form of interviews or focus groups, where informants and myself, the ethnographer, came together to dialogue about certain topics observed in the field. In total, the data collected amounted to:

- 6 months of participant-observation
- 49 in depth interviews with British retirees between the ages of 57 to 101 \(^{13}\)
  - 15 in depth interviews were conducted via online platforms or telephone due to COVID-19. These comprised more than one encounter, gaining the same degree of depth and rapport existent in past interviews.
- 7 interviews with retirement and later life migration ‘facilitators’
- 4 focus groups with between 3 to 15 participants

\(^{13}\) Go to Annex 1 for a complete table of the interviewees.
These methods, from now on referred to generically as fieldwork, were conducted on two Spanish coasts: Costa del Sol and Costa Brava. By choosing two different retirement destinations, this research illustrates a countrywide phenomenon of Northern European retirement and later life migration, while also giving a situated nuanced look at the ageing and migration experiences these hold. These two coasts were selected because of their positioning on opposing ends of the Spanish Mediterranean coastline, because of their historic association with touristic development, being considered "mature touristic destinations", and because of their significance and presence (or lack thereof) within Anthropology and lifestyle migration studies (Sardá, Mora, & Avila, 2006). Thus, both coasts represent differences in coastal retirement destinations available in Spain as well as differences in academic appeal; with Costa del Sol garnering more academic attention throughout the years, while Costa Brava has not (O’Reilly, 2000; Oliver, 2008; Durán, 2012).

By ethnographically studying both these coasts, tensions between different ageing life projects led by retiree migrants can be captured. Simultaneously giving a generalized view of retirement and later life migration in Spain, while also questioning the nuances within it. In terms of fieldwork, when I speak of Spain, I am referring to these two retirement destinations as ethnographic spaces. In each destination the same methods and procedures were followed, with a few distinctions due to contextual differences.

Before moving forward, it must be noted that, in this thesis, spaces are understood as malleable and moveable, while places are bound by the geographical and physical (Massey, 2005). Space is used in this research to refer to ethnographic spaces - with its moving persons and relations that aren’t bound by a particular physical post - and to refer to research spaces - created by myself through interviews and focus groups. Instead, the term place is used to refer to physically and geographically bound ethnographic locations. This does not mean that spaces cannot have a home within ethnographic places, as depending on who is where and what relationships are established, a space can change and flow (De Certeau, 1984; Massey, 2005; Jones et al., 2014).

In this research, the qualitative tools used were participant observation, in depth interviews and focus groups; resulting in the triangulation of methods and findings that generates a more comprehensive understanding of retirement and later life migration. This type of in-depth ethnographic methods provide access to discourses and practices that compose Northern European retirement migrant experiences, gaining both rich and thick data in the process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Said data was then processed through data saturation, applying the experimentation of the recurrent appearance of theoretical themes throughout fieldwork, indicating their relevance in the posterior process of codification and analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018).

The process was informed by an intersectional framework that assured an acute observation of nuance, contextually grounding social relations and emphasizing power relations found within the field (Hankivisky & Grace, 2015; Ruiz Ben, 2018). This approach is appropriate when studying retirement migrants like British expatriate retirees because of the privilege and vulnerability their migration later life experiences
As mentioned in Chapter 2, intersectionality has been used to illustrate precarious lived experiences and their connections to power structures. As subjects that are both privileged and vulnerable due to different sociocultural phenomenon, an intersectionally informed methodology can illustrate the power relations at play behind these experiences, questioning normalized paradigms within ageing and migration in Western societies (Carbado et al., 2013; MacKinnon, 2013; Collins & Blige, 2017).

The following pages expose in detail the methodological framework that drives this research; reviewing research objectives, exploring the reasoning behind its’ methodology, introducing the case study of British retiree migrants, through which the Northern European retirement and later life migration phenomena is understood, and finally presenting the places and spaces where fieldwork was conducted.

It must be noted that the Coronavirus pandemic, starting in early 2020, influenced these ethnographic methods and research plan. The ways in which the pandemic shaped this research will be detailed throughout the chapter, explaining how the methodological framework was adapted to suit the safety and health measures of that socio-sanitary period.

4.2. Reviewing Objectives

Before diving into the methodology and its application, it is necessary to review the research objectives. These are a road map to data collection and analysis, informed by the three pillars that compose this thesis: identity, ageing and migration.

This research has 6 objectives, detailed in the introduction, which bring up the following questions:

- identity (re)construction in retirement and later life migration and later life
- the interconnections between privilege, labelling practices, and belonging when ageing abroad
- how old age is constructed and experienced in retiree communities and how socio-historical constructions of old age affect these
- how does privileged migration and ageing experiences intersect in contexts of geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts

These questions point to an implicated exploration of British retiree life, observing day to day community interactions to detect shared discourses and practices. Thus, the methodology conducted aimed to capture intricacies of British retiree community life.

4.3. Capturing and questioning tensions in the field

It was important for this research to devise an ethnographic methodology able to effectively collect information on the intersections of ageing, migration, and identity, while simultaneously problematizing privilege. To do so the discourses created around these factors, and how they are experienced, must be reflected upon.
Both ageing and migration are pivotal moments in the life course that imply social and physical changes that promote identity (re)construction. Meanwhile, privilege pierces these experiences in a variety of ways that affect life project planning and identity (re)construction. Despite the latter, ageing and migration aren’t clear-cut life events, while privilege is quite elusive in its whiteness and taken-for-granted-ness (Pease, 2010). Ageing, migration, and privilege are complex occurrences that tend to have conflicting discourses and practices. Meaning people tend to say one thing and do another.

Said conflict is constantly present in studies regarding the successful ageing paradigm. As explored in Chapter 2, ageing has a materiality to it that frustrates discourse and practice in different ways, especially in Western societies where the successful ageing paradigm is more prevalent (Lamb, 2014). This highlights ageing’s “intriguing disjuncture” between how it is conceived and how it is experienced, leading ageing individuals to a complex negotiation between discourse and practice through lived experience (Degnen, 2007:70).

Migration suffers from a similar issue. Migrant’s craft strong migration discourses regarding their journeys and identities. Yet, post-migration, their lifestyles may put their own migration discourses in question. This is especially true for lifestyle migrants, who prior migration craft strong narratives regarding the personal purpose of their migration journey (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). This sets expectations that might not be fulfilled. Consequently, migrants, and particularly lifestyle migrants, suffer from a disjuncture between discourse and practice like that of old age and ageing, that can be detected by employing ethnographic methods.

Ethnography captures discursive and experiential gaps through lived experience, paying attention to context and the quotidian, finding the disjuncture between what is said and what is done. In this thesis, ethnography was conducted taking the critical variables of ageing, migration, and privilege into account. Thus, resulting in the creation of a fieldwork approach with the following three methods: participant observation that captures practice and generates stable relationships with participants, interviews that seize discourse and questions practice, and focus groups which confront both practice and discourse in a group setting.

4.3.1. Participant observation

While becoming familiar with a field and research participants, there is a process of trial and error that puts the social life studied in question, revealing what is taken for granted (Guber, 2001). Within this tension between distance and intimacy, valuable ethnographic insight is gathered. This tension can be documented through ethnography’s staple method: participant observation. Participant observation promotes a certain degree of distance between the observer and the observed, but also encourages participation. Essentially, it is the instrumentalization of the process of an outsider attempting to become an insider.

Participant observation is twofold. Firstly, participation allows the researcher to experience the people's interactions and the meanings they attach to them (Jorgensen,
Meanwhile, observing is a way of opening one’s senses to the extra-lingual, like gestures and non-verbal cues, in an active manner (Lázaro, 2014). Observation is informed, reflexive, and critical. Participation does not exclude observation; it comes hand in hand (Jorgensen, 1989). Participant observation is a continuum and, thus, depending on the context move between a participant observer or an observing participant (Junker, 1960; Guber, 2001).

In this research, I attempted to foster proximity and intimacy with participants, while presenting myself as an anthropologist and researcher to ensure an ethical practice. This was achieved by getting involved in participants’ day-to-day lives, often making myself an accessible and helpful asset. This generally implied my Spanish speaking skills, meaning I acted as an interpreter at doctor’s appointments and police stations, translated documents and other correspondence, and made calls to phone companies. This action allowed for the participant-researcher relationship to grow, and it granted me access to and daily practices and its’ attached discourses. By fostering relationships with participants – I also refer to them as informants - the opportunities to participate in other community activities, like luncheons, dinner parties, petanque14 meets, wine tastings and more came up.

In the field I was rather conspicuous due to my age and American accent. This brought attention onto myself within a context where English accent were the norm and the median age was 60, and I was in my mid-twenties. This conspicuousness was also an asset. It aided in the creation of relationships with potential research participants, sparked informal conversations on my research topic in the field, and made my presence as a researcher known. However, as people got acquainted with me and the research project, my presence became increasingly normalized as time passed.

Throughout fieldwork, I would log my participant-observation interactions daily in a Word Document that acted as my Field Diary. To capture interaction in detail I would also take Filed Notes throughout the day in a notebook or on my Notes15 application on my phone. These Filed Notes acted as writing prompts when I wrote my Field Diary entries. Writing a Field Diary wasn’t only a way of gathering data collected throughout participant observation, it also triggered preliminary analyses (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

These dynamics were altered during the Coronavirus pandemic’s initial stages16, resulting in restricted social contact and “social distancing”17 measures when in-person meetings were unavoidable. Furthermore, those over the age of 60 were considered an ‘at risk’ group when it came to contracting the novel virus. Thus, exercising participant

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14 Petanque is a French outdoor game played by two opposing teams trying to throw boules, or metallic balls, as close as possible to a smaller ball or object, which is called the ‘jack’ or the ‘pin’ in these British communities.

15 The Notes application on iPhones is a digital note pad where I could typed information while in the field. This act was normally construed as texting, which helped keep the flow of the situation as opposed to writing in a notebook which could be somewhat uncomfortable.

16 Go to Appendix 2 for a timeline of Brexit, COVID-19, and fieldwork.

17 These measures included standing 1.5 meters apart, wearing masks, avoiding crowded spaces, keeping areas well-ventilated and washing hands and surfaces continuously and thoroughly after use.
observation in person became unfeasible, aggravated by the ‘at risk’ label retirees were given.

To accommodate sociosanitary safety measures, other means of gathering data were employed, adding online tools to the methodological framework. Participant observation passed from being an in-person practice to an online one, allowing a connection with both field sites simultaneously. As participants couldn't engage in face-to-face socializing, their day-to-day lives consisted of a continuous thread of online and telephone communication, which I became a part of. Informants used a variety of technological tools besides telephone—emails like Skype, Face Time, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Facebook, or Zoom. I participated in retiree migrants’ lives through these channels, joining chat threads on WhatsApp, choir practices over Zoom, and the passing of funny memes and inspirational videos on Facebook, WhatsApp chat threads, and email.

Online ethnography presented its own difficulties, like the complexity of informed consent online, how to adequately observe community building through virtual and social platforms, and the essentialization of discourse online due to its hybrid nature between the oral and the written (Kozinets, 2010; Ardévol et al., 2003). These were overcome by being as transparent with research participants by sending Information Sheets and Consent Forms over email or other online platforms like WhatsApp, asking for permission to use media posted on online platforms like Facebook, and continuously reminding informants of my position as a researcher during online and telephone interactions.

Throughout online fieldwork, detailed Field Notes and a Field Diary were kept about day-to-day interactions and news developments, just as with in-person fieldwork. A great part of the Field Diary kept during initial stages of the pandemic in 2020 involved Brexit and COVID-19 news; documenting the geopolitical and sociosanitary changes that occurred at the time to contextualize the data collected. Despite the inability to conduct in-person participant observation for a part of fieldwork, methods were adapted to suit the sociosanitary circumstances. It also allowed for a reconnection with the Costa del Sol field site, documenting daily experiences on both coasts through online channels.

Overall, participant observation is a methodology that critically pins down theoretical concepts into concrete realities, grasping research participants’ lived experiences as data (Guber, 2001:62). Consequently, participant observation is an ethnographic method that allows for the collection of a myriad of data that the field presents to the ethnographer, who processes it through their informed theoretical lens. Accordingly, a great amount of data is collected, and new questions arise from the filed itself. This textured and layered collection of data is later addressed in a more direct manner through other ethnographic methods, like interviews the follow method explained.
4.3.2. Interviews

Interviews are a space in which two parties come together to discuss a particular issue, making the invisible visible (Staples & Smith, 2015:15). It is a space in which social meaning is created, often leading to an ethnographic moment in which a person stands outside their own experiential flow and comments on it (Lázaro, 2014; Staples & Smith, 2015:14). In this research interviews occupy a key space within its’ methodology, accompanying participant observation.

Two types of interviews were conducted. The first were in-depth life history interviews with British retiree migrants, of which 49 were conducted. These interviews explored the life course of the interviewee and how it connected to their present life stage of retirement in Spain as well as delve into their present lifestyles. Interviewees ages ranged between 57 to 101. All interviewees described themselves as living in Spain permanently, some for over 30 years others under a year. Interview length ranged between 1 to 3 hours, and all were recorded using the Voice Memos application on my phone. Most interviews were done individually, while some were conducted in pairs. This occurred with couples who had been together for a long period of time, shared life histories, and wanted to conduct the interview together. Some interviewees were interviewed twice, to expand on previously covered material in the first interview. This especially occurred with online interviews conducted during the pandemic. During that period, the first personal contact I had with new informants beyond e-mails and texts, were through interviews. In those instances, the interview became a way of getting ‘my foot in the door’ with new interlocutors due to the lack of communal spaces to conduct participant-observation in and meet new people. Through ads in several newsletters of migrant organizations or referrals from other informants, I was able to make new contacts during a time of social distancing. These online in-depth life history interviews were conducted over Skype, Zoom, Whatsapp videocall, or a regular phone calls. They were recorded through the same online platform or utilizing external tools. Out of 49 life history interviews, 15 were conducted online, of which 11 were interviewees I met solely during lockdown, and thus exclusively interacted with through online channels or through phone calls. Not meeting in person did not affect interviewees candor, as speaking from one’s own home (in which they lived in on their own or with a partner) created a comfortable interview environment.

The second type of interviews were more concise interviews with service providers, like realtors, government officials, lawyers, or legal counsel (*gestors* in Spanish, a term used by retiree migrants as well), and export shop owners. 7 of these were conducted with the aim of understanding the necessities of retiree migrants in Spain and how these service providers attempted to satisfy them.

Both types of interviews were open-ended but directed by guidelines and key topics that were essential in each interview. Its’ open-ended structure allowed for an organic approach throughout the exchange, simulating to a certain degree daily conversations in an organized manner. All interviews were prepared beforehand, constructing them with previously known information of the interviewee normally
gained through participant observation. This was a key step when attempting to create a conversational space conducive to reflection.

Before an interview, each interviewee was given a brief description about what the interview was for, a comfortable setting and time was chosen by the interviewee, giving opportunities before the interview for the interviewee to ask any questions about the interview process, creating a comfortable communicative space.

I found that the act of interviewing someone was a way for my role as a researcher to be validated, giving credibility to my presence in the field. In the context of Northern European retiree communities, an interview was identified as an academic activity that was widely recognized and highly regarded. Informants welcomed acts like receiving an official University of Barcelona Information Sheet and signing a Consent Form. Adding to that, in some instances being interviewed was considered as an accumulation of social capital. Many migrant retiree interviewees expressed their gratitude and pride for being considered for an interview, boasting to their friends and relatives (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, February 26th, 2019). Meaning that the communicative space was already shaped by what interviewees believed an academic interview was. This also highlights the privileged context this fieldwork took place in, as in other more precarious environments things such as signing a consent form can be problematic for a variety of reasons.

Nuancing this privileged context was interviewees relationship with the tape recorder. As stated previously, all interviews were recorded with the interviewee’s consent, who had the power to turn off the tape recorder whenever they felt uncomfortable. Whenever an interviewee asked for the tape recorder to be stopped, it was because they were about to talk about something sensitive normally related to legal issues, like not having adequate documentation or instances of informal work. In these moments, it was evidenced that the communicative space of the interview was understood as a potential tool of State control. This fear was backed by their knowledge of this research’s government funding stated in the Consent Forms and Information Sheets, despite me assuring them of their anonymity.

Interviewees exhibited a great amount of reflexivity, something which other ethnographers studying lifestyle migrants have also detected (see O’Reilly, 2000). However, this self-awareness and reflexivity can lead to rehearsed discourses that can be hard to penetrate and get beyond (Herod, 1999). In this research, these rehearsed discourses were already detected through participant-observation prior to interviews. These normally concerned retiree migrants’ retirement destination choices and migration journeys. These rehearsed discourses posed advantages and disadvantages for data collection. Rehearsed discourses give the researcher easy access to recurrent themes found in that field. When aiding these discourses with data collected through participant observation, a comparison between discourse and lived experience can be made, exemplifying how people negotiate their identities within those ethnographic spaces. However, interviews can become spaces in which these rehearsed discourses are repeated, which is a disadvantage. Thus, I had to prepare the interviews thoroughly to properly question these discourses.
After each interview, I filled out a First Impression Form with basic information about the interviewee (age, gender, origin, year of migration, prior work positions and socioeconomic class, and family situation). These forms also had a section detailing first impressions of the interview, notes on extra-lingual cues that can be missed in the recording, and overall thoughts about the encounter. These First Impression Forms were also filled for service provider interviews, including the company’s or organization’s name, services provided, how long they had been operating, and who was their targeted public.

In conclusion, interviews were not only a useful tool for gaining in depth information on research participants. Through these interviews, what is observed and experienced through participant-observation was questioned, generating a space in which theoretical and experiential issues of life in Spain as a retiree migrant were broached.

### 4.3.3. Focus groups

After conducting both participant observation and interviews, certain aspects about the studied phenomenon started to recurrently appear. These hinted towards patterns within Northern European retirement and later life migration in Spain, giving indications of themes that would appear during stricter data analysis. This early detection of patterns and themes\(^{18}\) was incredibly useful when organizing focus groups and was a first step towards data analysis. Focus groups represent an opportunity to create a discussion with multiple informants. This type of collective communicative space is meant to examine information gathered during participant observation and interviews, completing the process of data triangulation.

The hallmark of focus groups as an ethnographic method is the group dynamic that produces data and insights only accessible through group interaction (Kook et al., 2019:88). The difficulty focus groups present is its multiple interviewees and consequent unpredictability, but this is also part of the focus group allure.

A total of 4 focus groups were conducted: 2 in Costa del Sol and 2 in Costa Brava. All conducted towards the end of fieldwork. Each focus group lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. All participants gave their informed consent to the recording of the interaction. The focus groups conducted in Costa del Sol took place in the context of Northern European social clubs. The first one was conducted in a social club, which I call the Nordic Club from now on, with Scandinavian members as well as British. This mix was reflected in the participants of the interaction. As the focus group took place in a shared social space at the club’s headquarters, where I didn’t have much control over assistance, more than the planned participants ended up taking part in the focus group. Resulting in the outstanding number of 15 participants, much higher than anticipated. Data gathered was very valuable as participants knew each other from club events, which created a comfortable communicative space. The second focus group was conducted in a

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\(^{18}\) These recurrent patterns and themes are detailed in section 4.4.
British social club and was composed by 9 Britons. Participants in this focus group did not know each other as well as in the latter, but this didn’t create hinder the conversation flow.

The other 2 focus groups conducted in Costa Brava were done over Zoom and participation was strictly British. One had 6 participants, while the other had 3. These lower numbers were arranged purposefully, as group videocalls are harder to manage than single ones. The first one was composed of 3 couples, while the second were either widowed or had indisposed spouses. Some participants knew each other in the first focus group, while the second did not. This had its benefits and drawbacks. Being strangers embolden some, while silenced others. Ultimately, the environment generated in the Zoom call in both scenarios was comfortable and dynamic.

All four focus groups were successful in questioning recurrent themes throughout fieldwork. In these, the gap between discourse and practice recorded throughout participant observation and interviews was addressed. This triggered participants to start analyzing their own behavior through reflexive expressions on their shared lifestyles. Focus groups proved to be a valuable ethnographic method, giving data depth and strength when entering the upcoming phase of analysis.

4.4. Processing and analyzing information

Implicit throughout the entirety of recording, processing, and analyzing of data, there is an inevitable process of ‘cultural translation’ (Marcus & Cushman, 1982). This refers to the interpretation of cultural data through the lens of the ethnographer’s cultural understanding. As a Spaniard with an Anglo-Saxon and North American education, as well as experience living in the UK for over a year, the sorts of translations that I had to do throughout the handling of ethnographic data wasn’t too excessive. I was somewhat familiar with British social imaginaries and was able to collect and process data from a distanced but somewhat knowledgeable positioning.

After completing fieldwork, the next phase was processing and analyzing the data collected. All data gathered was processed in the same manner, involving a review and categorization that triggered analysis. This process is done systematically and self-consciously until no new patterns appear, establishing themselves as research themes, through the process of data saturation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Said processing entails a detailed review of recordings, transcriptions, First Impression Forms, Field Notes, and Field Diaries. Through this review, data was coded and categorized, facilitating subsequent analysis. Relevant indicators or units were identified and then tweaked into subunits throughout the process of sifting through data, as nuances of these wider units appeared. The following are the units of analysis, with its correspondent subunits, that resulted from this process:
- **Ageing:** active or successful ageing / invisibility or negation of oldness / relativity and judgment within an ageing migrant community/ work and retirement/ gender and identity.

- **Migration:** life course planning, expectations versus reality/ support networks / supposed “integration” / learning the language / “integration” as a symbol of socioeconomic class.

- **Bureaucracy, paperwork, and social security:** the process and its’ issues (or not) / paid help versus amicable help / to legalize or NOT one’s position / privilege turning into vulnerability, nearing precarity.

- **The importance of labeling:** available labels are expat, foreigner, tourist, cosmopolitan, pensionista or jubilat/ power, privilege, and migration / old age indicators.

These units of analysis highlight recurring themes, issues or questions detected in the data, connecting it to the existent theoretical fieldwork. Each unit, and its subunits, are connected to multiple objectives outlined in section 4.2. Despite them being presented as separate, they are all interconnected. Said units and subunits were color coded to highlight pertinent data in interview and focus group transcripts and in Field Diary entries. Then data was categorized into separate documents and sections that mirrored its’ subunits of analysis. Such documents served as platforms where analytical connections and reflections between data were made. These created bridges between ethnographic data and theory upon which analytical conclusions were reached. The relationship between the theoretical framework and data is reflexive and dialectic (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Thus, throughout data processing, new theory was consulted as well as old concepts revisited. This suggests that the data collected is thought-provoking, questioning the theoretical framework from different perspectives.

### 4.5. A Snapshot: Northern European retiree migrants in Spain

The coming pages will explore the characteristics of retiree migrants in Spain, presenting the general characteristics of Northern European retiree migrants on Spanish coasts and then focusing on the case study of British expatriate retirees that this thesis explores.

The Northern European retirement and later life migration phenomena in Spain is nuanced in its’ diversity, with varying migration and mobility practices, lifestyles, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Throughout fieldwork, Northern European retiree migrants encountered in the Costa del Sol and the Costa Brava originated from countries like the United Kingdom, Sweden, or Denmark. Within these groups of retiree migrants, there were North American outliers. These were very sparse and far between and functioned predominantly within Northern European retiree migrant groups. Most retiree migrant groups were between the ages of 60-85. However, anomalies were found to this generalized age rule, the oldest being 101 years old and the youngest being 50. Most retiree migrants encountered were white, therefore whiteness was a contextual standard.
Despite countries of origin, Northern European retiree migrants shared similar working and life experiences explained by the similar economic and social contexts these countries share, where neoliberalism and individualism are the norm. Some retiree migrants had experienced mobile lifestyles before retiring abroad, either travelling due to work or for pleasure. Meanwhile, others had more immobile experiences because of their socioeconomic limitations or family obligations. Both retiree migrant types identified retirement and choosing Spain as a retirement destination as a key life milestone that triggered identity (re)constructions in later life. Therefore, retiring to Spain was a key lifestyle choice with aspirations to age 'better', acting as a unifying factor within communities abroad. Most had previous ties with Spain, knowing the coasts from vacationing in the area prior retirement (Williams et al., 2000; Gustafson, 2002; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Engdahl, 2021). Some even had holiday homes in Spain that turned into retirement homes as time progressed. There were also some who migrated to Spain with no prior contact, but these cases were scarce. Migrants generally embarked on this retirement journey with a partner, even though some migrated on their own. Those migrating on their own tended to be women, divorced or widowed. Once in Spain, those migrating alone leaned towards searching for a partner within the migrant retiree community, resulting in the stigmatization of single migrant retiree women (O’Reilly, 2000; Hayes, 2018; Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019).

There was class diversity between Northern European retiree migrants, with middle class people being the majority. The gaps between socioeconomic classes were evident in the lifestyle’s retiree migrants led. Those from upper class backgrounds had multiple properties in Spain and/or their native countries. They were part of social clubs – like nautical and/or golf clubs – where they both attended and organized social events. Those from middle class backgrounds generally had one property - normally their residence in Spain - or none. Many had sold their home country properties as a means of financing their retirement project. These groups mainly resorted to volunteering, attending events organized by the local government or charities, and going to their local English pub, Danish Café, or Spanish bar to socialize. Such class differences were made evident by other factors like access to resources, or lack of, like legal help, private medical assistance, or translation services. Thus, the levels of privilege experienced by Northern European retirees in the field was variable, intersected with their health and ageing conditions and support networks. It is in these intersections, that the vulnerability these groups may experience abroad was exposed.

Depending on the country of origin, retiree migrants exhibited different migration and mobility patterns in retirement, which has been noted by various academics in the field (Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013; Simó Noguera, Herzog, & Fleerackers, 2013). Scandinavians mostly went back and forth between their countries of origin and Spain, spending up to six months in each. This migration is seasonal, meant to combat the Scandinavian winters with the milder temperatures of a Spanish winter. By migrating seasonally, residency in their home countries was maintained. Some British migrants also had seasonal migration patterns but, throughout fieldwork, more British retiree migrants were found that considered Spain their permanent place of residence than their
Scandinavian counterparts. The British exposed a greater array of mobile practices than the Scandinavians did, presenting different patterns of movement between the UK and Spain that surpassed the six-month winter migration trend exhibited by most Scandinavians. Those British retirees living in Spain year-round visited the UK at different frequencies. Some went as often as once a month, while others hardly went at all. Despite considering Spain their permanent place of residence, not everyone had Spanish residency because of different mobility and bureaucratic practices between retiree migrants, reflecting the groups' privileged migration experiences (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O'Reilly, 2000; Hall, 2011). In general, and despite nationality, the frequency with which countries of origin were visited depended on family and social connections that were maintained, or not, throughout the post-migration period. Depending on the strength of such connections, return migration was more likely for some than others, especially after events like the birth of a grandchild or the death of a partner.

Northern European retiree migrants use different labels to describe their situation in Spain and their migration patterns, using their own language or Spanish and Catalan terms. There are those who have more itinerant migration and mobility practices who call themselves “snow birds”, “swallows”, or “overwinterers” (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013). Other labels meant to reflect more permanent migration patterns are “foreigner” or “extranjero”/“estranger” in Spanish and Catalan. The term “expatriate” or “expat” was also meant to denote that permanence, but was reserved for British migrants, including Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and the Isle of Man. The reason for this distinction is explored in detail in Chapter 8. However, it is important to note this distinction here as it explains why I describe British retiree migrants as expatriates. Throughout this thesis, the term ‘expatriate’ is rationalized and used as a category of practice and not of analysis, as it emerged from the field and reflects its’ emic origin.

4.5.1. Case study: British expatriate retiree communities

While in the field, the analytical focus on British expatriate retiree communities came organically. This happened because this research was staged as an open ethnography, where I was open to changes in focus the field presented (O'Reilly, 2000). Due to contextual and personal factors aligning, this research narrowed in on British expatriate retiree communities as a case study through which to explore the Northern European retirement and later life migration phenomenon in Spain.

Firstly, the presence of the British in Spain is much higher than any other Northern European group. They are one of the biggest migrant groups in Spain, coming in third after Romania and Morocco in 2020 (INE, 2020). Also, they are the leading nationality in tourism to Spain from 2015 to 2019 (INE, 2021). This significant presence was unmistakable during fieldwork, where British shops, pubs, and restaurants made evident the presence of the British on Spanish coasts. The latter coupled with English being one of my native languages, as well as having lived in the UK for over a year, made this group
more readily accessible not only linguistically but in terms of shared sociocultural imaginaries. Consequently, British retiree migrants were one of the most accessible research participants; not only because of their sheer numbers and presence in Spain, but also because of personal factors that facilitated my involvement in their everyday life.

Secondly, during fieldwork, it was mostly the British expatriate retiree communities who overwhelmingly considered themselves as living in Spain full-time; generally using the term ‘expatriate’ to describe their experience as a group. This presented an interesting avenue to explore both belonging and labelling processes that illuminated identity (re)construction, one of the main objectives of this research. Also, the use of the term ‘expatriate’ introduced privilege as a key player in identity (re)construction abroad.

Thirdly, all British expatriate retirees were experiencing unprecedented levels of uncertainty linked to Brexit throughout fieldwork, making them question their lifestyles migration and mobility patterns abroad. This indicated that this research was witnessing a paradigm shift that was triggered in June 2016 when, after a contentious Leave campaign, UK citizens voted to leave the EU after an EU membership referendum. This started a slow and uncertain process that bled into fieldwork, skewing ethnographic interest towards British expatriate retiree communities in Spain and away from other Northern European nationalities.

From February to May 2019, the period through which fieldwork in Costa del Sol was conducted, Brexit negotiation talks with the EU were underway. This diplomatic tug of war was centric in day-to-day Northern European retiree life while on the field in the Costa del Sol. Then, from February to May 2020 when fieldwork in Costa Brava was conducted, it coincided with Boris Johnson’s victory as Prime Minister with the promise to “Get Brexit Done”; a slogan that historically and politically contextualizes that period of fieldwork as a time when Brexit had been postponed twice for a range of reasons. This fieldwork followed the ending stages of a long four-year process where Brexit mined at people’s confidence in government, created insecurity within life project planning, and generated feelings of uncertainty between British communities in Spain; making the British expatriate retiree experience in Spain that much more ethnographically alluring (O’Reilly, 2020).

Further complicating this geopolitical situation was the beginning of the sociosanitary emergency caused by the novel Coronavirus, captured in the second stint of fieldwork in 2020. The Coronavirus seriously affected mobility within Europe and around the world. It placed an unprecedented amount of pressure on healthcare systems world-wide, while the overall population was told to stay at home for their own health and that of others. This entailed undesired immobility for many, especially those considered to be ‘at risk’ (Salazar, 2021). British expatriate retirees, who were an ‘at risk’ group because of their age, were experiencing COVID-19 with an impending Brexit, that didn’t take place until December 2020 well into the pandemic. Hence, a period of limbo ensued where privilege and vulnerability met in the intersections of unprecedented

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19 Go to Appendix 2 for Brexit, COVID-19, and fieldwork chronology.
geopolitical and sociosanitary changes; presenting a compelling ethnographic scene in which to explore identity formation in relation to privileged migration practices and ageing.

Brexit and the pandemic represented paradigmatic shifts that questioned taken for granted mobility regimes and geopolitical relationships of power that affected British expatriate retiree communities intersectionally. However, the ways in which these events questioned British livelihoods unveiled significant issues found within the overall Northern European retirement and later life migration experience in Spain. Hence, presenting the British case study as significant, shaping fieldwork in the process.

4.6. Introducing ethnographic spaces

In each coast a couple of locations were recurrently frequented, becoming key participant observation hubs. These locations happened to be organized associations and groups, which are a known way for Northern European retirement migrants to create and reproduce community ties abroad (O’Reilly, 2000; Haas, 2013). When it comes to the British abroad, these sorts of social spaces are thought of as key places to reproduce Britishness (O’Reilly, 2000). Before moving forward, the term Britishness must be explained, as it is a term normally filled with reductionisms and stereotypes (Rapport, 2020). However, Britishness is used in this thesis to refer to behaviors and practices that are tied to British social imaginaries and discourses that participate in the identity (re)construction of British expatriate retirees in Spain. Thus, Britishness is understood as grounded in the ageing migrant experience of expatriate retirees, while also dialoguing with social imaginaries found in the UK and Spain. These ethnographic places reproduce Britishness by giving space for these discourses and social imaginaries to root themselves in ageing migration experiences.

The following pages describe these key locations, its physical geographic details as well as the relationships that unfold within them. This provides an ethnographic backdrop in which relationships with informants and their lifestyles on Spanish coasts can be contextualized.

In Costa del Sol fieldwork was conducted in Fuengirola, Benalmadena and Mijas, three neighboring municipalities (see map in Appendix 1). Of the three chosen, the municipality with most registered British residents is Benalmadena, by a thin margin, meaning they all have high numbers of British residents (INE, 2020). These municipalities went through great infrastructural changes throughout Spain’s tourism boom in the 70’s. Thus, explaining the construction of high-rise buildings very close to the coastline, product of a time where construction laws regarding building near the coastline hadn't been enacted. In the town-centers there are a great number of British restaurants and shops, with one of the biggest British import supermarkets in Costa del Sol (Iceland and Waitrose) found between Fuengirola and Mijas. The latter is home to great luxury housing estates and golf courses, which is possible due to its grand extension over various hills. Meanwhile, Fuengirola and Benalmadena have older housing, traced back to the 70’s, less luxury, and no physical space for further construction on their own
grounds. Fuengirola is densely populated, duplicating its population in the summertime due to tourism and residential tourism (INE, 2020).

Throughout fieldwork in Costa del Sol, I frequented two main ethnographic spaces: the Club and the Charity. These were clearly delimited in certain areas and buildings, with very distinctive activities taking place in each. Occupying these were very different interlocutors, with wealthier British expatriate retirees frequenting the Club than the Charity. To access these places, I enrolled as a member in one and as a volunteer in the other, always stating my intentions as a researcher. These ethnographic spaces were in fact places with bounded physical and geographic locations (Massey, 2005). Due to the fluid nature of the relationships within these, the term space is used as well to describe it.

In Costa Brava fieldwork was mostly conducted in an area called Baix Empordà, between Sant Feliu de Guixols and L’Escala (see map in Appendix 1). The municipalities most visited during fieldwork were Sant Feliu de Guixols, Sant Antoni de Calonge, Palafrugell and Begur, where a myriad of British-centered activities and spaces were found. However, many informants’ attending these social spaces lived in areas beyond Baix Empordà, up to Roses or Cadaqués. This vast field delimitation is due to the scattered nature of the British expatriate community. There are some British restaurants and pubs in the area and two import stores, but they are small and far apart. Costa Brava has also suffered the effects of speculation and tourism, but Sant Antoni de Calonge is the most exploited construction-wise. However, the majority of Costa Brava is filled with small coves between mountainous terrain (see pictures of the coastline in Appendix 1).

The disperse nature of the British retiree communities on Costa Brava was reflected in an important British entity that occupied several physical places: the Organization. The Organization held activities that spanned across the Costa Brava, with interlocutors from different socioeconomic backgrounds partaking in them. It was from this entity that ethnographic spaces were encountered, always finding that the Organization held great importance in the British expatriate community in the Costa Brava and was responsible for the creation of spaces that engendered feelings of belonging and community. Therefore, in Costa del Sol these spaces were bound in physical geographic places, while in Costa Brava the malleability of space was more evident (Massey, 2005).

The Club, the Charity, and the Organization were entities that generated ethnographic spaces in which I was able to create meaningful relationships with interlocutors, observed their interactions with others, and how these actions established and (re)constructed their communities and identities. Thus, the following pages describe these to contextualize the lives of research participants. It must be noted that the entirety of British social activity was not centered upon these and spilled out from them centrifugally. Other places like bars, restaurants, shops, and beauty parlors were also important to social activity on the coast. These spaces will appear throughout ethnographic chapters.
4.6.1. Costa del Sol: the Club

The Club is a social organization open since the 1960’s. Exclusively run by British expatriates, with a few non-British exceptions, the Club was mostly frequented by retirees, evidenced by the age demographic of members ranging between late 50’s to early 100’s. Most members were white from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds, retiring from corporate jobs that required world travel. Even though the Club’s social activities, like luncheons and dinner dance parties, were a big part of Club-life, the Club’s utility for British expatriate retirees went beyond its’ social implications. It gave them a social space to find other British expatriates akin to themselves, creating a support network that provided advice and support when issues occurred in a foreign country. That is why people like Isabel, a 70-year-old Club member who had retired to the Costa del Sol about 20 years ago, would refer to the Club as “a place to find a family away from home” (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

The Club found its’ home in a Villa on the hills between Fuengirola and Benalmadena, with views overlooking the sea. It was a big house that was previously owned by a British expatriate who donated it for Club social events after his passing (Costa del Sol: Field diary, 6/02/2019). Previously, there was a pool in the back of the house that had recently been reconverted into 5 petanque lanes, where petanque meets were held weekly, with a terrace overlooking the lanes where spectators could gather around and watch the games unfold while sipping on glasses of wine or beer (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 12/02/2019) (see picture 1). The Villa also has a large dining room with a small dance floor, a big kitchen for catering large events, a library filled with English books and DVD’s to rent out, and a bar with a terrace that overlooked the sea in the distance (see picture 2 and 3). The bar and kitchen weren’t staffed during weekly events, with members helping with its’ running. During big events like dance parties or luncheons, staff was hired. In total, the house had three stories with a generous outdoor area that was overall well-kept, but its biggest flaw were its countless stairs. For instance, the petanque lanes were accessed from the Villa by walking down a steep set of stairs, or if you wanted to have a drink at the bar, or head to the terrace to see the views, another flight of stairs must be faced. There were no chair lifts or elevators, so Club members with reduced mobility had a hard time moving from place to place within the Villa.21

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20 During fieldwork, the Club only had two members that weren’t from the UK. They were both partners of British members, one was Danish and the other Spanish.

21 More on how the Villa’s architecture affected members’ ageing experiences in Chapter 6.
Picture 1. Petanque lanes at the Club

Picture 2. Club terrace
The Villa hosted various events like weekly petanque meets, wine tastings, language classes, bingo, quiz nights, Sunday lunches, dinner dances with live music, entertainment and more. The yearly membership fees ranged between 80 to 160 euros depending on whether you were a part-time or full-time member. This covered the costs of taking care of the Villa's upkeep and cleanliness, but it did not cover the cost of activities, each with its' separate price tag. For example, the weekly petanque was 6 euros, including some sandwiches for after the competition and bottles of wine for the couple of winners and runner up's (Costa del Sol: Field diary, 6/02/2019). However, for non-Club members these prices were higher, and they could only participate in up to 3 Club events a month, inciting friends of members to join as well.

That is why I entered the Club as a paying member, because if not, I could only participate in 3 events per month. This was only possible thanks to Nigel's intermediation, a man in his 80's who used to be the Club's secretary and used his influential position within the community as leverage. In fact, my membership to the Club was a bit contentious at first, considering I was a non-Briton that was considerably younger than the Club norm. However, as the Club was undergoing an organizational change that threatened the continuity of the entity, the Club's board decided to allow my access to the premises for research purposes if I became a paying member.

The Club was run by an elected and voluntary board of members, that changed over time. Meaning that most members had at some point held a Club related title like president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer etc. Due to the advanced ages of most
members, running the Club was complicated with younger members carrying the organizational weight of most activities. Prior to fieldwork, the Club had almost closed its’ doors as board members had grown tired of the immense effort running the Club required. This led to a change of board members who found themselves with the tough job of revitalizing the Club. They did so by being less selective with Club memberships, resulting with an influx of younger members, with lower socioeconomic statuses than the previous norm, that helped the Club reestablish itself (Costa del Sol: Field diary, 20/03/2019). This was quite controversial between older members who remembered the careful membership selection process that took place in the 60’s and 70’s, when the Club was in full swing, and parties were formal and frequent (Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). However, it was the new members desire to participate and the boards’ invested time and new ideas that allowed the Club to stay open. Thus, the Club was experimenting moments of change and tension between its’ members, illustrating British conceptions of social class and labelling practices that are explored throughout the thesis.

4.6.2. Costa del Sol: the Charity

Another frequented organization during fieldwork in Costa del Sol was the Charity. It was created in 2014 as a charitable social space designed to help English-speakers over that age of 50 in Fuengirola and Mijas. They didn’t have an official office or place to socialize, but used bar, restaurants, and other locales for their events. The aim of the organization is to provide social activities and advice on welfare information as well as provide support to those over 50 in vulnerable situations. One volunteer, and the secretary of the Charity, described the Charity’s mission regarding older English-speaking people in Costa del Sol in the following way: “just because they are old, it doesn’t mean their life is over” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 7/02/2019).

The Charity offered a myriad of free services like translation of documents, interpreters for doctor’s appointments, rides to the hospital, weekly rides to the supermarket, welfare advice, guidance when choosing care homes and more. They also organized several social activities like coffee mornings, monthly lunches, day trips, and Christmas parties, creating a support network out of the Charity’s users and volunteers. The prices of these activities were always kept low to accommodate all price ranges; however, any sort of donation was always appreciated to keep the Charity going.

Being a non-profit, there were two types of people that frequented the spaces the entity crafted: volunteers and users. ‘Users’ was the most common term employed by volunteers to refer to those who made use of the services given by the Charity. Some volunteers used the term ‘clients’; this was frowned upon as it implied some sort of payment, when the services given by the Charity were free. Users tended to be somewhat older than volunteers with worse health conditions. Some had quite serious health issues like Alzheimer’s, cancer, or mobility issues. Socioeconomically, the differences between volunteers and users were minimal, ranging from middle to lower class socioeconomic backgrounds. But there were some outliers. During Charity events, what distinguished
volunteers from users were ID cards volunteers would hang around their necks that identified them as registered volunteers within the Charity.

Eight volunteers ran the Charity, each of which had a title that described their role within it: president, treasurer, secretary, head of welfare, welfare officer, auxiliary, deputy president and general advisor, and shop manager. These eight organizing volunteers were the heart of the Charity. They were the ones who organized and distributed volunteers to perform different activities or services, depending on the volunteers’ skills.

To access the Charity, I contacted the Charity secretary, Sam, a retired man in his 60’s living in Spain for over 30 years. Through Sam’s intermediation, I entered the Charity as a volunteer and researcher. Meaning that I got a badge stating that I was a volunteer but was always introduced as a researcher by volunteers. This allowed be to participate in some volunteer work that was crucial for this research, like acting as an interpreter in doctor’s appointments or police offices, translating bills or governmental letters.

Since the Charity didn't have a specific headquarters most of its organizing and consulting occurred during its’ weekly coffee mornings', also called weekly drop-in centers. This was one of the most popular and frequented activities organized by the Charity, taking place weekly in Fuengirola and Mijas. In Fuengirola it was held in a local pensioner’s bar with very friendly prices (see picture 4). In Mijas the coffee morning was held in a Peña Sevillana, a bar specialized in musical and dance performances of typical folkloric Sevillien music (see picture 5). They had an agreement with the owners of each establishment to use the space for about two hours once a week. Both spaces were easily accessible for all types of mobility ranges, with elevators or ramps. This was something extremely important for Charity users as it gave them autonomy.
During these weekly meetings, users asked volunteers for help with issues they were having like changing their phone plans, needing an interpreter for a doctor's appointment, scheduling a ride to the supermarket, writing their name down for monthly lunches or day trips. Besides this organizational and transactional nature of the coffee morning, it was also a key social event within the Charity and the lives of the British expatriate retirees that either volunteered or attended them. It was a space in which one could catch up with friends and acquaintances, meet new people, and have fun playing card bingo or participating in the weekly raffle with prizes like chocolates and biscuits.

Even though volunteers stressed that they were open to all older English-speakers who needed assistance, most of its’ members were from the UK. In fact, the Charity was affiliated with a very well-known British charity, explaining why it is so popular within Costa del Sol British community. This British dominance was illustrated in many of the social activities organized by the Charity. For example, coffee mornings are a popular occurrence between British charities oriented towards helping older people in the UK, denoting Britishness in the Charity’s practices (Huber & O’Reilly, 2004).

As a British space within Costa del Sol, the Charity knew about the Club’s existence and vice versa, but it must be noted that the socioeconomic realities between the Charity and the Club were different. Many Charity users and volunteers called the Club members “too posh” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 22/02/2019). Therefore, the Charity illustrated a less expensive and lavish lifestyle in Costa del Sol, especially when compared to the Club, capturing the lives of Britons with middle to lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). The Charity also represented the effects old age could have on
privileged ageing experiences, illustrating ageing realities that weren’t easily seen in places like the Club. Consequently, the Charity illustrated the socioeconomic differences in the British expatriate retiree experience in Costa del Sol as well as the negative ramifications old age can have on a privileged migration experience, highlighting the importance of a supportive social network while ageing abroad.

4.6.3. Costa Brava: the Organization

In the Costa Brava, the Organization was an English-speaking social and educational club that was aimed towards retirees wanting to engage in mentally and physically stimulating activities where they could learn from each other’s life experiences. It was founded in 2001 by a group of 12 British retirees living in Costa Brava, who had been part of similar organizations back in the UK and wanted to recreate it in Spain (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Since then, the Organization has grown to have 400 members. These were scattered across Costa Brava and not all of them lived in Spain year-round. “Once you’re retired, you are not dead” was the unofficial motto of the Organization, as those words were said constantly in different Organization events (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 4/12/2019; Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

The Organization was divided into self-managed groups marked by different interests and hobbies, creating up to 46 different groups. Each member could be part of as many groups they wanted, paying a yearly fee of 15 euros. Some groups required extra payments for equipment, transport, food, drink and more. Despite the latter, the price was affordable enough for people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to join and participate weekly in at least a couple activities or events. There was several walking, cycling, trekking, and golfing groups for different levels of expertise. There were also book clubs, language exchange groups, craft circles that did sewing or quilt work, cooking groups, card game groups that played games like bridge, history groups, winetasting groups and more. Not all groups met every week, but the most active groups were the ones that met weekly, including a petanque group, the walking netball group for women, and the walking football group for men, mahjong tiles, scrabble, and canasta. These weekly activities were held in different places along Costa Brava like Palafrugell, Sant Antoni de Calonge, Begur, or Estartit. Some events were held at members’ houses, rotating between the most frequent members, while others like netball or petanque were held in Town Hall venues (see picture 6). This meant that travelling from one town to another was a frequent occurrence for active Organization members. Before or after these activities, sporadic drinks, lunches, or coffees were shared at nearby restaurants or bars. This reinforced ties between members outside of Organization activities. The largest Organization events were the General Meetings, which were held 5 times a year and attempted to join all members. In these, budgets were reviewed, groups publicized

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22 As of 2021 the yearly fee rose from 12 to 15 due to a loss of income caused by COVID-19 and the lack of activities the Organization was able to maintain. This rise in fees assured the Organization’s continuation.
themselves, and new groups were created. Some of these meetings were followed up by big luncheons that could join up to 250 people.

To enter the Organization, I attended a General Meeting in December 2019, before starting fieldwork in Costa Brava, gaining several contacts there. To participate in Organization events and groups, I asked for group leaders’ permission to participate, as the Organization’s leaders waved the membership fees for me to do my research. In exchange they asked for me to do a presentation on my research at a General Meeting in April 2021, after my fieldwork with them had been completed.

Organization member's ages ranged between 50's to late 90's. The oldest members of the Organization mostly participated in activities like mahjong tiles, scrabble, and canasta, with some of them participating in petanque as well. These activities were economically and physically accessible for the older Organization members, with younger members assisting the oldest in their car rides. Yet, as members aged, they found themselves participating in less activities. Outside of official Organization events, younger members would get together and visit older members to have a cup of tea or coffee at their houses (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2020). From these visits the monthly Octogenarian Lunch was born, with the goal of maintaining a community feel between those members over the age of 80. Before these events, younger members would organize car shares to ensure all members above 80 years old could join if they pleased. However, this organization normally took place during weekly activities, illustrating how important these events were for the Organization’s continuity.
Even though it didn’t set out to be a British-only entity, it only had about 20% non-British members according to their website statistics. Therefore, it is a predominantly British and white entity, becoming a space where Britishness is reproduced in community settings abroad, like the Club or the Charity in Costa del Sol. Despite the latter, the Organization’s Committee claimed that it strives for connections with local Catalans. This intention is stated on their website, and shared by its members, using language like “integration” (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Susan, 73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). The Organization was a complex ethnographic space that captured the conflicting aspirations and realities of British expatriate retirees, highlighting how life project planning and experiences differ.

4.6.4. Costa Brava: Costa Brava Club, Anglican Church, and Choir

Outside of the Organization, there were also other social spaces that British expatriate retirees occupied, becoming peripheral ethnographic spaces in Costa Brava. The following spaces, however, aren’t exclusively British or exclusively for retirees. These are hybrid spaces, occupied by many Organization members as well.

Firstly, there was the Costa Brava Club, which was based in a golf club of the area. It is meant to be an international meeting point for foreigners and locals, having members from Spain, the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Germany, and North America. This club particularly brought together upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds and held several activities like golfing, book clubs, cooking clubs, and walking groups. Most of the Costa Brava Club members I met were interested in this club for the access it gave to golfing and its’ international feel (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 7/03/2020; Patricia, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Most of the members were Scandinavian, North American, or British; Spaniards were scarce. This place was rather exclusive, as attending any of these Costa Brava Club’s activities as a guest required a payment of at least 30 euros, depending on the activity and event. This paywall complicated research in this place, revealing its’ exclusivity. I couldn’t go to the Costa Brava Club premises for research for a variety of reasons. However, I did meet many people who were members and participated in the Costa Brava Club’s volunteering activities and walks. It wasn’t a particularly British space, with members describing it as having a “cosmopolitan” feel, where one was in contact with individuals from other countries with “open-minds” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 7/03/2020; Patricia, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Those that weren’t members described Costa Brava Club-goers in very different terms, saying they were “very old fashioned” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 26/02/2020). This denotes that there was a class-difference between club-goers and some Organization members, like that described between the Costa del Sol Club and Charity.

Another ethnographic area that British expatriate retirees frequented was the Anglican Church. This church didn’t have a building of its own and held services in four different churches across the Costa Brava. The Anglican Church occasionally had coffee

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23 The concept of “integration” on the field is explored in Chapter 8.
mornings and fundraising activities like luncheons, bake sales, and yard sales; activities which I was able to participate in thanks to a couple I met at the Organization (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 29/02/2020). This space was predominantly British, evidenced by the Church’s Brexit Hub, which was a helpline for those dealing with the aftermath of Brexit. This space joined Britons of all ages, as families and their children, retirees, and working middle-aged individuals attended services. Therefore, the Anglican Church provided a multigenerational support network for British expatriate retirees involved, giving them purpose by helping their parish, interacting with people of all ages, and giving them a support network beyond that of retirees (Gwen & Eliot, 75 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Costa Brava: Field Diary, 29/02/2020).

Finally, another key ethnographic space in the Costa Brava was the Choir, a space where about 40 British expatriates of different ages, between late 30’s to early 80’s, got together to sing and sometimes preform in local events for free. The Choir had members from other countries like Norway, Germany, and Spain, but they were in the minority and were partners of British choir singers. Not everyone in the Choir was retired. Many were active in the workforce, having their own businesses in Catalonia, like restaurants or tourist services, or working for British companies abroad. However, a notable part of the Choir was retired and were also members of the Organization. The Choir got together once to twice a week and their rehearsal spaces were provided by the Town Halls of Sant Antoni de Calonge and Begur, using government buildings and their recreational rooms and a sports hall. For extra rehearsals they would practice in local bars, having a drink there before and afterwards (see picture 7). The Choir was organized by three British expatriate retirees who loved music and had participated in bands in the past: Max, age 69, Eliot, age 79, both living in the Costa Brava for about 15 years each, and Mary, age 57, living in the Costa Brava for about 4 years. This space was created in late 2018, therefore, many were invested in making the Choir work and were excited of the prospects the Choir provided (concerts, tours, retreats...), as well as the opportunity of joining with other people of different ages who enjoyed singing for fun. The intergenerational and internationally open feel of the Choir made my participation in it quite simple. However, each practice choir singers paid a small fee of 1 euro per choir singer to cover expenses like sheet music.
Most British expatriate retirees in Costa Brava knew of the existence of these spaces, regardless of whether they attended them or not or how far away they were from their homes. This indicates how small the British expatriate community is on the Catalan coast regardless of the distance that separates one ethnographic space from the other. These spaces provided them with things the Organization did not, which was contact with individuals of different ages and/or nationalities. Ultimately, these ethnographic spaces are important to this research because they illustrate the heterogeneity of British expatriates on the Costa Brava, exposing the integral role retirees play within these communities.

4.6.5. Ethnographic spaces online

As mentioned throughout the chapter, online spaces became increasingly important due to the sociosanitary impact of the Coronavirus. All the ethnographic spaces described made some attempt at translating their social interactions online, resulting in WhatsApp group chats, email chains and newsletter, and weekly pub quizzes via Zoom (for a more detailed list of all the online ethnographic spaces I participated in, go to Appendix 3). Through these communication channels, the Club, the Charity, the Organization, the Costa Brava Club, the Anglican Church, and the Choir were kept afloat during a time where social mingling was at a standstill. These online spaces became important within the lives of British expatriate retirees on both coasts, helping them maintain social ties and allowed me to establish and maintain bonds with informants.
To conclude, ethnographic methods like participant observation, in depth interviews, and focus groups informed by an intersectional framework allow for ethnographic spaces to be explored intimately and thoroughly, revealing power relations as well as grounding retirement and later life migration within a particular context. They provide a road map to discourses and practices found between British expatriate retirees across Spanish coasts. In turn, British expatriate retirees act as a significant case study that captures issues that affect Northern European retirement migrants in Spain as a whole.
5.1. Northern Europeans and Spain as a holiday destination: a brief history

Historically, southern Europe has been the holiday destination for privileged upper class Northern Europeans, providing a space for pleasure (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000). This changed during the postwar period, when the welfare state was introduced in most of Europe, and so was job stability and expendable income. This meant that vacationing and tourism became accessible to working classes. This led to mass tourism beyond the elites, in which the consumption of experiences, appearances, and pleasure slowly became the center of touristic practices (Rizoma, 2005). Tourism led to more types of fluid mobility within Europe, like residential tourism, seasonal migration, and retirement migration.

As Spain was suffering from a dictatorship until 1975, the wave of mass tourism took a while to arrive. “I remember when I first came to Fuengirola in 1957. It was just a small town, a fishermen’s village. We immediately fell in love with it” recounts Lenard, a Swedish man in his 80’s (Costa del Sol: Focus group at Nordic Club, 2019). Lenard is one of several Northern European retiree migrants who recall Spain before mass tourism. Others like him, most in their late 80’s to 90’s, recall visiting Spain during the Francoist period with much nostalgia, as it was a holiday destination that was affordable and tranquil because of its lack of touristic infrastructure and development. In a search for revitalizing its economy during Franco’s final years, Spain opened itself to tourism and, with it, its’ coasts began to sprout with high-rise buildings (Tremlett, 2006; Mantecón & Huete, 2011). Lenard recounts this change by noticing that Spaniards were starting to learn English, saying “before they (Spaniards) only knew how to say (in English), ‘one cigarette please’ (laughs). Now you can go anywhere, and everyone speaks English” (Costa del Sol: Focus group at Nordic Club, 2019).

That is how Spain became a staple in the package holiday industry in Europe, marketing itself as an affordable, close by, and relaxing holiday destination under the sun by the Mediterranean Sea (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010). Coasts from Andalucía to Catalunya were subjected to this tourism boom in different ways, with the Southern coastlines becoming more well-known than the Northern ones for their cheaper prices. Once Spain joined the EU in 1986, and the free movement of person’s and workers within the EU member states was assured by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, residential tourism and retirement migration became even more popular. This treaty facilitated movement while also gave access to healthcare across EU members states. As older migrants who wanted to have access to their families in their home countries and were worried about age-related health issues, these factors reinforced retirement and later life migration to Spain by making it a more appealing option. Ultimately, this branded Spain as a holiday

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24 Under the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco.
destination under the tourist gaze, due to its warm weather, its’ pristine coastlines, and its’ cheaper cost of living that allowed access to a good quality of life (Urry, 1990b; Hurtado, 2010).

During the housing bubble in the 1990’s, Spain solidified its’ presence as a touristic and residential tourist destination, as European real estate investors poured money into Spanish coasts (Membrado Tena, 2015). Infrastructure-wise, real estate growth littered the coasts of Spain with big high-rise coastal hotels, apartment buildings, and housing estates. Housing estates were particularly marketed towards foreign buyers by foreign owned companies that facilitated the purchase. Despite the far-off location of these housing estates from town or city centers, their Mediterranean views and cheap prices acted as key selling points. Many companies even flew out prospective buyers to Spain for a weekend so they could experience the potential lifestyle they could acquire through purchasing that real estate (Membrado Tena, 2015; Elle, 82, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Elle, age 82 and retired in Costa Brava, had worked for a real estate company that did just that, giving a first-hand account of these selling practices:

“For the last six years of my working life I worked for a company selling Spanish property. So, we used to go off from where I lived every weekend, Friday to Sunday, to big exhibitions around the country (UK) presenting the property to the people. We didn’t do this area (Costa Brava), we did Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol. [...] I sold a lot of properties in the Costa Blanca and the Costa del Sol. I knew the areas, they used to take us down there two or three times a year for research, and we would bring clients out as well. We knew what we were selling.

- Elle, 82, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Several informants had purchased their homes in Spain through these sorts of practices in the late 90’s to early 2000’s. Elle’s account also explains why the Costa Brava wasn’t such a focus for retiree migrants, as most developers at the time were carrying out construction projects along Spain’s southern coasts. Also, the rise of low-cost flights, creation of highways connecting Europe, and technological advances such as cable TV and internet, made both residential tourism and retirement migration in Europe more accessible than ever before. This connectivity, through technological and infrastructural advances, facilitated the migration process, making it more practical for retirees who wanted to keep in contact with their families without sacrificing their retirement abroad.

The latter factors combined resulted in many housing estates - or urbanizaciones as informants said in Spanish - on the outskirts of coastal towns and cities, becoming heavily populated by Northern European residential tourists and retiree migrants (Huete, 2009; Engdahl, 2021). Local Spaniards and academics have called these areas ‘ghettos’, ‘enclaves’, or ‘colonies’ (O’Reilly, 2000; Field Diary, 2019-2020). These places is a physical testament of rising and persisting residential and retirement and later life migration from Northern Europe to Spain.
Like many other retiree migrants, Richard B., age 81, was living in one of these housing estates on the outskirts of Fuengirola that was mostly Northern European. He says:

“There are 23 houses in this’ urbanización’, I don’t know how many Spanish people are here, mainly they are foreigners. You don’t find yourself in a Spanish community, you find yourself in an English or a foreign community. Which is peculiar because, in a way, you are getting away from that sort of life in England when you come here.”

- Richard B., 81, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Richard B. suggests that he initially didn’t intend on living in a housing estate that was mostly composed by ‘foreigners’, word he and others use to describe Northern Europeans and other Global North migrants at large. Rather, he implies that the situation just happened to turn out that way as if by chance. These sorts of tales were common, illustrating the many actors and factors behind retirement and later life migration in Spain that go beyond retiree migrants’ individual agency; creating an inertia around this migration phenomenon that has long-standing roots in Spain’s touristic infrastructure development history.

Hence, Spain’s touristic development is intrinsically linked with it becoming a retirement destination as well. Ageing European populations that had gotten to know Spain through tourism were now searching for a place to age in. A destination where they could maximize their pensions, have warmer weather, access public and private healthcare, be connected to the rest of Europe, and, overall, search for the ‘good life’ in retirement. Spain had all the pre-requisites for it to become one of Europe’s designated retirement destinations, where ‘ageing better’ became accessible to Northern Europeans with a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds (Echezarreta et al., 2005; Hurtado, 2010; Blaakilde & Nilsson, 2013).

5.1.1. The British on Spanish coasts: from package holidays to retirement migration

Spain’s journey from burgeoning touristic destination to a consolidated holiday destination, and its' key role in European retirement migration and mobility practices, illustrates Europe's changing socioeconomic, legal, technological, and demographic landscape (Hurtado, 2010). Retirement and later life migration flows from the Northern European countries to Spain also illustrate differences on a socioeconomic level, materialized in differences between pension schemes and exponentially ageing populations. All the latter is mirrored in the relationship between the UK and Spain, where tourism and longstanding unequal North-South power relations take shape (O'Reilly, 2002; Valluvan & Kalra, 2019). Yet, the UK’s relationship with Spain has its specificities. These must be considered when exploring the experiences of British expatriates searching for retirement under the sun. The following section explores these
specificities, historical and discursive, setting the scene to understand the foundations upon which British expatriate retirees construct their ‘ageing better’ life projects in Spain.

The UK and Spain have a long history binding them together, going back to colonial times when both countries were competing over the control of Asian, African, and American countries. Spain lost its colonial influence much earlier than the UK did, which shaped their influence in the creation of European power relations. Making the UK a fundamental geopolitical actor within Europe.

More recently, in the XX and XXI centuries, this relationship has been shaped by tourism. In fact, the touristic relationship between Spain and the UK predates the mass tourism boom of Franco’s final years. Due to Spain’s lack of participation in the World Wars, it was cheaper than other countries and in one piece, making it a place upper and middle classes retired to in the inter-war years and working classes started to visit with the aid of the Workers Travel Association (Buchanan, 2007). Later, the relationship between both countries was greatly shaped by the growth of package holidays and accessible camping sites, leading many British to visit Spain’s coastlines through these affordable touristic offers (Williams et al., 2000; Rodríguez, 2001).

This is the case of Mary, an 86-year-old woman living in the Costa Brava for over 30 years after retiring from a long working life in the service industry owning her own Pub. She explains how she came to know Spain through vacationing in a caravan with her family:

“We were on vacation actually; we were on our way down South and we’d been in the caravan car for a long time. The children were angry with us because they’d been the day before and the next in the car all the time, and they were sort of fed up. So, I spoke to my husband and said, ‘Can we stop off somewhere just for tonight?’ [...] We looked at the coast, and I saw Playa de Aro (a location on the Costa Brava) [...] We knew some people that had a bar there, so we went down there and we eventually found a place to park the caravan and we stayed there and we enjoyed it [...] The children loved it, so we rented a house on an estate in Playa de Aro the coming summer.”

- Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

After that, Mary and her husband rented and then bought a property in Calonge, further up the Catalan coast. Once their children got older, they went there during the winter and autumn because of their work at the Pub. Once they retired in their 50’s, they moved to their holiday home permanently.

British middle and working classes got acquainted with Spanish coasts, especially during the 80’s when the exchange rate between the Spanish pesetas and the pound sterling was favorable to them (O’Reilly, 2000). British citizens of all ages started to migrate to Spain, as access to work and healthcare were made easier by Spain joining the EU. The ever-growing touristic infrastructure on Spanish coastlines, like the Costa del Sol, meant there was available housing, jobs in need of English-speakers, good public transport, and growing connections with the UK through airports, highways, or by sea (Engdahl, 2021). The conjunction of these factors made migrating to Spain an accessible
and appealing option to many, while also meaning that Britons got to know Spain through a tourist gaze that perpetuates an unequal relationship between Spain and the UK (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This was evident through comments on Spain’s hospitality skills, with British expatriate retirees saying things like: “in Spain to be a waiter is a profession, in other places it is hard labor. [...] But in Spain a waiter is a friend of the table you are sitting at, always with a smile” (Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). These sorts of remarks further the idea of Spain as a holiday destination that willingly caters to holidaymakers and tourists, creating a relationship of power along with it. Moreover, it highlights the Francoist roots in Spain’s image abroad, as Franco’s tourism was characterized by the projection of a “friendly” Spain to increase tourism (Mantecón & Huete, 2011). Thus, these comments highlight the unequal foot on which a touristic relationship between both countries started and how that impression carries on.

The late 80’s to early 90’s can be marked as a period when retirement migration and settlement in Spain was a particularly British phenomenon, raising questions about whether the British were exporting their elderly and with them the welfare issues they posed (O’Reilly, 2000). Since the British engaged in more permanent migration flows than other Northern European retiree migrants, conversations regarding welfare, ageing, and the European legal parameters necessary for this migration to continue, took place around the British case study, exemplifying the significance of this groups’ retirement experiences in Spain (Echezarreta et al., 2005).

From the 80’s onwards, the British have created extensive networks throughout Spain’s coastlines, exemplified by charities and social clubs that have various delegations along the Mediterranean coastline, connecting these areas and creating support networks throughout Spain. This is mirrored in fieldwork, where the Charity on the Costa del Sol has sister branches in Costa Blanca, or the Organization on the Costa Brava is in contact with similar associations in Costa del Sol. Also, there are British run newspapers and radio stations that broadcast British information in Spain. Some newspapers, like the Olive Press News or the Euro Weekly News, are geared towards relaying information to Britons throughout the Spanish peninsula, while others like the Sur in English is only for the British in Andalusia, more specifically the Costa del Sol. Meanwhile, the most listened to all-English radio stations are Costa Blanca FM or Top Radio Europe, where commercials concerning expatriate living occupy the airwaves. These news and entertainment outlets based in Spain illustrate the settlement of British populations on Spanish coasts.

Currently, the relationship between Spain and the UK is at a crossroad due to Brexit. Even though the changes up to date aren’t as severe as some anticipated - for example healthcare agreements have been reached between Spain and the UK, an assurance that is key for older British retirees and tourists alike - it still requires a recalibration of the once solid relationship, especially regarding tourism, residential tourism, and retirement migration. Smaller things like needing Spanish license plates or buying British products in Spain has been made difficult because of Brexit. However, the most significant difference is the new restriction of movement that has created a sense of legislative uncertainty regarding the futures of these groups on Mediterranean coastlines (Giner-Monfort & Huete, 2020).
5.1.2. The British expatriate retiree in Spain: a contemporary framework

Due to Brexit, UK media representations regarding expatriate retirees in Spain have spiked. Many media and news outlets have dedicated much time on the effects this geopolitical shift may have on the British population abroad, particularly focusing on British retirees in Spain. Highlighting their leisure driven lifestyles, their lack of attention to Spanish or EU legislation, and their old age. This media fixation isn’t new, as in the 80’s and 90’s when British retirement and later life migration to Spain became evident, general interest started to peak in the UK regarding British retirees in Spain (O’Reilly, 2000). This was demonstrated by mass media representations of the group through soap operas, documentaries, and travel television shows which continue to this day. These generally depict the British in Spain as homogenously white, ageing, from middle class backgrounds who only socialize with other Britons without learning the local language, engaging in hedonistic lifestyles, searching for a ‘better’ life on one’s own (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2017; Hall, 2021).

The latter representation is negative, revealing prejudices and stereotypes linked to ageism and socioeconomic class found in shared British social imaginaries. These representations feed a popular belief in the UK that all British in Spain are retirement migrants; a belief that has actively been revoked by projects like Brexit Brits Abroad, led by Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly (O’Reilly, 2020). However, these representations illustrate the ties between British retirement and later life migration to prejudices surrounding the so-called white working class as well as prejudices concerning imperialist and colonialist nostalgia.

Prejudices surrounding the white working class illustrate the penetration of post-Thatcherite discourses about ‘social mobility’, the ‘individual’, and ‘choice’ into the general consciousness, instilling the myth of middle-class uplift and petit bourgeois provincialism that have travelled with the British abroad (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012; Valluvan & Kalra, 2019). These have participated in the creation of contradicting views on the British white working class. The category white working class can be traced back to Thatcherism, in the 80’s and 90’s, and New Labour’s subsequent call for racial equality through multiculturalism, in the late 90’s to early 2000’s, that alienated working class white people into a political void (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012; Jones, 2012). Moreover, the white working class is a label that has been simultaneously vilified and oversimplified within liberal shared social imaginaries, as well as encouraged through nationalist, even imperialist, melancholy, and notions of deservingness (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012; Jones, 2012; Smith, 2012a; 2012b; Valluvan & Kalra, 2019). Consequently, it is a concept that has gained much political and media attention post-Brexit, as it has been attributed with responsibility over a great part pro-Brexit votes and a sense of white alienation in the fights of social inequalities (Evans, 2017).

25 Some of the most well-known shows that feature Britons in Spain are *El Dorado* (a soap opera infamous for its great cost and fast failure), *Benidorm* (a sitcom), and *A place in the Sun* (a reality TV show that follows British house-hunters in different holiday destinations. Spain was featured in 2019, with many of its participants being older couples searching for retirement destinations).
Similarly, the growth of imperialist and colonialist nostalgia has been attributed to the reaction of a ‘multicultural’ Britain and to Brexit’s success, inspiring a revision of imperialist and colonial history in the wake of Britain’s decline in global influence (O’Reilly, 2002; Valluvan & Kalra, 2019). The white working class and right-wing political parties of all socioeconomic backgrounds have been associated with these discourses, leading to stereotypes surrounding whiteness in Britain and how certain white Britons feel that the country is losing its identity (Garner, 2007a; 2016). Consequently, said nostalgia and melancholy is an exercise of wishful thinking that answers the complexities of plurality and difference in Britain that governmental organs have failed to address (Gilroy, 1987; 2004; Garner, 2016). This leads to a review of imperialist and colonial British history that is selective and mythologized, explaining feelings of superiority and entitlement of the British aboard (O’Reilly, 2002; Gilroy, 2004).

As products of these political systems, economic changes, and categorization debates that construct shared social imaginaries, British expatriate retiree experiences and discourses are filtered through these frameworks by themselves and by Britons in the UK. Being white and British abroad means having to face the complex intricacies of post-colonialism as well as navigating the stereotypes associated to the white working-class that are so pervasive in British social imaginaries. This results in prejudices and stereotypes that these groups must traverse when abroad and in their home country.

In this thesis, these stereotypes and prejudices are encompassed in the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure that is explored in depth in Chapter 8, but appears throughout the thesis. This figure is the measuring stick against which British retirees in Spain judge British behaviors abroad. This figure finds its’ roots in these frameworks, playing with British notions of socioeconomic class, whiteness, imperialism, and colonialism. Thus, these prejudices and stereotypes actively shape how British expatriate retirees build their life projects in practice and in discourse, in turn affecting how they (re)construct their identities abroad.

It must be noted that these discussions have a rich academic tradition in Anthropology of Britain and History, where there has been a long-expressed interest in understanding the creation of the working class and how it has been vilified in modern British shared social imaginaries, as well as how Britain’s imperial past affects their political and social present (Thompson, 1966; Gilroy, 2004; Jones, 2012; Smith, 2012a). I acknowledge this long-standing tradition, understanding that the latter explanation only scratches the surface of these debates’ complexities. Consequently, I position this thesis at the peripheries of these discussions, acknowledging them as a means of understanding the roots of prejudices and stereotypes that affect and shape the British expatriate retiree experiences and identity (re)constructions in Spain.

To conclude, the British population in Spain has a particular sociocultural, historical, and political baggage that affect how retirement life projects in Spain are thought of and experienced. This baggage sets a different scene from that of other Northern European retiree migrant experiences. With particularities that result in experiences that comment on coloniality, whiteness, and North-South European relations in a way other experiences cannot. The following pages start to explore the relationship
between the UK and Spain through the eyes of British expatriate retirees on the ground. This illustrates how the frameworks and explained before come to life when conceptualizing the UK as their home country, Spain as their retirement destination, and the influence it has on their life projects plans.

5.2. The British expatriate retiree gaze: migration discourses (re)constructing spaces, places, and identities

As discussed in Chapter 3, migration discourses not only (re)construct one’s own identity, but they also generate discursive patterns that build an intersubjective reality of shared aspirations, expectations, experiences, and places within a particular migration trend. These debates illustrate the gaze under which British expatriate retirees view their experiences, their home country, and their retirement destination; illustrating the social, economic, cultural, and historical underpinnings that construct British retirement and later life migration experiences in Spain. This section aims to understand these discourses through ethnographic data, exploring the underpinnings that construct it, providing an understanding of the foundations upon which British expatriate retirees build their the life projects.

Before moving forward, the concept of escape narratives must be revisited (section 3.2.). These are part of migration discourses that suggest a desire to escape past pressures and open new possibilities for identity development through mobility practices (O’Reilly & Benson, 2009). In the case of retirement and later life migration, retirees find an opportunity for identity transformation through mobility and migration practices abroad. Many retiree migrants, in this research and others, speak of escaping societal pressures related to old age, economic pressures due to small pensions, and general capitalist pressures related to productivity and materialism found in their home countries (Oliver, 2007; O’Reilly & Benson, 2009; Hayes, 2018). Ultimately, these escape narratives intersubjectively generate a notion of place that regards one as a place to escape from and the other as a place to escape to, while also (re)constructing one’s identity as a ‘risk-taker’ or ‘adventurous traveler’ that breaks social conventions (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Salazar, 2014; Hayes, 2018). These migration discourses and escape narratives give meaning to the action of moving abroad, (re)constructing one’s identity along the way.

When it comes to British expatriate retiree migration discourses and escape narratives there are stable patterns that have emerged due to the established relationship between the UK, as a retiree migrant sender, and Spain, as a retirement destination (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Betty, 2017). Through these, British expatriate retirees construct the UK as a place to escape from by building a negative image of Britain. O’Reilly calls this the ‘Bad Britain’ discourse (2000). Meanwhile, Spain is constructed as a place to escape to, describing it as idyllic and paradise-like. All of this is tied to how Spain is conceived as a holiday destination underneath the tourist gaze, which in turn influences the way British expatriates interact with and experience these spaces and places during retirement (Urry & Larsen, 2011).
There are differences within Spanish retirement destinations. Those who choose the Costa Brava over the Costa del Sol are constructing an escape narrative that is slightly different from that of other British expatriate retirees, revealing notions of class that are implicit within the process of choosing a retirement destination in Spain.

These discourses illustrate various recurrent topics encountered throughout British expatriate retiree experiences in Spain. Firstly, they exemplify current sociopolitical and economic issues British retirees detect in their home countries, leading to feelings of disillusion and disenchantment. Secondly, they illustrate Spain as the antithesis of the UK, revealing past frustrations in their work lives, family lives, and overall social experiences related to prejudices and stereotypes about old age, class, gender, and more. Thirdly, they reveal the intricacies of how a retirement destination is chosen over others, giving insight into what factors come into play when choosing where to grow old and their connection to greater frameworks and structures. And finally, they reveal an unequal relationship with Spain as a holiday and retirement destination that responds to general North-South power relations.

These discursive constructions of Britain as a place to escape from and Spain as a place to escape to are the background to understanding shared British expatriate retiree experiences in Spain. The following pages are grounded on the testimonies of British expatriate retirees who comment on the UK, Spain, and the relationship between both countries, revealing migration discourses, escape narratives, and identity (re)construction processes through their accounts.

5.2.1. Disenchantment in Britain

“Have you heard of the property ladder? Well, the big thing on peoples’ minds in Britain is ‘I’m going to leave for college and get a job and then I’m going to get on the property ladder. To start with I’m gonna get a house with two bedrooms and when I can afford it then I’ll have a house with three bedrooms, then a house with four bedrooms and a drive up to the door and then we are going to have not one car but two cars...’ It’s an exhausting way to live, always looking for more. So materialistic. I didn’t want it anymore.”

- Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

From his home office in Sant Feliu de Guixols, Mick started to tell me over Zoom about the “property ladder”. He spoke to me about it as a means of illustrating what he disliked about the UK and why he didn’t feel represented by materialistic values, especially after a health scare in his late 60’s that made him re-evaluate his life project. At the time of the interview, he was living in the Costa Brava with his wife Martha, 57, for just over a year and a half. In Spain, Mick and Martha sought to get away from materialistic and capitalist pressures, pursuing their interests in biking and mountain hiking in retirement. Through these activities they found a sense of work-life balance only accessible to them in retirement abroad (Martha, 57, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). The use of discourses of disillusionment with one’s home country and its’ socioeconomic systems to justify migration is common within lifestyle migration and
mobility trends. These discourses of disenchantment and escape narratives reveal life project plans that resolve work-life balance issues and capitalist discontent through migration and mobility. They also break with localized social pressures, like those associated with ‘old age’ or capitalist consumption (Hayes, 2018; Mancinelli & Fàbrega, 2020).

When Mick spoke of the “property ladder”, he wasn’t speaking of a globalized and growing ailment pushed by capitalism, he was specifically constructing it as a British phenomenon. He used it to express deep disenchantment with the UK, illustrating a place he does not want to grow old in. The word ‘disenchantment’ has been used frequently in the Anthropology of Britain to connect personal feelings of discontent and disconnection with overall British sociopolitical infrastructures, morals, and values (Rapport, 2002; Smith, 2012a; 2012b; Tyler, 2013; Koch, 2016; Degnen & Tyler, 2017; Evans, 2017). It is a term that has appeared in relation to the white working class, white British identities, and discontent with rising multiculturalism and notions of fairness, while ‘othered’ figures and cultures attempt to ‘integrate’ into British society (Garner, 2016; Smith, 2012b).

Unlike other British subjects in different contexts, when Mick was faced with such disenchantment, he did not turn to grassroots politics or right winged cultural nationalism (Smith, 2012b; Koch, 2016; Evans, 2017). He turned to migration and mobility patterns available to him, due to factors like his socioeconomic standing, generating discursive spaces that allowed him to (re)construct his identity abroad, while also describing the UK as a place to escape from.

Within the ‘Bad Britain’ discourse, there are many metaphors like “property ladder”, used to portray the UK as materialistic, individualistic, and consumerist (O’Reilly, 2000). Others include “rat race”, “treadmill”, or “daily grind”. These expressions, not only used in the UK but across other Anglo-Saxon countries like the United States of America or Australia, refer to a never-ending race towards happiness through materialism and consumerism that is unfulfilling and frustrating (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Schlagwein, 2018; Mancinelli, 2019). These expressions have found its’ way into non-English speaking countries, illustrating the modern imperialism of the English language and the relevance these expressions pose around the world due to expanding capitalism. Implied in these expressions is the growth of competitive individualism that is believed to break down communities’ fabric, which in turn is unappealing for ageing individuals because of the fear of loneliness in old age, especially present in the Global North (Smith, 2012b; Phillipson, 2013). However, many British expatriate retirees interviewed contextualized this growth of individualism in the UK to the country’s recent political history saying things like this:

“[Margaret Thatcher] did politics that encouraged people to just think about themselves and get what they wanted out of life and become very self-centered and selfish. Money became incredibly important.”

– Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020
There was a shared understanding that the UK’s political past had impacted general national character. People like Dina found that individual socioeconomic ascension was increasing in importance due to Britain’s Thatcherite past, which in turn made for a more hostile ageing environment (Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

As ageing individuals collectively searching for a ‘better’ ageing experience in retirement, British expatriate retirees like Mick or Dina found these attitudes unappealing and incongruent with their later life project goals. This participates in the negative intersubjective construction of the UK as a place that is losing its community values and is driven by economic and individualist interests, deeming it an unfit place to age in. By migrating to Spain, they are actively breaking away from these values in search for another place that does welcome their ageing life project.

By expressing discontent towards the UK through the ‘Bad Britain’ discourse, people like Mick justified their migration decisions to Spain and constructed their own identities against these values. Eventually characterizing themselves as “risk takers”, “outside the box thinkers”, and just generally “different” from other retirees who opt to stay in their home countries. For instance, Jane, age 78, characterized herself as “different” from other retired women and “brave” for migrating on her own post-retirement to Spain, where she had never been prior to her migration (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Like Mick, Jane expressed disenchantment with the UK, but in her case, it was associated with her low pension despite having worked in a variety of odd-jobs her entire working-life. This made her feel like she wasn’t being “taken care of” in her own country, making her “take matters into [her] own hands” and search for retirement abroad (Jane, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Both accounts illustrate how identities suture subjectivity and discourse together, hailing people into being within shared realities (Hall, 1996). The ‘Bad Britain’ discourse is a way of (re)constructing identities discursively, while simultaneously generating a shared intersubjective reality where Britain is viewed negatively.

Despite wanting to escape from values such as UK’s capitalism through migration, engaging in lifestyle migration, and thus retirement migration, is also an individualist-driven life project based on the consumption of a place (Mancinelli, 2021; Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Consequently, the escape narrative that the ‘Bad Britain’ discourse helps construct is incongruent with the reality that retirement migration perpetuates. This complexity in identity construction will be explored further as the thesis unfolds, revealing contradictions between action and discourse and how they co-exist through experience.

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26 Jane’s case will be analyzed intersectionally, and in more detail, in section 6.2.2 of Chapter 6, taking into account her gender and socioeconomic status.
5.2.2. Construction of an antithesis

The ‘Bad Britain’ discourse is a way of generating part of an overall escape narrative that constructs the UK as a place to escape from. However, the other piece of this escape narrative is the way in which Spain is conceived as a place to escape to. This is the other face of the ‘Bard Britain’ discourse, where Spain is constructed in contraposition to the UK (O’Reilly, 2000). Therefore, when constructing the UK as a place unfit to age in, Spain is simultaneously constructed as a retirement destination. Meaning one is constructed as the anti-thesis of the other, and vice versa.

As discussed in section 5.1.1., Spain and the UK have a longstanding relationship due to tourism. Many British retirees first contact with Spain was through tourism. Thus, they got to know Spain underneath a tourist gaze, which views Spain as a place of leisure and consumption of experiences. When moving from tourist to retiree migrant, many of the same aspects of Spain as a holiday destination are appealing: its’ coasts, leisure opportunities, cheaper prices, warm weather, and connections with the rest of Europe (by air, sea, and road) just to name a few. Nonetheless, there are also other factors that construct Spain as a place where ‘ageing better’ is possible, offering healthier lifestyles on a social, physical, and mental level. This section will review all these factors and how they are tied to ‘ageing better’, while contributing to the construction of an escape narrative that creates Spain as idyllic and the UK as undesirable, feeding British expatriate retirees migration discourses.

One of these factors is the appeal of Spanish friendliness and community values when migrating from the UK to Spain. Being greeted on the street by strangers, being offered help to carry one’s groceries, or a passing smile were acts that made older retiree migrants conceive Spain as a community-centered place (Field diary, 2019-2020; Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). These actions were also interpreted as the hallmark of host friendliness that Spain was well-known for in early stages of its touristic development (Mantecón & Huete, 2011). Below, Dina, age 69, who had recently moved to the Costa Brava at the time of the interview, explained how she perceived Spain to be friendly and family-oriented:

“Just by observing the Spanish young people the time I have been here, particularly how they greet one another, how they behave with one another, their body language, it’s an amiable thing. In England everything is so aggressive. People don’t greet people warmly; people don’t even look at each other. Here I have noticed [that] people are just so warm and friendly and family is important. It’s nice to see.”

– Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

In Dina’s remarks, the implied comparison between the UK and Spain is made explicit. Illustrating how the characteristics assigned to one are generally contraposed with the characteristics of the other.

This occurred again in an interview with Karen, 67, and Anne, in her 70’s, (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). They were speaking about how, in the UK, they felt like people
had lost respect for the elderly, saying that younger generations constantly blamed older generations for issues like Brexit or the weakening welfare system, especially in the media (Karen & Anne, 67 & 70’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Right after discussing this unfair portrayal of those over retirement age (65), Karen started speaking about how respectful Spaniards were towards the elderly:

“I sometimes see entire families go out to lunch together. The grandparents, in wheelchairs or with walkers, are also included. It’s just so lovely. England used to be like that, family oriented. Now, it’s been lost. But when you come here, everyone gets a greeting on the street, everyone gets a smile. It’s very nice and needed when you get older.”

- Karen, 67, Costa del Sol: Interview: 2019

Like Linda, Karen is constructing Spain as a community-driven place and the current UK as its’ hostile antithesis. However, Karen goes a step further, implying that Spain’s friendliness and amiability towards the elderly benefits ageing individuals, raising their quality of life. As a person searching to find an ‘ageing better’ experience abroad, highlighting these perceived qualities fits within life project plans. Being part of a wider community, while also being valued and respected in old age is something that is important in later life (Phillipson, 2013). Thus, moving to a country where community-building and respect toward the elderly is perceived to be present is appealing to retiree migrants like Karen or Linda.

Karen also speaks of Spain as a mirror to UK’s past, something which has been noted in other studies regarding British expatriate retirees (O’Reilly, 2002). O’Reilly connects this with overall feelings of nostalgia for Britain’s past within the retiree migrant population who “escape to the past” searching for a place to remember the Britain they had been a part of (2002). Even though O’Reilly’s research took place in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, there are still indications that this nostalgic gaze, linked with imperialist and colonialist nostalgia, persists in comments like Karen’s 20 years on, perhaps on a lesser degree. Thus, British expatriate retirees’ escape narratives partake in this “escape to the past”, implying that current Spain is reminiscent of an idealized British past (O’Reilly, 2002).

In the same vein as Spain’s family values, British expatriate retirees also mention Spaniards’ capacity to “work to live, not live to work”, which most Britons supposedly lack according to informants (Martha, 57, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). This is seen as a refreshing change from materialistic tendencies in the UK, while also creating Spain as a place where work isn’t central to one’s life project. If Spain is considered to be less work-centric than the UK, this facilitates identity and life project (re)constructions in retirement when work has ceased.

Spain’s appeal in terms of sociocultural values tends to end here for many informants, with tourism associated reasons why Spain is a place to escape resurfacing within escape narratives. First signs of this within escape narratives is the use of weather as a means of illustrating Spain as paradise-like and the UK as “miserable” or “grey” (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Costa Brava: Field Diary, 11/02/2019; Jane, 78, Costa del
Informants named many advantages of warm weather, these were the most cited: lower expenses in heating, possibility for more outdoor activities, and the physical security of being able to walk without rain-dampened floors that could precipitate a fall (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2020; Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). Thus, focusing focus on warm and sunny weather builds Spain as a holiday and retirement destination that allows for a ‘better’ ageing experience.

Another important factor was the lower cost of living in Spain, mentioned almost as much as the weather. In their day-to-day lives, British expatriate retirees tended to talk a lot about Spanish affordable gastronomic traditions like tapas, small portions or platters to share, menu del día, a daily lunch menu at a reasonable price, or the vino de la casa, the restaurant’s house wine that is cheaper than others. These were used as an example of Spain’s lower cost of living and how, as pensioners, they were able to get more for less, especially when compared to the UK:

“The menu del día is the most fantastic product of Catalonia. It used to be 10-euro menu del día with a whole bottle of wine to yourself. And you thought ‘have I ended up in paradise?’”
- Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

The above citation illustrates how a lower cost of living participates in the discursive construction of Spain as an idyllic holiday and retirement destination. It must be noted, though, that the cost of living in Spain has risen since retirement migrations’ popularity climb in the 80’s and 90’s, especially in the Costa Brava. That is why Ramsay says “used to” in the above citation. However, the overall cost of living is still low enough to maintain its’ allure for incoming retiree migrants. When compounded with the warm weather, this preserves the construction of Spain as a ‘paradise’ within migration discourses and their escape narratives.

It was common for retiree migrants to speak about the weather and the cost of living as a way of justifying migration to Spanish coasts, while also illustrating one of the main purposes that drives retirement migration: a ‘better’ ageing experience. In the following Filed Diary excerpt, this very issues was addressed between two Costa del Sol Charity volunteers, Karen (mentioned before) and Norman, both in their late 60’s, while we were driving between Charity events:

“Norman explained that, in his mind, no wonder Britons come over to Spain to live. Their pensions are very low for the living expense in the UK, about 700-800 pounds without counting work top ups. He said ‘You have little money and miserable weather! It all comes down to quality of life, and the quality of life here is much better.’ Karen said that her husband has rheumatism and that it helps him to be in a warmer climate. […]. Norman reiterated that the reason younger Britons do not move to Spain is due to the lack of jobs in Spain or, if they are lucky enough to get one, the need to learn Spanish and the much lower wages than back in the UK. Norman went on to say that that was why Britons waited until retirement to come to Spain, because beforehand it isn’t worth it for them.”
- Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 11/02/2019
This excerpt illustrates how Spain cannot discursively be constructed as a retirement destination without considering the conditions in the UK as well. Material components in Spain and the UK appear as crucial factors within migrant discourses. These give a more comprehensive understanding of retirement migration as a trend beyond a generalized disenchantment with the UK that moves into the realm of geographic arbitrage (Hayes, 2018).

Consequently, Spain’s allure as a retirement destination is not only constructed from Spain’s idyllic beaches and ‘mature’ tourism infrastructure, or the sociocultural values that uphold older people. Its allure is also because of the benefits warm weather and lower costs of living suppose for British retirees, who compare their ageing experiences in Spain with a rainy and more expensive UK. Spanish coasts are constructed as spaces that offer an array of lifestyle opportunities that aren’t available to them in the UK, giving them that ‘ageing better’ experience. Ultimately, Rose, a 70-year-old woman living in Costa del Sol for over 10 years, summarizes very well in an interview how British retiree migrants conceive Spain as the UK’s antithesis: “I don’t think you age half as good in England as you do over here [Spain]” (Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

5.2.3. Choosing a “costa”

Another key aspect of British expatriate retirees’ migration discourses is which Spanish coast they choose to retire to and why. These discourses provide context to migration experiences, showing how material factors like infrastructure, weather, and cost of living are tied with sociocultural imaginaries like prejudices related to class and colonialist nostalgia.

As mentioned earlier, many British expatriate retirees already knew Spain as a holiday destination from previous vacations. Some even owned a holiday home that later became their retirement home. These would claim that deciding where to retire had “already [been] chosen for them”, as they already knew Spain well and had friends and acquaintances there (Jasper, 80, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Meanwhile, those who did not have these previous connections would explore their options in Spain and in other European countries, like Portugal or France, before committing to a particular place as a retirement destination. This was a common process that most called “doing research” (Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Some would start their “research” a couple years prior their retirement, while others waited until after retiring from the work force to start searching, establishing an initial period in retirement to travel. This was a reflexive process of assessing one’s own needs and desires, resulting in very different experiences and decisions.

Throughout this process of “research”, material factors such as weather and cost of living came up often. Despite Spain being overall cheaper and warmer than the UK, there are stark differences between southern coasts and northern coasts. The perennial sun was something that many British expatriate retirees living in Costa del Sol, in the south, would constantly highlight. Those in Costa Brava highlighted the weather but in a
different manner, valuing the changing weather between seasons saying, *I like to know when it's winter or fall!*” (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Gwen & Eliot, 75 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

When it came to cost of living, the Costa Brava was much more expensive than the Costa del Sol. Amenities like groceries, electricity, gas, or internet had similar prices, but housing and leisurely activities were more expensive. For example, in Costa Brava a *Menu del Día* ranged between 10-15 euros, while in Costa del Sol it ranged between 8-12 euros. In housing, the difference is also notable, with the average price per square meter in Costa Brava being 3950 euros and in the Costa del Sol being 2238 euros.27 Adding to the climbing cost of living was access to public transport, which was weak in Costa Brava, especially when living in secluded housing estates. This made owning a car in Costa Brava an indispensable asset, particularly considering the scattered nature of the British community there. Gwen and Eliot, 75 and 79 respectively, had been living in Costa Brava since 2006 and they had concluded that having a car was crucial when living on the northern Catalan coast:

“*Gwen commented that, since being active in la Costa Brava requires constant use of a car, anything and everything becomes more of an ordeal [...] In fact, they own two cars, a big range-rover-like Kia, and a small Yaris. They say they need two for when they are both doing different activities during the week; something which happens often. [...] When asked about public transport they said the SARFA (name of the bus company) couldn’t be trusted.*”

- Costa Brava: Field Diary, 19/02/2020

On the other hand, Costa del Sol had a strong public transport system, with bus and trains connecting the coast with Malaga capital and airport. Many British retirees used the buses, especially if they have the *Tarjeta de Oro*, a transport card for those over 65 that grants free access to all buses. Retirees saw using public transport as easy and comfortable, not having to worry about driving tired after a meal or a couple drinks with friends (John, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Costa del Sol also had more leisurely and cultural activities, with British expatriate retirees praising the great array of activities the coast offered from traditional fiestas to concerts and theater in English.

Why choose Costa Brava over Costa del Sol if the prices are lower, the weather seems to be nicer, and the transport and tourism infrastructure seems to be more convenient? Part of why British expatriate retirees chose Costa Brava was because of its access to nature and outdoor sports, with many informants being interested in cycling or trekking; reflected in the many groups destined to outdoor sports at different skill levels in the Organization. However, a big part of the decision-making process was associated to the place Costa del Sol, and other Southern coasts, occupy in the British shared social imaginary.

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27 These are the prices for purchasing a house, not an apartment. The prices shown were obtained from most popular realtor sites in the Costa Brava and the Costa del Sol (average prices 2022).
An exchange between Organization members after a petanque match in Palafrugell, Costa Brava, illustrates that. During a lunch at a local restaurant with a *Menu del Día*, the only North American couple in the group pointed out that they were astounded that not many Americans or Britons knew of the “beautiful and rocky Catalan coast”, especially when other more “crowded” and “touristy” coasts like Costa Blanca, in Alicante, or Costa del Sol, in Malaga, were so well known. This prompted others at the lunch, all British, to criticize those coasts by saying that they were “filled to the brim with Brits” and they simply had a “bad reputation” for being “tacky” and of “bad taste”. Then, everyone around the table went on to explain how they had come to find the Costa Brava, because it was mostly unknown. Some said they had encountered it through friends, others when crossing over from France (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 03/03/2020).

Besides its contact with nature, this exchange highlights part of the Costa Brava appeal: it isn’t Costa del Sol. Due to other coasts sizeable tourism and its association with Britons, these tourist and retirement destinations are described as being of ‘bad taste’. This use of ‘taste’ is a coded way of speaking of class, with it suggesting embarrassment, separating oneself from that ‘other’ as an act of belonging and identity (re)construction (Bauman, 2004; Douglas, 2004). In this case, the ‘other’ the Organization members are separating themselves from is the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ stereotype, briefly mentioned in section 5.1.1., that rejects the British white working class and persistent imperialist and colonialist nostalgia. Also, due to Costa Brava being a relatively unknown retirement destination between the British, when retirees choose this coast, they are constructing their identities as unique adventurous travelers on paths of self-transformation, which is a key component of lifestyle migrant discourses and escape narratives (Salazar, 2014).

Ironically enough, British expatriate retirees in Costa del Sol made similar comments about other British expatriate retirees that would frequent areas in Spain that were conceived as overly ‘British’ or for tourists. Exemplifying the pervasiveness and slipperiness of these stereotypes, categories, and prejudices tied to British social imaginaries on socioeconomic class, whiteness, imperialism, and colonialism, framing British expatriate retiree experiences in Spain.  

Choosing a coast in Spain is part of a life project planning process that impacts identity (re)construction, both in the moment of making the decision as well as in the retelling of it. These decisions say something about later life expectations, while also illustrating personal relationships with British sociopolitical frameworks, socioeconomic classes, and more. The act of choosing a coast over another is a key part of British expatriate retirees migration discourses, complementing and grounding escape narratives within the particularities of one Spanish coast, revealing differences between British expatriate retirees’ decision-making processes.

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28 More on this in Chapter 8.
5.2.4. An underlying sense of entitlement

In a car ride back from one of the Organization’s general meetings, Mick and his wife Martha started to talk to me about their lives in Spain. We spoke of many things: how they chose to retire to Spain, why Costa Brava, how they found small groups of Catalan cyclists they felt comfortable with, finally landing on what aspects of life in Spain they struggled with the most and didn’t expect to. Mick said he didn’t expect to feel so frustrated by the slow-paced lifestyle in Spain, especially when it affected customer service. Then Mick and Martha proceeded to tell me a story about how they wanted to install a ‘toldo’ or awning (they used the Spanish word). They called a local shop to get the task done, “the only shop that does this in town, he has a monopoly” they said between laughs. Despite issues understanding each other due to lacking language skills to understand the other, they reached an agreement. Or appeared to. The day the man was meant to come and install the ‘toldo’, he didn’t come. They called him several times, with no response. The next day, the man came to their house unannounced and did the installation much to the chagrin of the couple, who weren’t expecting his visit. Mick delivered the end of the story like a punchline to a joke, laughing and saying “this would never happen in England. But I guess this is Spain, and this is what we came here for” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 4/03/2020).

Mick and Martha’s anecdote about getting their awning installed shows how migration discourses concerning their home country and retirement destination take a different shape when met with the reality of living abroad. Here, Spain’s paradise-like community-oriented qualities are spun on its’ head and are turned into incompetence and consumer frustration. Meanwhile, the UK is characterized as efficient.

Mick’s final comments highlight the very irony of their frustration: they came to Spain searching for the same laid-back approach to life that now impedes their daily experiences. This has been called the “mañana mentality”, an expression that is meant to encapsulate the laid-back approach Spaniards have to life, claiming that everything can be done mañana (tomorrow), implying a capacity of living in the present that isn’t included in Northern ideals of punctuality (Karisto, 2013). The appeal of the “mañana mentality” in Spain is gaining a better work-life balance and, for British expatriate retirees, ‘ageing better’ because of it. However, its’ appeal wears off when retirees enter in contact with Spain’s bureaucratic and service provider services. The way experiences with bureaucracy or service providers are articulated end up implying, or explicitly stating, that Spain is “behind” or “underdeveloped” when compared to the UK, bringing to the surface the implied underlying inequality within the UK-Spain relationship (Costa del Sol: Focus Group, 2019; Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Costa del Sol: Filed Diary, 20/03/2019).

This unequal relationship can be traced back to tourism, placing Spain as a country that caters to UK’s touristic and leisurely needs. It can also be attributed to changing conceptions of whiteness in Europe, with Spain slowly moving away from the intersubjectively constructed concept of ‘European whiteness’. This is due to the increasing conflation of migrants as a source of danger, leading to the everyday
racialization of European citizens that has redrawn racial borders within the EU (Grosfoguel, 2003; Garner, 2007b; Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Lundström, 2014).

The latter becomes evident in comments like Max’s, a 69-year-old living in Spain for almost 15 years, who made the following comparison in an interview:

“[Spain is] just another Pakistan or Venezuela. Every politician is corrupt and you [Spaniards] let it happen. It holds you back. It’s sad, it’s sad.”
-Max, 69 years old, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Max’s remarks construct Spain as ‘other’, directly comparing Spain to countries that are collectively understood as being part of the Global South. Clearly marking a divide between him, as a Briton, and Spaniards; constructing his own sense of identity as British. Thus, these sorts of comments expose not only an unequal relationship between the UK and Spain, but between the Global North and the Global South; as they mark a divide within Europe by equating Southern Europe to the Global South (Grosfoguel, 2003; Lundström, 2014).

Max’s brazen remarks weren’t the norm between British expatriate retirees. However, they do explicitly reveal the underlying construction of Spain as ‘less than’ the UK that is also present in Mick and Martha’s anecdote. Said unequal relationship also lurks beneath migration discourses and escape narratives. By constructing Spain as a place to escape to, British expatriate retirees are inevitably romanticizing community-driven slow-paced lifestyles that evoke a nostalgic British past. This equation of Spain’s present with the UK’s past is not only problematic because of what that past entailed in the UK (colonialism, whiteness, imperialism...etc.), but also because it implies a chronological delay to Spain’s economic and social development. This supposed delay feeds stereotypes of the Spanish as lazy, inefficient, and corrupt. These sorts of judgments of Spanish character can be attributed to UK’s Protestant past, which has historically been tied to individualism and productivism, as well as Thatcherite Britain values (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012; Weber, 1949). This connection triggers the adoption of capitalist behaviors as moral social values in a manner other societies do not. Thus, it can be argued that when British negatively comment on the “mañana mentality” it is partially due to the latter.

The ultimate signal of the unequal relationship between the UK and Spain can be detected in the feelings of entitlement British expatriate retirees display towards Spain. A sense of entitlement is something that accompanies privilege, as privileged groups take for granted the benefits they enjoy, giving way to socially constructed discourses that legitimate this sense of entitlement (Pease, 2010). Like other Northern Europeans that migrate to Spain, British expatriate retirees do so with the intention of consuming a lifestyle, weather, and a lower cost of living; relating to Spain from a privileged vantagepoint when compared to other migrants (Lundström, 2014). This positioning gives way to a sense of entitlement, constructing British migration and mobility to Spain as a necessary economic source of income for Spain as a country (O’Reilly, 2002).
In the field, it was very common for British expatriate retirees to speak about how Spain “needed” the British as a source of income for tourism and retirement migration, revealing this underlying sense of entitlement. This sense of entitlement came out when speaking about how Brexit would affect British and Spanish relations. Even though there was a great amount of anxiety-inducing misinformation around Brexit, even those who were against Brexit and feared its outcomes, would point out the economic benefits the British brought to Spain. These were interpreted as proof of Spain's interest to maintain people like British expatriate retirees in the country (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Jane, 78; Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). This sense of entitlement was severely questioned when British expatriate retirees had to undergo changing bureaucratic processes due to Brexit, something which is ethnographically explored in Chapter 7.

Ultimately, criticizing the ‘mañana mentality’, through retellings of lived experiences, and the discursive construction of Spain as a place to escape to and the UK as a place to escape from, are both phenomena born from the same frameworks of power, geopolitics, historical baggage, and shared social imaginaries. They show how British expatriate retiree discourses and experiences coexist and participate in different manners in the shared creation of places and spaces, while simultaneously (re)constructing their own identities.
Chapter 6
Ageing on the Coasts of Spain

6.1. Complex later life projects abroad

As communities from Western societies with neoliberal and capitalist baggage, old age is conceived in British expatriate retiree communities as something to be avoided or delayed. This concept of old age is constructed and upheld through community settings and individual identity actions that value activity and middle-aged able-bodied-ness over all else; establishing feelings of belonging and (re)constructing identities upon a shared ‘ageing better’ life project. However, ageing slowly takes its toll on bodies, implying mental and physical decline in one degree or other. This embodied ageing experience goes against Western discourses on old age, which view decline as something to be repelled rather than accepted; leading to incongruences in identity (re)construction processes that must navigate opposing old age discourses, perpetuated through shared community actions, and old age experiences. These incongruences pierce the ageing experiences of British expatriate retirees in Spain, affecting them in different ways depending on another web of intersected factors such as gender, past work lives, and socioeconomic class. In turn, this influences what the ‘good life’ in Spain looks like for each retiree, depending on their accessibility to resources, economic and social, as well as their ageing condition. Ultimately, revealing a fine line between privilege, vulnerability, and precarity when it comes to constructing later life projects abroad. This final point is further demonstrated through the incursion of COVID-19, which evidenced many of the underlying issues of these ‘ageing better’ life projects. Consequently, this chapter aims to uncover how this understanding of old age affects the ageing experience abroad, shining a light on the complexity behind constructing a later life project in a community that is privileged, while also on the verge of vulnerability and dependence.

6.2. Understanding old age on the field

Molly, a Scottish woman aged 73, has a comfortable life in Costa del Sol. She has lived in Spain with her husband Ewan since 2004, when they moved permanently into their holiday apartment in Benalmadena. As most retiree migrants, Molly opted to retire to Spain because it gave them access to a ‘better’ later life experience, where the weather and economic conditions allowed them to have both more physical and social activity. For Molly this translated into participating in several Council roles in the Club she was a member: she had been treasurer, vice president, and even president. It also meant that she partook in many of the social events at the Club. She wasn’t particularly interested in golf, like her husband, or any other sport for that matter. Even though Molly describes her retirement as “relaxing”, she would tip toe around the subject of ageing. In fact, she is one of many informants who wouldn’t delve into ageing and its repercussions. When further pressed in interviews or informal conversations she would sweetly say, “Honey, no one wants to be old” (Molly, 73, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).
Even in a community of individuals already partaking in many life course milestones that imply old age, ageing still holds its negative societal connotations (Lamb, 2017; Degnen, 2007). This was evident by how the topic of old age wasn’t commonly spoken of head on in the field, using humor and hushed tones. Some of these informants, most of them in good health, did not want to think of themselves as ageing, and what the social and physical implications of that could be. This was the case of John and Kelly, friends of Molly’s from the Club in their mid to late 70’s, who had been living in Costa del Sol for over 12 years at the time of fieldwork. Like Molly, John and Kelly were both very active; always busy with social engagements, family, and friend visits, or walks on the beach and petanque tournaments at the Club.

While the couple sipped on their red wine in a sunny terrace of one of the nicest restaurants in Fuengirola, I asked what it was like to age in a country that wasn’t their own. Kelly made a face of surprise at the question, saying “we haven’t discussed really what will happen when we get really old, and we can’t look after each other”. John then went on to say, “I think the both of us do not think we are actually 70” and laughed heartedly (John & Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview: 2019). Kelly elaborated on John’s remarks by saying:

“I’m not ready for a [nursing home] at 75. Maybe someone in Scotland would be [...] but I am not. I want to add years to my life. The sun is brighter, and it adds years to me.”
- Kelly, 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

This manner of avoiding ageing in day-to-day conversations, paired with practices meant to ‘better’ the ageing experience or delay it, represent the ambivalence and incongruence with which old age is perceived and ageing is experienced in Western societies (Rowe & Khan, 1998; McHugh, 2000; Lamb, 2014; 2018). This incongruent construction creates a gap between the conceptual and the experiential of old age and ageing that is further exacerbated by discourses on ageing experiences like the ageless self, permanent personhood, or the mind body dualism, mentioned in Chapter 2 (Degnen, 2018; Lamb, 2014; Kaufman, 1986; Csordas, 1994). By conceiving of their minds and bodies as separate things, the embodied ageing experience is disembodied, leaving its repercussions as a worry for the future and not the present. When John says he doesn’t think they “are actually 70”, he is disembodifying his ageing experience, implying that his ‘true self’ does not match his chronological age and physical body (Degnen, 2012; Kaufman, 1986). This problematic becomes more acute when taking into consideration that retirement migration is conceived as a key factor in delaying old age and its associated dependency; as seen in Kelly’s last comments that compare Scotland with Spain (Lamb, 2014). For informants, migration is used as a tool to act upon permanent personhood and articulate it into being. Speaking of their migration to Spain as something that “adds years” to a person’s life, where “nobody seems to get old” (Kelly, 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Rose, 70, Costal del Sol: Interview, 2019). This reveals strong successful ageing influences while also showing how it ties into migration discourses and
constructions of place; framing Spain as the anti-thesis of the UK, where ‘ageing better’ lifestyles can be pursued.

Due to this desire to avoid ageing and its’ repercussions through activity filled lifestyles, and by conceiving of oneself as ageless or permanently ‘young at heart’, when British expatriate retirees were directly affronted with the repercussions of old age these experiences were jarring, even when they were secondhand accounts. This is what happened to Dina while having coffee at a small Café in the Town Square of Palafrugell.

Dina was a 69-year-old woman who had recently moved to Costa Brava from France. She used to work as a lawyer but had a creative side that she was exploring in retirement, telling me she wanted to take advantage of her good health “while it lasted”. She was telling me about all of this when friends of Dina’s stopped by. They were a British couple in their 70’s, the woman had a black eye, something that was not referred to during the short exchange. Once they left, Dina explained to me in hushed tones, that the woman had got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom when her blood pressure unexpectedly dropped, leading her to pass out and hit her face against the bathroom sink. Dina then remarked “Things that only happen once you get older, poor woman, right? It could happen to any of us!” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 03/03/2020).

This whole exchange highlights how old age, especially its’ negative repercussions, are taboo between able-bodied and healthy expatriate retirees. The way in which Dina spoke about the event in hushed tones, how she expressed surprise at the impending threat of ageing health and body repercussions, illustrates the complexity and relativity behind old age experiences within British expatriate retiree communities. As a community filled with individuals over retirement age, the relativity of what it means to be old becomes more nuanced, marking dependence, illness, and vulnerability as indicators of old age and ageing rather than accepting them as results of chronological age. This is because dependence, illness, and vulnerability threaten to tumble the myths of the ageless self or permanent person. Consequently, these are feared, leading to complex identity (re)construction processes that must navigate the realities of ageing and the fear of experiencing illness, dependence, or vulnerability due to it.

These complex identity (re)construction processes are particularly interesting in British expatriate retirees who are older, in their 80’s and 90’s, or who do not have healthy and able bodies. Living in an older and less fit body leads to moments in which one must acknowledge the materiality of their bodily existence (Csordas, 1994). In the field, this resulted in an attitude of acceptance or resignation, while still hinting at the gap between old age as concept and ageing as practice and the mind/body dualism. This is generally triggered by common daily occurrences that are experienced differently due to age-related issues or by big life milestone that makes ageing evident like retirement, becoming a grandparent, or suffering from an age-related illness. I refer to these instances as moments of recognition of ‘oldness’, where people must navigate their evident ageing condition and (re)construct their identities accordingly.

Despite the importance of life milestones such as retirement, which, as Degnen noted, are integral to creating a notion of time within one’s own biography, moments of recognition of ‘oldness’ can also be composed by tiny mundane occurrences where ageing
identities are slowly (re)constructed in everyday life (2012). These moments of recognition of ‘oldness’ challenge notions of permanent personhood and what the successful ageing paradigm stands for, cumulatively acting as catalysts for identity change. The following Field Diary excerpt illustrates one of these mundane moments of recognition of ‘oldness’ that occurred in a coffee morning, organized by the Charity in Costa del Sol, with a user named Christine:

“During our talk there was a moment in which Christine (in her late 80’s) could not properly open her water bottle, so I opened it for her. This prompted her to comment on how before she used to be the one helping open people’s bottles or jars. “How the times have changed!” she said. She called it a “reality check” of how her life is different now and how she is ageing. This moment reminded her of something that had recently occurred to her on a Charity fieldtrip to the Orchid Museum the day before. Christine explained how they had to walk up a steep hill to get to the Museum and she had a hard time doing it. Christine describes how, in that moment, one checks in with their ageing body and where they find themselves [...] She took it as a funny thing that just happens in life, while others around her started to act very awkwardly trying to instantly cheer her up.”

- Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 14/03/2019

The latter entry, demonstrates how something as simple as opening a bottle of water can remind someone of how his or her body has changed with age, making evident their bodily limitations. Christine joined two events in her life to signify ageing, the occurrence with the water bottle and the moment at the Orchid Museum. Overall, she expressed a mix of acceptance and resignation saying that this is something that “just happens”.

What is also interesting to note, is the reaction of others witnessing Christine’s moment of recognition ‘oldness’, who instantly cajoled her or minimized the events. These reactions are telling of the extent to which admitting old age is taboo in Western societies, to the point where acknowledging someone else’s ageing seems to be a sign of bad manners. In one of her studies on old age in United States of America, Lamb points out how this is a codified social response in Western societies perceived as etiquette, where one instantly counters a comment on one’s ageing condition with “age defying discursive labor” that is expected in Western societies (2018:2). This is what was happening to Christine, with those around her making remarks like “you are still young” or “you don’t seem to be so out of shape”. This age defying discursive labor was extremely prevalent, as if it were a preestablished social script. If someone made a remark about their ageing body, others would say “you look so great!” almost instantly.

These responses reinforce the confusing experience that is ageing in Western societies. These remarks are meant to make people like Christine feel better; to console them about their ageing condition by telling them there is a way to go back to ‘normal’. However, the assumed normalcy refers to being able-bodied, productive, active, and independent. This stunts people’s capacity to give meaning to decline and to the loss of physical and mental capabilities. Instead, it places pressure on the individual to meet up to unrealistic standards. Lamb explains that in India accepting decline and eventual death
are common parts of social discourse between older Indians, commonly associated to Hinduism and the view of transience of the human condition (2014; 2000). Conversely, between British retirees this sort of discourse is replaced with notions that highlight the importance of independence in all its forms, negatively associating old age with dependency and vulnerability.

When ageing abroad, old age becomes a blurry nuanced concept. The discourses displayed around ageing in these environments, from different degrees of successful ageing to permanent personhood, create very impactful moments of recognition of oldness that deeply shape one’s experience abroad and their communities. The relativity of what it is to be old is heightened to minutiae that other younger generations would pass as irrelevant, making evident the conflicting nature of old age as an abstract concept, and ageing as a lived experience. Therefore, the following pages will explore how this concept of old age as something to be avoided is acted into being through individual and community actions. In turn, it also explores how this very conception leads to backlash when vulnerability and dependence start to become present.

6.2.1. Age defying performances and monitoring ‘oldness’

As mentioned in Chapter 2, what it means to be old, or ageing, is mutually constructed between the self and society, creating a feedback loop between them of what old age is meant to be and how it is experienced; affecting identity construction accordingly creating a disjuncture between discourse and lived experience (Degnen, 2012; Lawler, 2014). Amongst British expatriate retirees, being ‘old’ is understood as being vulnerable or dependent and something to be avoided. This seriously affects how everyday life experiences are approached, leading to practices that perform and monitor age individually and communally in everyday life and perpetuate old age markers as something negative.

The practices involving performances are meant to showcase one’s capability and independence in front of others. I call these age-defying performances, borrowing Lamb's terminology (2018). These keep moments of recognition of oldness at bay, as they involve showing one isn’t old or is ageing ‘well’ – a concept that is heavily dependent on personal context. Meanwhile, monitoring practices are meant to control and judge ‘oldness’ in others; these are referred to as monitoring ‘oldness’, using Degnen’s terminology (2012). This practice can be tied to age defying performativity, as community members track these instances individually or together, judging whether they signify old age, dependence, or vulnerability, comparing it to others. Both these practices co-construct what it means to be old in a British expatriate retiree community, while creating a space for identities to be (re)constructed. It must be noted that, age-defying performativity and monitoring of ‘oldness’ must be placed in a wider Western context where neoliberal individualization and shrinking welfares systems are on the rise. This leads to large social disciplinary strategies that aim to transfer ageing responsibilities from the state onto the individual (Katz, 2000; Allain & Marshall, 2017). Thus, these practices reflect this macro level state influence on the micro of the mundane. Additionally, said Western context
implies a Cartesian divide between the mind and body. Age-defying performances especially reflect said divide, as it calls for the mind to control the bodily reactions, modifying them as a result (Douglas, 2004).

Age-defying performances and monitoring of ‘oldness’ are experienced differently depending on socioeconomic class; a factor that shapes access to disposable income, pension schemes, private healthcare, and general physical health in later life (Calasanti & Giles, 2017). In the field, informants came from very different working conditions, from businessmen to engineers, to accountants, teachers, and pub owners. Meaning that the conditions in which each entered retirement and later life were slightly different. Those most privileged, tended to have very little life experience with social isolation due to health limitations. Explaining why many of them were experiencing age-related vulnerability or dependency for the first time abroad. Thus, the responses to these limitations were strong, resulting in age-defying performances and monitoring that were sprinkled throughout everyday community interactions.

These were quite common at the Club in Costa del Sol. In the weekly petanque meets, it was common for male players to refuse help when picking up heavy metal balls used to play petanque (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). They would state that it was dangerous to pick up someone else’s balls because, when you gave them back to their owner, there was the possibility of accidentally dropping the heavy metal spheres on someone’s foot, leading to injuries. This did occur, as I did witness and suffer some bruises due to this myself. However, between men this practice was used to display bodily agility. If someone picked up your petanque balls, especially if they are noticeably younger than you, or a woman, it became an issue of pride. During the first months of fieldwork, I would pick up other players balls as a sign of good sportsmanship and manners. This led male players to urge me to drop them again, allowing them to pick up their own in front of other Club members. This occurred every week in the petanque courts at the Club, where members would gather at a terrace overlooking the courts to watch those who were playing and comment on the matches. Thus, showcasing how constructing what is old and who is old in the Costa del Sol Club community was something done through quotidian actions done in front of others, constructing one’s own identity away from the label ‘old’.

This age-defying performance was gender coded. Women would use strings with magnets on one end to pick up their petanque balls without having to crouch down. They would also use gloves to protect their hands from dust and dirt. This wasn’t explicitly seen as a sign of oldness for most women (there were some exceptions), but as of a sign of femininity. Meanwhile, when men used such magnetic strings, it was seen as a sign of accepting one’s limitations.

Age-defying performances of women were different from that of men, especially in environments with more socioeconomic privilege. Once again, in the Costa del Sol Club, women would display bodily agility through other things men didn’t, like comparing their steps per day, normally during post-petanque drinks, using their sports watches and smartphones (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). This sort of age-defying performance wouldn’t be possible between other British expatriate retiree women with less economic
resources, as these didn’t have the access to technology, or knowledge of how these devices worked, needed to engage in such age defying performativity.

Also, in the case of women, bodily agility was tied to overall appearance, connecting it to maintaining one’s weight (Karen & Anne, 67 & 72, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). As can be expected in a patriarchal society, the age defying performativity linked to appearance was a lot more prevalent between women than men, extending beyond weight to clothes and make up (Whelehan, 2013). Looking put together, wearing make-up and nice clothes, was valued between female informants, reflecting the societal pressure placed on women and their appearances. It was both a display of femininity and a way to express permanent personhood, establishing distance between themselves and the label ‘old’, ‘dependent’, or ‘vulnerable’.

This social pressure of maintaining appearances as a way of defying old age became evident in the case of a Club member, Victoria, in her late 70’s, who developed colon cancer. After a very serious operation, she needed an external medical bag that collected bodily fluids. Victoria would attend as many Club events as she could, dressing up in fancy clothes that would artfully disguise her medical bag, would always have her hair and nails done immaculately and would never speak about her disease publicly (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 04/03/2019). She was clearly undergoing a life altering moment, experiencing illness in a foreign country. However, what was most commented about her in the Club was how often she came to events and how much effort she put into her appearance. The monitoring of her appearance is both a way of monitoring oldness and constructing what is and isn’t old, while also controlling femininity, exemplifying the intersectional nature of the ageing experience for women. There were those who applauded her tenacity and capacity to maintain activity, while others thought that so much activity was reckless behavior. Either way, what was agreed by both sides was that Victoria was intentionally showcasing that she wasn’t dependent despite her cancer through her physical appearance and display of abilities. Victoria’s age-defying performances and the way she was monitored, illustrate how interconnected the self and society are in both identity (re)construction and the configuration and perpetuation of what being ‘old’ is within these communities, while also revealing how gender intersects with these practices and constructions.

Those from middle to lower socioeconomic backgrounds also participated in age defying performances and monitoring of ‘oldness’, but in different ways and degrees. When speaking of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, I am referring to ethnographic spaces like the Charity, in Costa del Sol, or some members of the Organization, in Costa Brava. In these ethnographic spaces, age defying performances weren’t as pronounced because many informants didn’t have the economic means to engage in these practices. The fact that those with fewer resources didn’t have access to, for example, private petanque courts, generating looser group dynamics and less opportunities for monitoring. They also didn’t have access to certain technology, like step counting watches or apps on their phones, making those with less socioeconomic resources less prone to participate in age defying performances and monitoring of ‘oldness’ in the same degree as their more affluent counterparts. In less wealthy social circles, where fewer
opportunities to spend time together organically arose, most monitoring was centered on big lifestyle decisions, not employing as much focus on details surrounding appearance or physical ability.

For instance, in the Charity there was a woman who lived in Mijas Golf, a secluded area in Costa del Sol that was hard to access by public transport or car. The woman had recently lost her husband, who was the one who drove both around. After her husband’s death, the woman found herself scared of driving on her own and resorted to Charity volunteers and friends to bring her to and from social events or help her do her shopping. The volunteers would comment amongst themselves about her “reckless behavior”, commenting on how this arrangement would only isolate her as she got older, saying that “for the life of them” they couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t move somewhere more accessible (Field Diary, 02/07/2019). Here, the volunteers were imparting judgements on this Charity user’s life, monitoring whether she was making a correct decision in her ‘ageing better’ life project abroad and adjudicating oldness connected to dependence because she didn’t feel capable to drive herself from place to place.

This was an established pattern in the Charity, where volunteers aimed was to help users with issues around ageing abroad, resulting in ‘oldness’ monitoring. In this space, monitoring was justified as part of volunteering. Unlike monitoring at the Club, it was one-sided because ‘users’ didn’t monitor volunteers as closely as volunteers did users. The volunteers’ relative position of power versus users - be it because they knew the Spanish legal system, or because they had lived in Spain for many years – meant they used their knowledge as a tool to monitor, judge, and adjudicate ‘oldness’ to others. Therefore, the power dynamics within the Charity meant that constructing ‘old age’ was dictated mostly by volunteers rather than users.

This was unique to the Charity, as in the Organization in Costa Brava said power dynamics didn’t exist. However, Organization members didn’t share enough social time and space to engage in the same level of monitoring that took place in the Costa del Sol Club. Therefore, Organization weekly or monthly events became the focus of age defying performances and monitoring.

Through age defying performativity and monitoring of ‘oldness’, British expatriate retirees on Costa del Sol and Costa Brava engaged in a context dependent co-construction of old age. Overall age defying performances emphasize the importance of signifying one’s own personal independence through different displays of bodily agility, autonomy, and permanent personhood. This takes different forms between varying socioeconomic circles and gender. These performances (re)construct British expatriate retirees’ identities away from ‘old’ and into the realm of ‘ageing better’, establishing that they are executing their life projects successfully. The monitoring of these performances within their communities is followed differently from ethnographic site to site; showing how complex, subjective, and relative to context old age is.
6.2.2. Moving through spaces and resorting to inaction

Age defying performances and monitoring of ‘oldness’ exemplify why meaningful decline is hard to attain in Western societies, illustrating through the quotidian the persisting social pressures to age ‘well’ even in an environment where everyone is sharing the experience of ageing abroad (Degnen, 2012; Lamb, 2014). These social pressures shape the lives of British expatriate retirees in a way that influences their behaviors and practices. This can be seen when individuals purposefully do not engage in certain social or physical activities to avoid a moment of recognition of ‘oldness’ in front of others, possibly resulting in monitoring and/or an adjudication of ‘oldness’. This inaction requires a sense of one’s limitations but also relies on denial or evasion of old age in front of others. It represents a unique moment in time when, suddenly, British expatriate retirees feel pressures they used to align with and encourage, because of their inability to carry out actions that they were able to do before (Allain & Marshall, 2017). Therefore, inaction represents being stuck between age defying performances, that one cannot engage in, and moments of recognition of ‘oldness’ that one doesn’t want to affront.

One of these individuals was Monica an 80-year-old woman who had recently undergone knee surgery and was having a hard time regaining mobility. She would purposefully avoid all Club meetings and, when asked about it by friends and other members, she would say it was because she had “previous engagements” or simply “wasn’t up for it” (Interview: Costa del Sol, 2019). Her husband Nigel would also miss the event to justify her absence. When asked during an interview why she didn’t attend Club events she said the following:

“I just don’t like attending events at the Club. The Villa has so many flights of stairs, you’ve seen them; they are everywhere. I can walk up stairs. I just take a while. I need a good grip and have to go sideways…its’ better for my knee that way. It’s just… I’m so slow, I feel like I’m being gawked at. […] So, I rather not go. At least for the time being.”

- Monica, 80, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Monica wasn’t the only one who felt that way about the Villa. Due to its steep staircases and how one needed a car to access it, the Club’s Villa would act as a generator of either age defying performances or moments of recognitions of ‘oldness’. If someone took a taxi and didn’t drive themselves to the Villa or would avoid going up stairs, members would notice and inquire about it. By not going to the Villa, Monica was avoiding these sorts of interactions. However, monitoring still occurred as people speculated why Monica wasn’t coming; going as far as asking me whether I knew why Monica and her husband Nigel weren’t attending events. This was severely affecting the couple’s social capital, as the less they attended events the less involved they were with the community that represented their central support network in Spain.

The risk of losing contact with integral support networks due to inaction, to avoid being monitored for ‘oldness’, was higher between British retirees in the Costa Brava than in the Costa del Sol. This was due to the community’s scattered distribution, leading
people who wanted to attend Organization events to face more obstacles than other retirees in other coasts. Some Organization members would directly state that they didn’t feel safe driving due to old age, while others avoided doing so out of fear of being labeled ‘old’. The latter were the ones who would lose touch with the community. Despite knowing members had issues moving from one Organization event to another, the Organization board didn’t provide any official resources to solve this issue. All solutions were informal. This implied that members in need had to admit to others their limitations, preventing some members from searching for help to continue attending Organization events.

An anomaly on the field regarding this type of inaction was found in the ethnographic space created by the Charity. As a space built to tend to the vulnerable and old, the social pressures of ageing were felt, but not to the extent of inducing paralysis to its ‘users’. It was a space where vulnerability and dependence were expected, and solutions were offered. Individuals felt freer admitting they needed help getting their groceries, driving their cars, or going to a doctor’s appointment. This acceptance was visible in the spaces occupied by the Charity. These spaces would be accessible to all types of mobilities and would be filled with walkers and wheelchairs. In no other space would there be so many objects that made evident one’s physical limitations, not in the Clubs or Organization events.

Consequently, the degree of inaction within a community reveals how different expatriate retiree communities conceive old age. They all start from the same ambivalent approach to old age, but some have wider gaps regarding old age as a discourse and old age as an experience. These can also be detected through how social places and communities’ spaces are organized, revealing this understanding of old age. For instance, the Villa’s steep staircases or the Organization’s failure to provide alternatives to those not willing to drive up and down the coast, expose an unawareness of diverse ageing experiences. Vulnerable and dependent realities weren’t explicit in these spaces because those who organized them were negating these due to Western discourses that influenced their views on ageing as being something to be avoided. Thus, they are impeding the capacity of vulnerable and dependent people to manifest their experiences in meaningful ways within these spaces.

It must be noted that inaction doesn’t always lead to a permanent loss of contact with the community. Some work through their mobility issues or age-related health concerns through time. Monica participated in Sunday lunches again after a couple months of inaction. She would get to the Club very early to avoid walking up and down stairs in front of others, all while looking her best in her best outfits, manicured hands, and coifed hair; passing from inaction to age-defying performances. Monica did encounter monitoring, as other members asked about her injuries and remarked on her condition. But, most importantly, people were genuinely glad to see her doing well (Field Diary, Costa del Sol, 17/04/2019). This helped Monica to slowly accept her current walking condition, as she realized that losing contact with the Club was more detrimental to her ageing experience than the monitoring she had to endure. Towards the end of fieldwork,
Monica was feeling more secure in her own ageing body, participating in events despite her limitations.

British expatriate retiree communities have a complex relationship with ageing and old age that is exemplified through quotidian practices that construct and uphold a grounded understanding of it. Moments of recognition of ‘oldness’, age defying discursive labor and performativity, monitoring of ‘oldness’, or general inaction are all practices that respond to this complex relationship. They reveal that old age in these communities is generally conceived as dependence and vulnerability, something which must be avoided or hidden to different degrees depending on the social space it takes place. Thus, British expatriate retirees undergoing any sort of decline must choose how to navigate this experience, responding to discourses and practices that conflict with their own lived experience. This illustrates the internal wrestling that occurs in identity (re)construction processes in later life.

6.3. From work to retirement life projects

During a petanque match in the center of Palafrugell, a new member of the Organization, Pat, in her late 70’s, wanted to get to know her teammate, another woman in her early 80’s. In between turns, the women started engaging in small talk, asking each other where they were from and how they came to live in Costa Brava. One question stood out from the rest. When Pat wanted to know what her teammate’s husband work had been in the past, she asked “what did he do in real life?” The matter of the question isn’t that strange, but the wording took me by surprise. Pat’s interlocutor barely flinched at the wording, proceeding to tell Pat about how her husband used to be a merchant mariner, travelling the world. Pat then said, “No wonder you came to live here then!” (Field Diary, Costa Brava 02/18/2020). This simple exchange reveals how work, retirement and migration are integrated into the identities of British expatriates. And how, despite being retired, work holds a powerful part of people’s identities well into retirement.

Between British expatriate retirees, what one used to work as is considered personal information that allows insight into why a person thinks and acts a certain way in later life. Like why they chose Spain as a retirement destination; just like Pat assumed that being married to a merchant mariner made the woman she was talking to more prone to retire to Spain. Someone’s work life holds social legitimacy due to the governing middle-aged normativity in today’s Western societies, awarding that life course moment the distinction of being substantial; a “real” moment according to Pat. Using the word “real” also bares the unvalidated space retirement occupies in Western societies, considering it a less socially significant life course moment, with less legitimacy than work.

Retirement is a life milestone that marks the biographies of ageing individuals as the moment when they stopped being a ‘productive’ part of society (Degnen, 2012; Lamb, 2014). Be it a loss of economic or social productive and reproductive processes,

29 A merchant mariner is a person that works for the British Merchant Navy.
retirement has been attributed to a loss of purpose and an onset of ‘oldness’ within Western societies (Phillipson, 2013; Taylor et al. 2021). This is reflected in informants dislike for the word retiree or retirement, making comments like the following: “[retirement] has overtones of old people sitting and doing nothing and getting old. It’s got all the wrong kind of overtones.” (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). This dislike can be attributed to the decline narrative, explored in Chapter 2, that gives old age and its’ associated life moments negative connotations (Hockey & James 1993). Yet, these comments go further into why these negative connotations exist within the context of British retirees in Spain. It shows a connection between idleness as something morally reprehensible that is associated with the acceleration of ageing. This introduces moral value to being busy in later life, making it the ‘right’ way of growing old (Katz, 2000). This ‘right’ way of ageing is expressed through a desire between British expatriate retirees to age “successfully”, “healthily”, or “actively” with life projects that mimic middle-aged levels of activity. In other words, busy lifestyles. Said desire is tied to the successful ageing paradigm influences that seemingly give old age and retirement more positive connotations. Consequently, like old age, retirement has a convoluted history, leading to identity (re)construction processes that must navigate the negative connotations that old age carries intersected with the pressures of living in a capitalist and neoliberal system after leaving the workforce or middle-aged-ness.

As evidenced by the popularity of retirement migration, retirement is now marketed as a moment to regain one’s work-life balance through autonomy and control over one’s own schedule while adding a search for self-care (Rowe & Kahn 1998; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong & Sherraden, 2001; Phillipson, 2013; Lamb, 2018). For retirement migrants, leaving work and entering retirement become integral parts of their escape narratives and migration discourses, describing these life milestones as breaking points that allow them to reimagine their life project outside of work constraints, increasing their agency and mobility (Torkington, David, & Sardinha, 2015).

British expatriate retirees on the field had many different experiences leaving their work lives behind and entering retirement, constructing their escape narratives accordingly. Some had to retire early to take care of sick loved ones or they themselves had an illness to tend to. Others found themselves without a job and opted for retirement, deciding they had worked long enough. Meanwhile, others gradually worked into retirement, some with small, odd jobs in Spain while others did overseas consulting for companies they had worked for throughout their careers. From those who were looking forward to retirement to those who were forced into it, many informants described facing retirement as a moment to evaluate their lives and decide what they were searching for in their upcoming life stage. Then there were women who didn’t consider themselves to be retired because they hadn’t participated in salaried work but did engage in reproductive work in their marriages (Candela & Piñon 2013). These women would use other people’s retirements, normally their husbands, as a moment to evaluate their own
life projects and future life aspirations\textsuperscript{30}. Ultimately, it is within this moment of recognition of ‘oldness’, catalyzed by entering retirement, that the self-bettering life project of retirement migration emerges as a possibility of giving meaning to their next life stage (Beson & O’Reilly, 2009; Oliver, 2008).

Overall, the appeal of being on a permanent holiday after retirement as a work-life reward is what initially attracted many British expatriate retirees to Spain post retirement (Torkington, David, & Sardinha, 2015). This expressed itself in escape narratives like Niall and Sophie’s. Niall, 70, had always travelled around Europe for work and Sophie, 73, had followed him, raising their five children along the way. The prospect of returning to the UK after retiring didn’t entice either of them. Only one of their five children lived there, and in an area that wasn’t to their liking. Both Niall and Sophie disliked the idea of moving somewhere they didn’t know well just to be close to their children - who were scattered around the globe from the United States to Australia - because they didn’t want to become burdens to them in old age. Whenever they were in the Costa Brava vacationing, which was often, they saw “people having a younger attitude towards life” (Sophie, 73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). It was on one of these holidays that the couple decided to move there:

“How we would sit in the Llafranc paseo and have a café con leche and just talk about what we would do if we lived there. Obviously, we didn’t know then that Llafranc was a ghost town in the winter, so we would imagine ourselves walking on the beach every day, even in colder weather. Having wine with our meals... just being happy, you know? And one day we said, what if we did it? (she smiles) What if we actually lived here?”

- Sophie, 73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

The couple’s retelling of how they decided to migrate to the Costa Brava reveals an escape narrative that simultaneously idealizes Spain as a holiday destination, while also dreaming of ‘greener pastures’ after a long work life. It also shows how retirement is given meaning through migration to Spain, a space that symbolized a holiday mind set as well as youthfulness for the couple.

Once in Spain, Niall joined a history club and got to know Spanish and Catalan history. Sophie went out for lunch and dinner with friends, enjoying not having to worry about house chores and meals for others. Together they participated in other social and physical activities, like traveling around the country with friends or trekking on the mountainous terrain of the Costa Brava. Both pursued life projects that reflected interests of theirs that they couldn’t have pursue during their middle-aged work lives. Their lives were filled with activities that excited them, because they hadn’t been able to pursue them during their working lives, and that kept them busy.

Ultimately, retirement presents an opportunity to reconstruct life projects that break with past work lives. Making space for new life pursuits and providing autonomy

\textsuperscript{30} How these women construct their retirement despite not having engaged in salaried work is investigated at the end of section 6.2.1.
over leisure that isn’t accessible during one’s middle-aged work life. However, this reconstruction isn’t the same for all. Not only is it influenced by its’ association with old age, but it is also affected by gender, socioeconomic class, past work lives, and more. Consequently, this section explores how a work life is constructed into a retirement life, exploring how searching for a ‘better’ later life experience can also uncover structural inequalities.

6.3.1. The “good life”

The “good life” is an expression that appears throughout lifestyle and retirement migration research, referring to an ideal life a retiree migrant pursues abroad to attain a work-life balance that isn’t accessible to them in their home country (Beson & O’Reilly, 2009). As explained in Chapter 3, section 3.2., this term is elusive in its content, meaning different things to different migrants, as each life project has its peculiarities (Salazar, 2014). The “good life” on Spanish coasts is conceptually tied to how British expatriate retirees conceive Spain as a holiday and retirement destination, where a better quality of life and a ‘better’ ageing experience is available; escaping the “rat race” or “daily grind” by breaking with productivity driven and work centered lifestyles in the UK.

In the field, the expression would normally surface in moments of pleasure, while sunbathing in one’s garden and exclaiming “this is the good life!” or while having a wine tasting overlooking the sea “this is the good life right here!” (Isabel, 70, Costa del Sol; Interview, 2019; Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). When asked what this expression meant, informants would say it referred to “living by your own rules” (Isabel, 70, Costa del Sol; Interview, 2019), highlighting a sense of agency that wasn’t present during their working years. Ethnographically understanding what the “good life” entails for different British expatriate retirees offers the opportunity of accessing a variety of expectations and experiences.

As an empty term, each expatriate retiree filled the “good life” with different meanings associated to their past work lives and personal life histories. For example, Lidia, aged 85, decided to retire to Costa del Sol after spending a lifetime working in an electronics factory. Some days, she wouldn’t even see daylight, which made her want to spend her retirement somewhere “the sun never stopped shining” (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Or Mary, aged 86, retired early to her Costa Brava holiday home with her husband, only because they were so burnt out from their business in the hospitality industry, and they wanted to spend more quality time together. She explains:

“\textit{We’d been in the pub business since I was in my twenties. We had our own business and then I was 47 and my husband was really strained because it is hard work, and it was a long time. [...] my mother said, if you don’t get him out of this country or this work, he is going to die. I said right that’s it! He’s mentally drained. We made a pact that if in a few years’ time,}

\footnote{Mary was briefly introduced in Chapter 5, where her retirement migration experience was connected to previous touristic experiences in Costa Brava.}
when he was feeling better, if he wanted to go back into it, we would, but we never ever thought about going back to it.”

- Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Both women retired to Spain to tip the work/life scale in a direction that benefited them, using retirement migration as a means of triggering said recalibration. Their “good life” was influenced by their work life histories, acting as push factors towards a lifestyle in retirement aimed towards gaining access to what they lacked before: autonomy over their own time and where they spent it.

It must be noted that both Lidia and Mary are women of middle to low socioeconomic means, living alone in Spain, leading them to describe themselves as “risk-takers” (Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Consequently, their “good life” was constructed around this notion of taking charge of their lives and being empowered. They would define the “good life” as “moving around, meeting people, and doing what [they] wanted” (Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). In other words, speaking of the “good life” was a way of articulating a sense of agency and empowerment, breaking with traditional female roles within their past identities.

Women with fewer resources and/or migrating on their own, found that retirement migration represented a unique opportunity for redefining their identities against traditional relationship and familial obligations; something which was also detected between women migrating alone post-retirement to Ecuador in Hayes’ seminal work (2018). However, this migration implied a risk of potentially creating rifts in family ties, a risk that doesn’t present itself as prominently in the experiences of men migrating on their own. Lidia, who had a very turbulent marriage, found that migrating to Spain was a way of asserting her independence once she was widowed. By migrating to Spain, she was leaving behind her adult children, creating a conflict within her family who saw this as an “abandonment” (Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). There were many single or widowed women like Lidia who put their family ties at risk when pursuing retirement migration life projects, describing similar accusations of abandonment or recklessness by family members. This gave more meaning to their retirement and their migration. Placing both as pivotal identifying moments within their migration discourses and what they wanted their “good life” to look like. Therefore, their “good life” wasn’t only identified by their waged work lives but also by their reproductive work, which was altered by their migration in retirement. This highlights how gender, waged work and reproductive work intersect and affect later life experiences.

For women with more socioeconomic resources and migrating with a partner, the risk experienced in retirement migration was lower; especially for those couples who had past work lives marked by transience and travel. For these women and their partners, the “good life” they searched for through retirement migration were charged with different signifiers that minimized notions of bravery and risk taking that Lidia and Mary oppositely underlined. Instead, commodity in later life took center stage without as much resistance from family members. For instance, Nigel and Monica, who were previously introduced while speaking of inaction, migrated to Spain from Malaysia because it was
the most “sound” option for their retirement (Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). They already knew the Costa del Sol from Nigel’s business travels and they enjoyed its’ proximity to the UK, while also being culturally different with a warmer climate. Consequently, for Nigel and Monica, going to Spain was a way of reaffirming their identities as travelers, while also experiencing a moment of recognition of ‘oldness’ that made explicit that they no longer wanted to live so far away from their children in later life.

It must be noted that Monica didn’t have a waged career but instead dedicated her life to her family and reproductive work, affecting how she experienced retirement and the “good life” she wanted to pursue. Accordingly, in Monica’s retelling of their retirement migration decision-making process, there is much more focus on family ties and reproductive work than Nigel. In an interview, she stated that she felt like her family no longer needed her as they used to. So, moving to Spain, instead of back to the UK, helped her step away from familial responsibilities and have the opportunity of eating out more often and do less housework by contracting a domestic worker (Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). That was the “good life” for her.

Like Monica, Sophie, aged 73, was also a stay-at-home mother her entire middle-aged life. Sophie travelled Europe with her husband Niall and their five children. Wherever Niall was sent, Sophie would attempt to learn the language to help her children with their homework. This involvement in her children’s lives seeped into their adulthoods, as Sophie would travel around the globe to help her children move into their new homes or to take care of grandchildren, while her sons or daughters and their spouses were on vacations or work trips. Unlike Monica, who spoke about not being needed anymore by her adult children, Sophie had the opposite experience in later life. Leading her to search for tranquility by migrating away from her familial duties:

“I love my family and helping my kids out. But sometimes I need my time as well. Being here I don’t have to cook, we go out to eat, we have a woman that cleans…things are easier. I get to relax for real.”

- Sophie, 73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

In the above quote Sophie expresses a similar sentiment of regaining autonomy over her own time that other British expatriate retirees who had worked salaried jobs also expressed, but she did so regarding reproductive work.

Monica and Sophie’s migration life projects to Spain do not imply a dramatic break with familial obligations as it does for women migrating on their own with fewer socioeconomic resources. Nevertheless, they do illustrate the importance of considering reproductive work as work. Despite clearly pursuing a “good life” marked by past reproductive work lives, both women seldom described themselves as being retired. This was not only because the word ‘retired’ has connotations of ‘oldness’ that are socially rejected, but it is also because reproductive work is gender biased and unrecognized by

32 The couple was introduced earlier at the end of section 6.2.
a patriarchal capitalist society that values economic productivity (Candela & Piñon, 2013; Castel, 2003). This explains why they didn’t view themselves as retired, due to this patriarchal structure that deems women’s middle-aged life stage less than for not being involved in waged work.

Monica and Sophie are just a couple examples of many other informants who were stay at home mothers or self-proclaimed “expat wives” or “trailing spouses”, a term used to describe corporate expatriate wives (Fechter, 2007; Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). These women dedicated their middle-aged life stages to social and family causes, raising their children, and getting involved with the expatriate community they were in, if they were abroad. When she wasn’t busy with housework or her children, Monica would volunteer at a British community theater in Malaysia, helping with set decorations and deciding what plays to put on. She would also attend cocktail parties and dinner dances as part of networking events for Nigel. Despite all this, Monica would minimize her reproductive work saying, “oh, I was just an expat’s wife” (Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

Women like Monica and Sophie represent a unique intersection of social class, migration, gender, and ageing, where identity (re)construction hinges heavily upon their familial obligations and how these change with age. In fact, Monica felt how her familial role changed as she aged in Spain, and with it her idea of the “good life”, especially after her grandchildren were born. During an informal conversation over lunch with Nigel and Monica, Monica voiced her regret over not being able to spend more time with her grandchildren saying that “they grow so fast, and I feel like I’m missing things”. Meanwhile, Nigel disagreed stating: “This way we aren’t swamped by them all year”. The tension was palpable between the couple, with even the waiter making jokes after the fact to break the tense mood at our lunch table (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 24/02/2019). This represents a common rift between couples once grandchildren are born (O’Reilly, 2000). It also emphasizes how gender and ageing intersect to create different experiences in retirement, with men feeling less pressure to tend to their families or be available to them like women did in these communities; reflecting the gendered familial structures of the times this generation grew up in (Jones et al., 2008).

Experiences of women like Monica embody the nuanced realities of the unseen work of stay-at-home mothers or “trailing spouses”, while simultaneously representing a privileged ageing experience (Fechter, 2007). In Spain, where eating out and housework is cheaper than in the UK, these women can transfer their responsibilities within the reproductive economy to other workers. The proximity between the UK and Spain allows many women like Monica and Sophie to maintain family ties without needing to tend to familial obligations. Together this constitutes the “good life” for British expatriate retiree women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These experiences highlight the global social inequalities that facilitate this transference of the reproductive economy, while also illustrating the gendered experience of mobile professionals’ partners well into retirement and later life stages (Hayes, 2018; Kunz, 2016).

Ultimately, retirement and the “good life” are interconnected with past work lives, be they productive or reproductive. In Costa del Sol and Costa Brava, British expatriate
retirees share a general idea of what the “good life” is that is directly related to agency and autonomy over one's own schedule. However, these past pages have exposed how socioeconomic backgrounds and gender notably affect how the “good life” is shaped in practice. Consequently, the execution of what a “good life” entails depends on how identity traits intersect.

6.3.2. Busyness and being ‘useful’

In the field, establishing interview times or meet ups with British expatriate retirees wasn’t easy because of their busy schedules. These were filled with a variety of activities that included volunteering in charitable organizations or social clubs, attending meals with friends, entertaining visiting family members or friends, going to dance, yoga and/or Pilates classes or petanque meets, cycling, trekking, or walking along the coastline. When asked about these activity-filled lifestyles, many answered things like “it keeps me young” or “it makes me feel like I am useful” (Gabe, 74, Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019; Anne, 72, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Whilst not all informants led busy lives filled with physical and social activities, those who wanted to “slow down” in retirement claimed that their lives were busy in public while privately discussing how they preferred fewer daily activities (Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Richard B., Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Thus, exhibiting a middle-aged level of activity, be it factual or simulated, was part of an age-defying performance designed to ward off the label of old age. It was a way of maintaining permanent personhood by maintaining a middle-aged level of busyness (Kaufman, 1986). However, it was also part of a greater life project meant to (re)construct identities in retirement in relation to the activities realized throughout that period, also establishing a sense of belonging within a community that bonds over a shared search for the “good life”.

Dina, age 69, is one of the busiest British expatriate retirees I met on the field. At the time of the interview, she had only lived in the Costa Brava for a little bit under a year on her own, but already had filled her time with a mix of activities. Dina used her retirement to pursue interests she had left behind in her work life as a lawyer. She was attending dance classes and did a lot of gardening. She dedicated time to meeting new people in the Organization, going to lunches and coffee dates with new friends. She was participating in planning the local Pantomime, an event organized by British expatriates of all ages and locals who wanted to practice their English-speaking skills. She was also starting a lifelong passion project of her own: teaching dance for the older women. Another one of her goals in retirement was to learn Spanish and Catalan: “it keeps your mind active and its’ always nice to speak to someone in their own language” (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Her lifestyle revolved around the idea of keeping her “young mind” active through “productive” activities she was passionate about that made her feel valuable, “I suppose all of us have got a side that likes to feel useful, don’t you?” (60, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

When asking her about whether she would describe herself as retired, Dina gave an answer similar to others I had received:
“I am happy to use the word retired, it describes who and what you are. But there is no way I could ever retire completely because I like to be busy. So even if I am not working for financial reasons, I’m always doing something. [...] Although I am retired from permanent working, I will never really retire because I think that you just vegetate if you retire”

- Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Dina’s account captures the conflicting feelings old age discourses and ageing experiences inspire in ageing individuals, with retirement being a part of these. Busyness becomes the antithesis of retirement and old age, an age-defying performance. Through busyness a sense of purpose is acquired, establishing their own identities away from vulnerability and dependency, gaining agency and autonomy over one’s own schedule in return. This becomes the ‘right’ way to age. Giving idleness in retirement a negative moral meaning within this shared social imaginary of what ‘ageing better’ in Spain is (Katz, 2000).

These social pressures to be active in later life aren’t only related to avoiding decline and illness. It can also be interpreted as a vestige of capitalist behavior brought into later life, as well as the imposition of middle-aged activity as the social norm. These are expressed in later life through language on health and ‘ageing better’ that has become part of the ageing cultural zeitgeist in Western neoliberal societies (Katz, 2000; Allain & Marshall, 2017; Lamb 2018). Accordingly, being busy becomes a cornerstone of community belonging between British expatriate retirees. As Dina puts it, “everyone I know from the Organization are all retired and they are busy doing this and busy doing that” (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Busyness becomes a shared community trait that denotes belonging, while simultaneously creating and maintaining community ties.

This pressure to ‘age better’ through activity filled schedules, creates age defying performances and monitoring regarding people’s level of busyness. Those who do not fill the prerequisite busyness, whatever that may be in each context, lose part of their social capital. The latter was evidenced when speaking of inactive community members in negative moral tones and others who are overly active in positive ones (Patricia, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Partaking in busyness can constitute an age defying performance that (re)constructs retiree identity as independent and active, reinforces social capital, while also constituting feelings of belonging (Bourdieu, 2007). Informants frame being busy as part of a wider ‘ageing better’ life project that constitutes their own search for the “good life” in Spain. Those who aren’t busy, aren’t participating in this life project and, thus, are deemed as not belonging within the community.

What these activities should be isn’t clear, as not even Gerontology has defined what activities are ‘proper’ to delay illness and ageing (Katz, 2000). Which activities are considered to contribute to a ‘better’ ageing experience, and which are not, is dependent on how each community constructs old age as well as each informant’s past life histories.

33 This idea of busyness as central for community functioning and belonging is revisited in the COVID-19 section, when the sociosanitary situation puts this busyness in question.
Once more emphasizing the give and take between the self and society that crafts a shared nation of what ‘ageing better’ is meant to be – a running theme throughout this chapter.

An activity often found within the busy schedules of British expatriate retirees is volunteering. There is a sizeable number of British run charities in Spain with different purposes: helping older Northern Europeans, assisting the homeless in Spain, raising awareness for diabetes or cancer research, or giving bureaucratic advice to British citizens abroad post-Brexit. English speaking churches or congregations had volunteering programs that funded the Church and helped their local communities, like opening soup kitchens for the homeless or fundraising for local hospitals or schools.

In the UK, retirees’ volunteering their free time is a common tradition and expression of British values. Haas, who conducted ethnography on a charity in Costa Blanca, found that bringing volunteering to Spanish coasts was a transnational expression of British-ness and a sign of commitment to Spain as a permanent destination (2013). Between British expatriate retirees, volunteering was a passion project that built feelings of belonging with the expatriate community and, depending on the charity, the local Spanish community as well. It helped recalibrate the work/life balance many felt they had lost during their middle-aged working years, while also allowing for an active lifestyle that participated in the ‘ageing better’ life goal they held. Those who volunteered, highlighted the importance of feeling useful post-retirement more than others who engaged in other popular activities like golfing or hiking. In the Charity in Costa del Sol, many volunteers expressed how it filled a void left by jobs, family members, partners, or hobbies.

Gabe, 74, and living in Costa del Sol for over 20 years, was one of these volunteers who swore by the importance of volunteering in later life. Gabe had retired early from his work at a clerk’s office around his early 40’s thanks to his savings and his husband’s earnings. They found the Costa del Sol attractive because of the gay scene in Torremolinos that started in the late 70’s into the early 80’s and its cheap prices. They bought a couple properties in Costa del Sol and Tenerife. They would rent the property they weren’t using for sustenance and would frequently travel, always using Spain as their home base. Sadly, Gabe’s husband died unexpectedly in a skiing accident in 2009:

“When he died everything changed. I just could not be bothered. I couldn’t stay at home during the day. It’s a lovely home but I needed to get out. That’s why it’s nice to have a reason to get out and [volunteer]”.
- Gabe, 74, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

He went to the Charity in search for grieving council and instead found himself recruited as a volunteer. Gabe used his “penpushing skills” from previous jobs and his Spanish speaking skills in the Charity, helping many British expatriates navigate Spanish paperwork and social services. Gabe found that volunteering gave him a sense of purpose after being widowed saying: “It changed me completely. When you look at how bad other people’s lives are you think, look at me! I have much to be grateful for” (Gabe, 74, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).
There were also volunteers who were simply seeking for friendship through volunteering programs. A 67-year-old living on the Costa del Sol for a bit under 4 years named Karen had joined the Charity for what she described as “both altruistic and completely selfish reasons” (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). She already volunteered before retirement in the UK and found that she enjoyed helping people and being useful. Once in retirement, she wanted to continue feeling that sense of purpose while also meeting people who shared similar interests. This was extremely important to many people besides Karen. A close friend of Karen’s, Anne, 72, also volunteered at the Charity and felt like some British expatriate retiree communities didn’t represent her interests:

“I am not good in a party scene, and sometimes the life of an expat can be like a party for some. In [the Charity] I find people like me. This is our way of living the good life.”
- Anne, 72, Costa del Sol: Interview: 2019

Anne is referencing the aforementioned ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure who is imagined as “constantly sipping G&T’s and sun tanning”, born out of the intersection of retirement migration with tourism and consumer driven desires for a ‘better’ life (Isabel, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview: 2019). Volunteering was a way for people like Anne or Karen of avoiding this sort of expatriate retirees and meeting like-minded individuals with a goal beyond having a ‘better’ ageing experience based on holiday living, which was helping others.

By searching for like-minded people, volunteering British retirees are also implicitly rejecting other types of ageing ‘better’ life projects. In the identity (re)constructions of volunteers, the value of spending post-retirement time giving back to the community was given great importance. For them the “good life” was about being part of something meaningful that also stimulated them mentally, socially, and physically by keeping them busy. It was common to hear volunteers say that, as retirees with much leisure time, they had a moral imperative to others in society to use their time wisely. This sort of moral imperative was manifested through monitoring and judging the moral quality of people’s post-retirement lifestyles and activities saying things like:

“Some people do not know what to do with their time. The drinking is easy. Sometimes I feel like saying to them ‘go do some charity work! There are loads of people that desperately need something”
- Jane, 78, Costa del Sol; Interview: 2019

Volunteers express their own escape narratives, (re)construct their own identities, partake in the construction of the ‘Bad Britain’ discourse, and redraw lines of community belonging when making such remarks.

Overall, volunteering presented a different way for British expatriate retirees to create a community with an institutionalized sense of solidarity and trust abroad that was outside of other popular British socialization channels such as social clubs or British
pubs (Haas, 2013; Giddens, 1991). Through a shared moral compass, informants who spent time volunteering would create support networks through their need for busyness and utility post-retirement. They would express a need for finding meaning and usefulness in a higher degree than their non-volunteering counterparts, finding that having a sense of purpose dedicated to helping others was central for their later life identity (re)construction.

Despite this marked moral difference that volunteers highlight in their migration discourses and life project plans, in practice all informants are searching for the best way of ‘ageing better’ according to their own life histories, past personal experiences, and intersecting identity categories. For instance, Kathy, 68, started vacationing in the Costa del Sol in the early 90’s and retired there in the early 2000’s. She retired to Spain on her own, leaving behind her dedicated work life as a beauty salon owner after realizing that her life was “too much work and not enough play” (Kathy, 68, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). The latter in conjunction with complicated family relationships, especially with her daughter, was what urged her towards wanting “to have [her] own life” in retirement (Kathy, 68, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). By retiring to Spain, she was able to escape these complicated family relationships and end her work constraints by recalibrating work/life balances and dedicating more time to herself. This took shape in a busy schedule that included yoga and Pilates classes three times a week, petanque meets at the Club, swimming in the sea once a week, getting her nails and hair done twice a month, and social engagements like dinner and lunches with friends as well as constant home renovations. Part of her schedule also included visiting her mother in a local care home. As Kathy came from a middle-class background, she had been able to bring her mother, who had severe health issues, to Spain. This occupied much of her economic resources, so she couldn’t afford to hire outside labor for things like house cleaning. Kathy took this in stride, saying it kept her “busy and active” while making her feel useful.

Just like other Club members, Kathy participated in age defying performances and monitoring practices, keeping a figurative score with others over who had missed a petanque meet or drank too much wine at a Dinner Dance Party. However, Kathy suffered from a particularly gendered form of monitoring due to her initial status as an attractive single woman. In circles like the Club the norm was to be in a couple, so Kathy stood out and found it hard to settle into her retired life until she had a partner, Jakob, 73, a widow whom she had met at the Club and was equally as active as her (Kathy, 68, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Kathy and her partner shared the same life motto: “if you don’t use it, you lose it!” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 31/03/2019). This motto summarized the couple’s outlook on retirement and its connection to a successful ageing life project based on busyness and activity. The couple’s new purpose in retirement was ‘ageing better’, with independence at the center of it.

Busyness and feelings of usefulness with activities one chooses, are the ways in which British expatriate retirees express a sense of purpose and agency in later life, connected with how they conceive the “good life” and how that shapes the goals of their ageing ‘better’ life projects. Informing these decisions are aspects such as gender, socioeconomic class, and previous work lives, leading to a particular lifestyle meant to
give meaning to retirement and later life, while also generating a feeling of belonging with others that share this ageing ‘better’ life project.

6.3.3. Working in retirement: pleasure versus necessity

In Spain, retirees on state pensions aren’t permitted to engage in waged work. This surprised informants because in the UK retirees are allowed to work into retirement. Informants on the field argued that this possibility gives retirees a chance to maintain activity and a sense of purpose, while also gaining money: “It is something that they do out there because they recognize older people need some stimulus and some extra money as well” (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava; Interview, 2020). Not being able to legally work into retirement, which is something that gives you both an active later life and a socially recognized purpose through waged pay, went against the ethos of independence and agency that permeated the British expatriate retiree experience in Spain. This was evidenced by informants who worked into later life. Some did so for pleasure while others did it out of necessity.

Retired expatriates who worked for pleasure tended to have qualified jobs in high-ranking positions in a company outside of Spain. Their work was done remotely through online platforms, sometimes involving light travel. Informants who worked for pleasure did so part time, allowing them to be involved in both their work and their pursuit of the “good life” abroad. Most of these were men who had corporate jobs throughout their work lives and were offered part-time positions when nearing retirement. For example, Nigel in his early 80’s and living in Costa del Sol, worked for a textile company part-time, acting as a consultant and liaison with Spanish companies. His job involved answering corporate emails and going to face to face meetings with Spanish company heads and occasional trips to Malaysia. Niall, 70, living in Costa Brava, was also working part-time but for an accounting company. His job was remote, involving supervision of big client accounts and attending online meetings. Nigel and Niall were introduced previously in this chapter when speaking about their wives, Monica and Sophie respectively.

Both men recount being offered these positions right after declaring their intentions of retiring. Niall said he took the opportunity because “it was good pay and this way I keep my mind agile, keeping up with all the new technologies” (Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Meanwhile, Nigel said he enjoyed “being active” and being able to continue being useful to the company (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 24/02/2019). Both enjoyed telling others they were working in retirement. Nigel would often do this during social affairs at the Club. Whenever a new person would ask about his previous work history, Nigel would say “I still work”, gaining words of praise from others (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 10/02/2019). Niall displayed a similar behavior, gaining both economic and symbolic capital from his working condition within the Organization at the Costa Brava, where he was believed to be a good president because of his accounting experience and current connections due to his part-time position (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 4/03/2020; Bourdieu, 2007). Their waged working status was integrated into their ‘ageing better’ life project, helping them reject notions of ageing and dependency by maintaining their

Nigel and Niall were two out of about 10 men I met on the field who worked for pleasure in retirement. On the other hand, I only met two women who did the same. One of them was Gwen, a 75-year-old woman living in Costa Brava for about 15 years. She was retired forcibly from her job as a teacher due to budget cuts in her district. At first it was good news, as she and her husband Eliot could now move to Costa Brava earlier than they had planned. But once in Spain, Gwen said she felt “homesick” and lacking identity abroad: “Back in England I was Gwen, I’d been a head teacher of two schools, I sang solos, did this, did that... I came here and I didn’t have any identity” (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Instead, her husband Eliot easily carved a space for himself in both the British expatriate community and the local community, which simply made it harder for Gwen to express her feelings of being identity-less in retirement34. Gwen tried to remedy her situation by joining the Organization, joining a local choir, and becoming part of a walking netball group, but even then, still felt like something was missing. So, when a former colleague suggested she become a school inspector, dedicating her time certifying schools around the world, Gwen said yes immediately. The job implied leaving for a few months at a time travelling to certify English schools abroad, leaving enough time in between to spend with her husband Eliot. “Now I am that two man that goes to Dubai and leaves Eliot all alone (laughs). I sort of got an identity that way, didn’t I?” (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Gwen’s experience explicitly marks how crucial work is to identity formation. She worked as a school inspector not out of need but to (re)construct her identity while in retirement. For her, the whole process of retirement migration brought upon a moment of recognition of ‘oldness’ that was intersected with the pressures around living in a new country. She didn’t have any friends and had to build a new identity in this new space with new people. This was hard for her to do without the basis of work. This led her to modify her life project and explore a new career avenue in retirement.

It must be noted that Gwen’s experience is unique, especially when it comes to women. As a woman who had to juggle work with family her entire life, being able to have a job that required travel was something she had never considered and could now pursue as her familial obligations diminished. Meanwhile, Eliot was constantly met with remarks about his wife “abandoning” him (Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Gwen’s decision to take a job that required travel in retirement, coupled with the comments Eliot received about his wife’s absence due to work, reveal how Gwen’s work in retirement challenged gendered social conventions. Gwen was aware of this, saying that her job involved a “reversal of gender roles” as she had understood them most of her life (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). She made this reversal part of her new identity in retirement, detaching herself from traditional female roles and (re)constructing her identity with new added agency and independence.

34 How Eliot made a space for himself in both local and British communities will be explored in Chapter 9.
The gendered implications of working in retirement for pleasure are significant. Not only do less women work for pleasure in retirement, they also do not have the opportunity to do so because of the life courses and patriarchal structures that have constrained their lives. Even in retirement abroad, women feel pressure to tend to familial obligations, which are, generally, significantly reduced when migrating to Spain because children and grandchildren are further away. Gwen’s example, even though exceptional, highlights the importance of gender and how it intersects and affects all kinds of lived experiences like working in retirement. In fact, most informants who worked in retirement out of necessity were women, revealing the intersection of gender and ageing with economic patterns (Calasanti, Slevin, & King, 2006).

Working out of necessity in retirement was complicated to broach on the field. Having a salaried job when receiving a state pension is illegal in Spain, meaning some informants would work informally in borderline precarious jobs that were invisibilized. These precarious jobs were mostly manually oriented, like gardening or plumbing for friends and community members, or more care oriented, like house cleaning or taking care of older and frailest community members. Precarity in old age is understood in this thesis as lifeworld’s characterized by risk, uncertainty, and insecurity (Grenier, Lloyd, & Phillipson, 2017; Hall, 2021). Thus, informal jobs participated in creating a lived experience of risk and uncertainty that wasn’t present in those working for pleasure. Adding to this sense of insecurity was informants’ unwillingness to disclose that they were working informally due to fear of legal reprisals or social judgment. In fact, a couple informants were unwilling to be recorded speaking of their situation due to fear of governmental retribution.

There was one woman who spoke about her experience: Jane, 78, living in the Costa del Sol for 15 years, who was briefly mentioned earlier in Chapter 5. Jane migrated to Spain alone after working for a social services department at a police station and later working in the same department in a nursing home. Jane had a complicated family history, having lost a son and not getting along with the other. This family unrest pushed her towards deciding to move to Spain because she “didn’t want a grey life” (Jane, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Jane explains that, in the middle of the excitement of migrating, she made hasty decisions. She ended up buying an overpriced apartment in a complex that wasn’t built yet during the real estate bubble pre-2008. The apartment complex was never finished, due to the financial crash, meaning she lived for a couple years in an apartment complex that was incomplete and with no neighbors, far off from town centers. Adding to this feeling of insecurity was her modest pension that didn’t match living expenses in Spain, which weren’t what she expected. All of this led her to sell her home in an attempt to keep living in Spain, losing 200,000 euros in the process. This loss was unexpected, but going back to the UK wasn’t a viable option for her because living expenses there were much higher.

At the time of the interview, Jane was renting an apartment that her pension barely covered, pushing her towards informal work to make ends meet, giving manicures and pedicures at the homes of other British expatriate retirees. However, when Jane explains how she ended up working, she says it happened organically while volunteering.
at the Charity. She told some Charity members how she had done special manicures and pedicures to older men and women while working in a nursing home. This caught the attention of some Charity users who offered to pay for her services. Since this job was informal, Jane didn’t have a contract or a steady income, meaning some months she wouldn’t earn enough to pay her bills. To remedy this, Jane had just started a weekly job at a British charity shop that paid well considering the short number of hours she worked.

Jane was aware that she couldn’t continue working at the same level she was working at for long. First, there was her ageing body. Jane had severe back issues due to an accident she had suffered in her early 60’s. Constantly lugging around her heavy manicure and pedicure kit and bending over to do her work was hard on her back. She didn’t have a car, and this made the entire process harder. Secondly, the area where Jane lived was becoming increasingly touristic, with new luxury hotels, golf courses, and apartment complexes to attract wealthy tourists. This was driving up the rent in her area, making her consider moving elsewhere.

Jane’s economic situation was precarious enough for her to ask me to stop the tape recorder during our interview and only allowed me to take notes when telling me about her work. She was highly aware of the fact that she was working informally under Spanish law and didn’t want anything to put that in jeopardy. This fear of legal repercussions, the informal conditions in which she works that impact negatively on her ageing body, and the uncertainty of whether she could pay her bills at the end of each month made her live on the edge between comfort and precarity.

For Jane, and others like her, working during retirement isn’t something that validates one’s social position, it is simply a means to an end of pursuing a better ageing experience in Spain. Therefore, the identity (re)construction that Gwen gained through working in retirement isn’t comparable to Jane’s, who views work as something that doesn’t define her identity. Jane sees herself as retired, and her work is simply a necessary activity to maintain her way of life.

There were some informants who worked informally in retirement but did so on the boundaries between pleasure and necessity. Especially if the job paid for was related to one’s hobbies. These British expatriate retirees would frame working as part of their ‘ageing better’ life project, while making “some extra cash” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). However, just like Jane, they wouldn’t describe themselves as working in front of others to gain social recognition. This was Dina’s case. Dina has already been mentioned throughout this chapter, using her testimony to understand how old age is understood in British expatriate retiree communities in Spain and to highlight the importance of busyness in later life abroad. As mentioned earlier, Dina, 69 and living in the Costa Brava, participated in many different activities, with dance being one of the activities she valued the most. She was very passionate about NIA, a sensory type of dance with a holistic approach to health made for the “mature person” (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

35 Jane gave express consent to the use of this information concerning her working condition. She elaborated that she was concerned about the legal repercussions that the existence of a voice recording could have but consented to notes being taken.
She was so passionate about this type of dance that she got certified as a teacher and taught some classes towards the end of her career as a lawyer.

Now, in retirement, she was interested in continuing these dance classes, asking me for help looking for venues on the Costa Brava. Together, we found that the Town Hall had prescribed areas for retirees to use freely for pensioner-organized activities that promoted movement in later life (something which reveals the close structural state ties between successful ageing and governmental welfare agendas). During the transaction, Dina made me ask about a clause in the venue contract that stated that no payments could be issued between event-organizers and attendees. The woman attending us apologized for the payment clause and said that it was impossible to change due to laws regarding pensioners and waged work. Dina accepted the conditions and signed the contract. But, when we walked out, she told me about how she would just speak to the people she knew were interested in the dance classes and tell them to pay her outside the venue. It was then that I realized that the monetary aspect of the dance classes was more important than Dina had let on. Later, while having coffee at the Palafrugell town square, Dina told me about how she was struggling to get by with her pension and how she had done “an odd gardening job here and there” to keep a steady income. However, she made clear to me that both gardening and dancing were things she thoroughly enjoyed but getting paid for doing these activities was a way for her to get extra money and be able to “keep up” with her new friends who led more lavish lifestyles than she could afford (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 03/03/2020). For Dina these “odd jobs” were simultaneously activities she enjoyed that also allowed her to maintain her comfortable lifestyle. She didn’t shy away from telling others that she did small jobs like teaching dance or tending gardens, but she didn’t tell them how the money was something she needed.

Since she was a woman who had migrated on her own and was new in the Costa Brava British expatriate community, her life was something many liked to gossip about. Meaning that other community members started to speak about her financial situation, using the fact that she was asking to be paid for services like gardening as a sign of economic instability, saying things like: “poor lady, she has only been here 6 months and she needs some cash. If you hear of anything, let her know” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 04/02/2020).

These sorts of occurrences made clear that not all paid work was regarded the same in retirement. Even though Dina’s dancing was part of her ‘ageing better’ life project, others viewed her as having a lower socioeconomic class. It must be noted that Dina was in much less of a dire financial situation than Jane and identified herself as a dancer, “I will always be one, until the day I die” (Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Being able to teach NIA was something that helped Dina (re)construct her identity in retirement as a dancer and not a lawyer. On the other hand, Jane didn’t have this identity-attachment to her informal job. Despite this distinction, both women were regarded as vulnerable in their community circles. This has much to do with them being single women migrating on their own and doing jobs that aren’t validated by society through high payments or company backings. Men who also worked out of necessity didn’t face the same scrutiny as women did. Consequently, Jane and Dina’s experiences depict a particularly gendered ageing
experience where the fact of being a single woman in later life affected how vulnerable they were perceived to be.

Through an intersectional analysis of the identity (re)constructions of retirees who work, the connections between gender, socioeconomic class, and types of work become clear. This analysis reveals the patriarchal roots of the economic system that frames successful ageing, highlighting why ‘ageing better’ migration life projects aren’t accessible to everyone. Women like Gwen, Jane, and Dina are all experiencing in retirement different types of gendered consequences to their life histories constrained by social pressures they felt towards the reproductive economy. In other words, they are experiencing how structures create unequal outcomes (Kobayashi & Khan, 2020). Gwen is one of few women who finds herself able to start a new job post-retirement, finding that her lack of familial obligations allows her to do so. Instead, women like Jane, who do not have the opportunity or connections to engage in contractual salaried work, find themselves in precarious informal jobs with no certainty if they will be able to make ends meet. Not having a partner, or children to turn to, simply aggravates this sense of economic insecurity. Meanwhile, the very communities they are a part of harshly control their economic conditions through the lens of monitoring ‘ageing better’ experiences; dissuading women from sharing their experiences, leading them towards more marginalization and invisibility. These precarious conditions make it harder for retiree women to find waged work that aids their pursuit of the “good life” and identity (re)construction in later life.

Working in retirement, be it for pleasure or necessity, must eventually end due to general decline in old age. For those working out of necessity, it can lead to increasingly precarious situations as ageing progresses. This is addressed in the next section by exploring to what extent ageing’s health effects trigger instances of vulnerability and dependence, illustrating how these are dealt with in the field.

6.4. Unexpected vulnerability and nearing precarity

In the pursuit of the “good life”, British expatriate retirees are eluding old age. However, there are instances in which ageing’s effects become inevitable, and independent lives decline; creating situations in which vulnerability and dependence ensue within the frames of privileged life projects. Experiences of vulnerability and dependence center on individual biomedical and functional risk, which in this thesis are related to ageing conditions and declining quality of life (Hall & Hardill, 2016; Grenier, Phillipson, & Settersten, 2020; Hall, 2021). In these moments, there is an embodied experience of partial isolation and need for human care, triggering social and personal crises that tug at the community surrounding that person (Livingston, 2005). For British expatriate retirees, these instances put into question their support networks (in Spain and the UK), their socioeconomic capacity, access to health services (private and public), and/or their knowledge of the local systems and language.

Due to shared social imaginaries tied successful ageing, and the time and effort informants dedicate to delaying decline, vulnerability tends to be experienced as
unexpected. As explained in Chapter 2, in a Global North context ageing bodies are experienced through a lens of permanent personhood and a Cartesian divide that separates ageing bodies from ‘youthful’ minds. This makes realistically planning for dependency and vulnerability in later life abroad challenging. In the beginning of this chapter this was exemplified through John and Kelly’s answer when asked about their plans for later life dependency, saying they “hadn’t thought about it yet” and “didn’t feel like [they] were 70” (John & Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Thus, explaining why instances of vulnerability are experienced as unexpected by British expatriate retirees. Additionally, due to their privileged life conditions, some informants have limited to no experience with any type of physical and/or mental limitations prior to old age. Consequently, many of them experience for the first time a sense of loss of autonomy associated to physical or mental health while ageing abroad, making them feel extra vulnerable.

Within these feelings of unexpectedness, experiences of precarity surface. Precarity in later life has long been invisibilized in old age studies (Phillipson, Grenier, & Settersten, 2020). By acknowledging precarity in later life migration, vulnerable and dependent experiences are situated within a broader social, economic, and political context of power and privilege that affects people throughout the life course into later life (Phillipson, Grenier, & Settersten, 2020; Hall, 2021). Therefore, to understand how instances of unexpected vulnerability may lead to precarity in the lives of British retirees in Spain, access to healthcare and social care in Spain must be addressed. First, British citizens can export their pensions and healthcare rights to any EU country. Meaning the British in Spain are entitled to health care, with its’ costs being reimbursed by the UK to the Spanish government (Hall & Hardill, 2016; Hall, 2021). Post-Brexit, some of these conditions changed, mostly concerning welfare rights like allowances for those with severe disabilities who need to hire care (Hall, 2021). Secondly, access to social care can only be established through residency. Social care entails access to home-based care and other state-funded care provisions, which is severely underfunded in Spain, being one of the lowest of all the EU (Gavanas, 2017). As Northern European retiree migrants have traditionally avoided formalizing their legal conditions in Spain, this hinders their access to social care resources. These services are all in Spanish or other local languages, like Catalan in the Costa Brava. Some doctors and social workers have English speaking skills, but this isn’t the norm. This has been pointed out as a barrier towards British expatriate retirees seeking Spanish welfare, especially when considering that few Northern European retirees speak Spanish (Casado-Díaz, 2006; Hall & Hardill, 2016; Calzada, 2017; Hall, 2021). When it comes to private care, there is an emerging field in Spain of companies offering care in English as well as at home services and helicopter pick-ups in case of emergencies (Gavanas, 2017; Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 12/03/2019). These services were only available to those who could pay monthly fees that started from 25 euros a month per person.

36 Helicopter pick-ups were very attractive for British retirees who lived in secluded areas. These services made them feel secure in their homes.
In this research and others, British expatriate retirees have overall expressed satisfaction with Spanish public healthcare services, mainly regarding surgeries and hospitalizations (Betty & Cahill, 1998; Hurtado, 2010; Haas, 2013; Hall & Hardill, 2016). Nevertheless, the issue that consistently comes up is how family centered the Spanish welfare system is. Welfare in Spain is set up in a manner that assumes family members will take over aftercare prior interventions and surgeries (Haas, 2013; Calzada, 2017). In the field, I encountered many cases of hip replacements, back surgeries, broken bones, or cancer related surgeries in which people struggled to find aftercare. In these conversations, the difference between aftercare in Spain and the UK surfaced, highlighting how Spain’s welfare state didn’t assure independence from family members. For instance, when asking Gwen and her husband Eliot about this issue, Eliot said: “I would never expect my kid to move in with me if I had a health problem, but here it is normal. So social services lack in that sense” (Eliot, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Gwen and Eliot’s view was widespread. Resorting to family members was viewed as a last resort, especially as it had connotations of being a burden, which goes against the community shared individualist independent ethos of ‘ageing better’ in Spain.

It must be noted that British expatriate retirees do maintain contact with their families and support networks back in the UK. Some visit the UK very frequently and receive visits of family members and friends for holidays and vacations in Spain (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000). However, these connections cannot aid in the day-to-day care needed when vulnerability arises. Therefore, not only are family members viewed as a last resort for aiding in instances of vulnerability, but their distance hinders their assistance entirely (Haas, 2013; Hall, 2021).

Despite family being a last resort, British expatriate retirees have been known to only resort to social services when in extreme need (Calzada, 2017; Hall, 2021). Social workers in this research echoed Ines Calzada’s findings regarding the use of social services by retiree migrants in Spain, saying that British retirees tended to mingle amongst themselves “living in their own layer of reality” (Calzada, 2017; Government worker 1, Mijas Foreigner’s Department, Costal del Sol: Interview, 2019). According to social workers, this could be extended to their lack of use of social services. Since they have very little connection with local Spaniards or other migrants who use these services, they shy away from using them until difficulties that cannot be ignored arise (Calzada, 2017). A social worker in the Costa Brava explains it the following way:

“[When they have recently migrated] we call them and give them the same services we do any other immigrant. We ask them if they need help understanding how social services work, how to get registered...all that. But almost no British or Germans actually come to informative meetings or even take our calls. [...] The British community in the Costa Brava isn’t that strong, and sometimes I have come across hard situations that are very sad. Like elderly men that haven’t left their house in months because of mobility problems. Since they don’t have strong communities like other immigrants, from for example Africa or South America, they enter these precarious situations and the people around them don’t see it because at first glance they are okay, they have money, a nice house with a view.”
Government worker 3’s comments highlight how precarity may follow unexpected instances of vulnerability, even in those groups that are perceived to be privileged, generating care gaps through which vulnerability and precarity thrive (Gavanas, 2017). She also illustrates how perceived privilege due to, for example, belonging to an upper socioeconomic class and/or being white, invisibilizes their vulnerability and heightens the experience of precarity.

Consequently, support networks established in Spain are extremely important when it comes to preventing vulnerability turning into precarity; especially when family bonds are considered last resorts, social services are seldom used, and not everyone can afford private care. However, when migrating to another country one’s support networks are inevitably eroded and must be constructed anew. The following pages will explore how instances of unexpected vulnerability are navigated by British expatriate retirees on the ground. Observing how vulnerability and dependency are experienced and how they may position informants between privilege and precarity in unexpected ways.

### 6.4.1. Support networks abroad

“When you come here at first you are young (laughs) well, younger. And you want to have fun and meet new people and travel! But after some years, things slow down, people leave… then you get older and things like walking become tiresome. […] Coming here once a week is a great pick me up. Since we are already out of the house, me and this wonderful lady here (gestures to the woman sitting next to her, called Petra) go to lunch every Friday after the coffee mornings. It's a great little tradition.”

- Christine, late 80’s, Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 14/03/2019

This quote is from a day at the Costa del Sol Charity coffee morning in Fuengirola, where Christine went every week. Christine’s story reflects how creating, and maintaining, strong support networks in later life abroad can be hard. She speaks about slowly losing contact with friends, some who return to the UK, others who pass away, or simply not being able to go to as many social activities due to increasing decline as the years progress. Christine was in her later 80’s and had lived in Spain since her early 60’s, meaning that despite living in Spain for almost 30 years, she had to resort to an organized Charity to maintain a steady support network abroad.

Many Charity users had similar stories to Christine’s. When speaking to Charity founders, they explicitly cited later life loneliness in Spain, chiefly after losing a spouse or partner, as one of the Charity’s missions (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 7/02/2019). Loneliness isn’t only an issue of the expatriate retiree community; it is an issue that affects a great part of the elderly demographic in Western societies (Phillipson, 2013). When you retire abroad, this loneliness is aggravated by the lack of lifelong support networks that usually mitigate instances of vulnerability when ageing.
This explains the intensity with which support networks are described in the British expatriate retiree community, who use the language of kinship and family to illustrate how strong their bonds with others are (Edwards, 2000). Christine and her Charity friend, Petra, would constantly refer to each other as family: “We’ve known each other for over 20 years! These people become like sisters” (Petra, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 07/02/2019). In spaces like the Charity, support networks were constructed and maintained, with volunteers and Charity users helping each other in a myriad of ways.

Thus, accompanying friends to doctor’s appointments, helping them with paperwork and bureaucratic processes, or even having them in their own home for aftercare, was common on both coasts. In the Costa Brava, a woman from the Choir underwent an emergency operation in her spine, leading to an instance of unexpected vulnerability where she could barely move and had no partner to take care of her, her family in the UK couldn’t come help, and she couldn’t travel back due to the state she was in. So, another couple in the Choir had her in their home for over a month. Other Choir members organized themselves to help this couple and injured woman in simple tasks like buying their groceries or setting up a driver rotation for doctor’s appointments (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 02/18/2020). Other examples of how support network’s function can be found in the Organization that had a billboard on their website were petitions for carpools, apartments, furniture, or anything else could be posted; or the Club in the Costa del Sol that had a Facebook group and a physical billboard on Villa premises, where announcements and petitions could be made, keeping members connected.

Haas noted the importance these entities have in the creation of communities of British expatriates abroad and their subsequent creation of support networks (2013). These spaces provide a time and place for close relationships to flourish, especially for those people who arrive to a foreign country without any previous contact. By participating in these organizations, social or charitable, expatriates gain access to a network of people who are experiencing or have experienced the same difficulties and issues abroad.

A key aspect of spaces like the Charity, Club, or Organization, was how they brought younger and older members together, regenerating support networks. The importance of new community members was highlighted in both the Club and the Organization, where younger members were becoming scarce and activities couldn’t be completed due to lack of participation while membership fees dropped, making these spaces hard to stay afloat. “It is just us oldies left”, some would say when speaking about younger retirees dwindling (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 18/02/2020). This became an acute issue in the Costa Brava Organization during initial stages of COVID, when many social groups and charities started to dissolve in the beginning of 2020 and into 2021, leading the Organization to up their membership fees to continue functioning.

Losing a support network in later life in Spain may lead to precarious situations that negate desires to die in Spain, as many British expatriate retirees would find themselves returning to the UK when suffering from instances of unexpected vulnerability (Giner-Monfort, Hall, & Betty, 2015; Giner-Monfort, 2018). This is what brought a group of women of an Anglican Church in the Costa Brava to start arrangements
to create a hospice, a home to take care of the terminally ill and sick nearing death. Gwen was one of the women involved, as she was a strong proponent for giving support to older expatriate retirees who want to spend their last days in Spain. Gwen’s involvement was due to an experience where a friend was forced to return to the UK when encountered with complicated health conditions nearing death: “It was so sad, she wanted to spend her last days here, but it was impossible with her condition and her family came to pick her up and bring her back” (Gwen, 75, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). The architect behind the idea of the hospice was Madeline, a 74-year-old woman whose life was marked by loss. Her first husband was Spanish, but sadly she was widowed quite early and returned to the UK with her three children. Then, she remarried, and her second husband wanted to retire to Spain. Madeline had kept her and her first husband’s home as a holiday home, so the couple retired there. Sadly, and unexpectedly, Madeline’s second husband passed away, but this time she decided to stay in Spain, saying: “I have lived here too long. I belong here. The Costa Brava is my home” (Madeline, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Madeline’s experience with loss and illness in Spain with both her partners made her realize how hard it was to be a foreigner in a situation of duress. In both cases, she saw how important it was to understand Spanish to communicate with doctors, nurses, funeral homes, social services, notaries, wills and much more. Especially with her second husband she saw how important it was in his last moments to have someone beside him who spoke his language:

“People like to die in their own language. Then they come here, the language is different, the bedside manner of the nurses is more abrupt…it can be quite disheartening.”

- Madeline, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

This is what led her to start helping other British retirees go through these last stages of life. Helping them understand their doctors, attempting to assure the comfort of the ill, setting up wills and last wishes with notaries, and then helping the partners of the deceased with the funerary arrangements and even providing bereavement counseling. She did this as a volunteer within the Anglican Church, organizing the volunteering initiative herself. As her work with the Anglican Church became well-known, the idea of creating a hospice in Costa Brava started to flourish. The project got much attention beyond the British expatriate community, involving local municipalities and the Red Cross.

The interest in the hospice generated within the British expatriate community and other Spanish organizations reveals a fear of suffering vulnerability and, hence, precarity while abroad. However, Madeline believed this fear was a resulting of impulsively deciding to move to Spain, without considering the consequences, saying:
“People come here and do not know what it is to live in a foreign country. Especially when you are older. They think living here is like being on holiday. They don’t think about what will happen when they get ill. They come here and don’t even learn any Spanish just ‘dos cervezas por favor’. It’s sad.”

- Madeline, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Madeline’s complaint is referencing the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ stereotype, a figure that is believed to not learn the language besides what is needed to feed its hedonistic holiday-like desires. Yet, she does emphasize the lack of thought retiree migrants give to decline in later life and how that may affect their ‘ageing better’ life project in a country they do not speak the language or share cultural values and customs with.

Learning, or trying to learn, Spanish or Catalan was a topic that was recurrent in the field, used to assess cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital, which will be explored in Chapter 8 (Bourdieu, 2007). However, there are practical effects to trying, and failing, to learn Spanish that British expatriate retirees had to face when encountered with instances of unexpected vulnerability. Having a support network completely composed by British expatriates or other Northern Europeans or North Americans meant that Spanish speaking skills were sparse. Most informants had similar stories regarding their Spanish-learning journeys, like John who said:

“The only Spaniards we meet are through the health system like doctors or sometimes landlords… these are the Spanish people we meet and have to communicate with, which is a shame really. For example, we know some Spanish people from restaurants but so many of them are English-speaking […]. People go straight into English, which is nice, but we should know how to communicate better in Spanish. […] I have been trying to learn it for three or four years, but only through [an] app [on my phone]. I just feel like I am too old, nothing sticks in my brain like it used to.”

- John, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

John’s remarks suggest that informants were aware that speaking Spanish would make certain key interactions with Spaniards easier. The difficulty of learning a language in later life is attributed to mental decline, leading many to get by with what they called “restaurant Spanish” (John and Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). This wasn’t an issue now but could be in the future. Issue to which those with more socioeconomic resources answered: “we could always hire an interpreter” (John and Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2020). Not everyone could afford an interpreter, meaning the repercussions of not learning the language could be greater for some than others.

Ultimately, informants’ support networks lived on the peripheries of local life, evidenced by their lack of Spanish-speaking skills and their heavy reliance on British expatriate support networks and charitable and social organizations for essential tasks. This could negatively affect those dealing with decline and vulnerability, leading them to swing between privilege and precarity. This thin line between privilege and precarity can
be illustrated by a Club member’s demise. His name was Jack, in his early 90’s. He was widowed and one of the oldest members of the Club. He had a strong family network back in the UK but chose to travel and live alone in Spain. Meaning that the Club was an important resource for him. The latter became clear when Jack was found sprawled on the floor of his apartment, where he had spent the four days, not being able to call for help due to a broken hip. It was Club members that realized his absence and were able to break into his home. A couple days later, he passed away in the hospital. This string of events shocked the Club community and brought to the forefront how fast a successful later life project can decline.

British expatriate retirees think of retirement migration as a means of making later life fulfilling and meaningful through activities one enjoys, fomenting a ‘better’ ageing experience through independence and autonomy. Jack was content with his lifestyle, however his insistence upon being independent, which was seen as a strength in the Club, quickly became detrimental. As someone who didn’t speak Spanish and had no relationship with his Spanish neighbors, Jack’s disappearance wasn’t noticed by anyone in his building. Despite being part of a tight knit community in the Club, members weren’t constantly checking in on him, taking for granted his independence.

Consequently, Jack’s demise exemplifies how thin the line is between privilege, vulnerability, dependence, and precarity. One moment, Jack is leading a successful independent later life project with social and physical activities he enjoys, and the next he is alone in his apartment with a broken hip. These sorts of instances occur to many elderly people in Western societies. Nevertheless, when it comes to ageing abroad, these instances of vulnerability are amplified. As support networks must be constructed anew, languages must be learnt, and new systems and cultural customs must be understood, British expatriate retirees experience instances of vulnerability acutely, like other ageing migrant groups. However, when intersected with the unrealistic ageing expectations Western old age discourses place on ageing experiences, British expatriate retirees’ experiences of vulnerability are amplified. This puts them on the edge of precarity despite the privileged conditions that allowed them to migrate post-retirement to begin with.

### 6.4.2. Dependence, care, and later life partners

The first years after migrating are crucial for British expatriate retirees because it is when support networks that will later serve retirees while facing ageing repercussions are established. Things like finding the right home, in the right neighborhood, with people you know and get along with, is something that takes up time in early stages of retirement migration. These were the things Dina, the 69-year-old woman who migrated on her own with her two dogs, was doing in her first months in Spain. Dina migrated to the Costa Brava because she was unhappy in France, where she originally retired to. She knew the area because her niece worked in Gerona, the capital city of the area, but her connections ended there. This seemed rather unimportant to Dina, as she was willing, and excited, to
make new friends during retirement. Everything took a turn when she fell into an unmarked manhole in the parking lot of her new apartment she had just recently bought:

“It was just awful. My dogs were in my apartment; I was unconscious in this pit. I was taken out of the pit and taken to hospital, where I was for three, four days. [...] I was stuck in hospital because I didn’t know anyone. So, I had to get them to phone my niece in Gerona. She contacted a friend of hers who lives in Palafrugell who went to the Estate Agent who sold the flat to me who still had a set of keys, thank God, and they managed to get someone to go and look after my dogs for me. So that was that. Then somebody else that I had already met at the time came and picked me up from the hospital and brought me home. But that was really tough, I didn’t know many people, I couldn’t walk, I had two dogs, I couldn’t speak the language. Well, I still can’t but at least I am getting there. And I felt very vulnerable. [...] Having bad health is so debilitating.”

– Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Dina explains how she unexpectedly found herself in a vulnerable position with barely any contacts to help her. This situation isn’t due to old age, but it accurately illustrates how crucial support networks are abroad. Since she migrated on her own with minimal prior contact and hadn’t had much time to expand her support network in Spain, Dina was completely reliant upon the slight support she had.

This highlights the differences of migrating alone versus with a partner, emphasizing the fundamental role partners have in later life care, especially in instances of severe dependency and illness. Throughout fieldwork, I met couples that had health issues and they leaned on each other for support, one always compensating for the other. Those who did not have a partner had a harder time adjusting to their ageing lives abroad, like Victoria (mentioned in section 6.2.1.) who had colon cancer and struggled navigating the whole process on her own.

The correlation between care in later life abroad and having a partner became clear when I met Tim and Andrea, 83 and 82 respectively, living in Costa Brava since 2002. They were the founders of the Organization, which was a passion project of theirs. They spent their first years in Spain establishing the Organization, getting it to function properly, and most importantly determining the purpose of it: “when you are retired you are not dead. You have a life behind you with all these expertise and through the [Organization] you get to share it with others” (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Through the Organization they pursued their style of the “good life”, which was participating in activities that were both mentally and socially stimulating.

This all changed when Andrea suffered from a heart attack in 2015 that left her with very limited mobility and intellectual capacity. “I haven’t had a day off since then” explains Tim, who became the main care provider for Andrea (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). His day revolves around her needs: making sure she takes her pills on time, she has her food ready, clean clothes, moves her body to not to develop blisters, he even makes sure she gets out once a day and sees the sea, wheeling her up and down different seaside promenades on the Costa Brava.
They were both teachers in army schools around the world, so they had good pensions but not enough to cover such extensive private care. Meaning that Tim had to go through a complex bureaucratic process to get governmental help and register his wife as disabled in order to get governmental assistance. It must be noted that Tim and Andrea were able to access disability services because they had been registered in Spain and had been residents there for over 5 years. This is a pre-requisite that many British expatriate retirees in vulnerable situations do not meet. Despite meeting that basic prerequisite, Tim still had a hard time navigating this foreign bureaucratic health system. Thankfully, he spoke a bit more Spanish than the usual Briton, so he was able to understand the process on his own. However, it all got to be too much for him, and he resorted to hiring a legal consultant. Through his own efforts and those of hired help, he was able to receive help from the Spanish social services that allowed him to stay in Spain with his wife.

If they hadn’t received this disability assistance, Tim would’ve had to return to the UK, where they would have gone to their family or a care home to cover Andrea’s needs. In fact, this had been a real option for the couple, as in the first stages of Andrea’s decline Tim described himself as being “completely overwhelmed” (83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Eventually, returning seemed more complicated than staying, especially after the disability assistance had been granted. First, there were the economic costs like the cost of transporting Andrea, a person with very reduced mobility, and the cost of care homes in the UK, which he couldn’t afford. He calculated that he had to sell his apartment in Spain or ask for economic assistance from his children to make ends meet if he returned. Asking for help from his children was something he really didn’t want to do, showing how much he ascribed to notions of independence and autonomy in later life. Then there were the health repercussions for Andrea, who also suffered from mental issues that made it extremely hard for her to adapt to change, making her doctors recommend a scheduled and predictable lifestyle. Ultimately, Tim decided to stay in the Costa Brava for his wife’s health and their own economic wellbeing.

As the years passed and Tim got older, the help given by the government wasn’t enough. At the time of the interview, he had informally hired a neighbor of theirs, an Indian woman, for some extra help on the weekends. The weekends were the busiest times for Tim, as the government assigned carers weren’t scheduled to come because it was assumed that family members take over care duties on weekends; reflecting Spain’s family-centered welfare system. Consequently, Tim was starting to stretch his economic resources thin and was worried he might have to ask for economic help from his family. For the time being, he claimed to be “getting by” (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Overall, Tim’s lifestyle passed from being socially and mentally active to being repetitive and entangled in the daily routine of care. Despite the latter, he tries to stay positive, saying:

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Chapter 7 will explain bureaucratic processes, like registering in Spain, and how British expatriate retirees navigate the system as well as repercussions on ageing experiences.
“I know what a day-to-day entails. One of the strange things that happens is that since you do exactly the same thing every day, you tend to forget what day you’ve done it. It is a feature of repetition and age, I think. But I am probably fitter than most of my friends at my age. I walk a lot, and carry Andrea, get her up... she is keeping me fit.”

– Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Tim’s comments reveal how powerful the successful ageing paradigm is. Within his retelling of his day-to-day life, he rationalized having to take care of his wife into something that is not only good for his wife’s wellbeing but also his own. This illustrates the powerful biopolitical undercurrents of the successful ageing paradigm and its’ potential effects on the welfares system (Allain & Marshall, 2017).

For Tim’s friends, the sort of lifestyle he led seemed unbearable. It was monotonous and lonely, with only about a couple hours a day to himself. Other informants who knew him thought that if they moved back to the UK, with Andrea in a care home and his family lending a hand, Tim would be able to have more of an autonomous life. However, Tim did not feel that way, explaining his decision-making the following way:

“We know that when you get old you have problems, medical problems. Other problems too. We came here to live. We sold up in England, we intended to come to live here until we die so we were fully aware of what we were doing. [...] When you get old, you get ill and eventually you die. I’ve always been a pragmatist and as we say in England, I always cut my cloth based on the circumstances. I just find something to do. You know the routine I do. [...] It doesn’t upset me, I don’t feel caged or imprisoned. Andrea has given me 61 years of her life. And when we married, we agreed, we contracted, for better or for worse, sickness or in health until death do us part. So that is what we are doing, just getting on with it.”

– Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Above all else, Tim wanted to maintain the life project he had planned with his wife, which was to live and die in Spain. Since Andrea’s sickness, he was forced to adopt a more pragmatist view of what that life project would entail.

Wanting to spend one’s last life moments in Spain until death was a very common desire between British expatriate retirees, however, statistics reflect that not as many British die in Spain as retire there (Giner-Monfort, 2018). Consequently, there is a clear gap between expectations and reality regarding death abroad. Tim and Andrea’s case illustrate how making a later life project in a moment of health doesn’t mean it’ll be applicable in a moment of vulnerability. Tim was commendably attempting to maintain a desire and life project that the wear and tear of care and ageing was putting in peril. He was aware of this and, unlike many others, made plans for if and when he would no longer be able take care of Andrea due to death or physical decline. This was all laid out in his will, where he details how to transport Andrea back to the UK if need be as well as provides a list of care homes in Spain that could be within his children’s price range (Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).
The work and time Tim dedicates to taking care of his wife is something that the British expatriate retiree community couldn’t do. The community or charity spaces are useful when it comes to individual sporadic gestures of communal help, like driving someone somewhere, giving them advice on local services, helping them translate a particular document...etc. However, when it comes to more severe instances of vulnerability, where dependency is acute and care needs are high and long-drawn-out nearing death, the community that surrounds British expatriate retirees cannot always provide the type of support a family member or life partner could. Consequently, migrating on one’s own versus migrating with a partner can be a decisive choice to how age-related vulnerability is experienced.

6.4.3. Ageing decline and economic resources

Having enough economic resources can give a sense of security, especially to those with weakened support networks. Throughout the chapter we have seen cases like Tim and Andrea’s where being able to hire legal assistance was key in procuring a comfortable lifestyle. Or John and Kelly, who assumed they could hire an interpreter if ever needed, to overcome their idiomatic shortcomings. Having access to certain services that palliate feelings of vulnerability is a privilege reserved to those from affluent backgrounds.

However, the sense of security money brings is based on assumptions that draw a fine line between privilege, vulnerability, and then precarity. In the field, the most common assumptions made by the most affluent British expatriate retirees were the following: assuming their physical capacities wouldn’t diminish over time, assuming they could hire outside help to solve any issue, assuming their money flow would be steady, and taking for granted that their existent support networks wouldn’t change. These suppositions are built upon old age discourses of decline and successful ageing that encourage avoiding old age, even in personal self-reflection. It must be noted that other British expatriate retirees from other socioeconomic classes made similar assumptions. But, since they did not have access to certain resources due to lacking funds, they had to face these assumptions sooner than their wealthier counterparts (Hall, 2021). Meanwhile, wealthier British expatriate retirees do not have to face these assumptions until ageing decline, physical or mental, are glaring and impending vulnerability isn’t already palpable. Thus, they heavily rely on their economic status to maintain their lifestyle and wellbeing in Spain.

Illustrating how ageing can also lead to vulnerability and precarity between those from upper socioeconomic classes is Jacqueline, a wealthy 101-year-old woman, who retired when she was in her early 60’s to the Costa del Sol in the 1980’s. Jacqueline was one of the wealthiest women in the Club, coming from a family with generational wealth and marrying wealthy. She also had a very lucrative job in an insurance company where she had the opportunity to travel. The latter combined, participated in her extremely privileged life characterized by mingling with the owners of big corporations, politicians, and even royals. She was very athletic, playing tennis and winning competitions well into her late 70’s and early 80’s. Meaning she was in good physical shape throughout a great
part of her later life, but was now suffering from severe rheumatism in her leg and was losing eyesight. She wasn’t sure how much eyesight she was losing because she disliked going to the doctor, which she found too bothersome and “only bad news came from it” (Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 10/03/2019).

Jacqueline didn’t have any children or close ties with family members. Even though she had a strong presence in the Club community, most of her friends had passed away. Her remaining friends were sons and daughters of those deceased. These would take Jaqueline out for lunch or dinner once every week, rotating between them the responsibility of taking her out.

Due to her health conditions, Jacqueline hired a local woman, Mari, to do her shopping, clean the house, and perform other menial tasks she could no longer do. Mari’s English was very limited and Jacqueline, despite having been fluent in Spanish, was losing some of her Spanish speaking deftness in old age. Meaning that Mari did not fill Jacqueline’s social needs. It must be noted that Mari only went to Jacqueline’s a few hours a day, while most weekends Jacqueline was on her own. She didn’t hire Mari for longer because of a negative experience she had had with a cleaning lady who stole great amount cash and jewelry from her, resulting in her being quite mistrusting. This aggravated her feelings of loneliness and vulnerability.

This is how Jacqueline recounts her feelings of vulnerability and loneliness in later life:

“The quality of life has changed completely. I have grown lonely. I know myself that living here is not correct, because if I fall down, I am completely alone here. If I fall down, I have to wait until Mari comes the next day. [...] If you have a rheumatism in your leg and especially losing your eyesight like me, you lose your independence. You need someone always looking over you when you go shopping and things like that you can’t go by yourself. You can’t see things on the shelves, so you need help anyways. Absolutely dependent on the good graces of other people. It is hard for me, I am a very independent person. [...] I never imagined this would happen to me, but I have to face up to the fact that 101 is 101. I call someone and they come get me but what is the use of that? I can’t expect someone like Mari to take charge of me.”

- Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Jacqueline was able to reach 101 because she led a very privileged life, which allowed her to grow old in good health. As old age set in, her support networks weakened and her physical health diminished, lowering her quality of life in a manner she had never experienced, encountering loneliness and dependence that she didn’t expect. Thus, she was realizing the limits of her economic reach. These limits became clearer when intersected with her fear of being robbed and her desire to continue living in her penthouse of almost 50 years on her own. Despite choosing to live alone, Jacqueline had many fears in old age: fear of falling on her own and breaking something, fear of losing more of her eyesight, fear of being taken advantage of, fear of being robbed, and more.
These perceived risks positioned her otherwise very privileged ageing experience closer to a precarious one in her day-to-day life.

Precarity in old age is product of a combination of intersecting factors regarding formal care policies and social protection in Spain and in the UK, their support networks in both countries, their socioeconomic class, and the condition of their ageing bodies (Hall, 2021). Depending on the conditions of each of these, the experience is different. Jacqueline’s exceptional case highlights how coming from a high socioeconomic background does not assure a precarity-free ageing experience, as the material and physical realities of old age chink away at the armor that is economic privilege. It also demonstrates the importance of having steady and close support networks abroad. Hence, the intersection of a thinning support network and increasing mental and physical ailments has the capacity of turning a privileged ageing experience into a vulnerable and even precarious one. This is because age related vulnerability has the potential of instilling a sense of risk in day-to-day life that is characteristic of precarity (Grenier, Lloyd, & Phillipson, 2017). This last reflection is key and must be kept in mind regarding the coming section, where the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on British expatriate retiree lives is examined in detail.

6.5. COVID-19 and the rise of quotidian vulnerability

The effects of the Coronavirus started to become evident on the field as early as March 3rd, 2020, when neighboring Italy was heading into a strict lockdown, affecting common everyday behaviors in a petanque meet in Palafrugell, Costa Brava. The petanque meet organizer, Jim, 76, opened the days’ matches by saying “Remember! No handshaking and definitely no kissing!” before heading on to the customary process of randomly assigning partners and playing courts. Things like celebratory hugs, two kiss greetings, or ‘fair game’ handshakes post-matches were substituted by awkward elbow bumps and air kisses. The weekly post-match lunch was cancelled because there weren’t enough participants willing to eat indoors. Between the typical jokes and friendly banter, no player mentioned the fact that the Coronavirus was a threat to their own livelihoods, like if it was a possibility no one wanted to say out loud (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 03/03/2020). However, in the coming days this unspoken fear became reality, as of March 14th, 2020, Spain imposed a nation-wide lockdown, with its borders closing soon thereafter on March 16th. 38

During the first weeks of lockdown, informants were collectively undergoing a moment of recognition of ‘oldness’, making comments like the following: “I think I am rather fit, but I am still in my 70’s. We all think we are untouchable, don’t we? When in fact we are the target for this virus, we must still be careful” (Anne, 72 Costa del Sol: Interview: 2020). Being forced to stay in their homes and watch the news that constantly bombarded them with demoralizing figures on the contagion rate and the death tolls in Spain and around the globe, British expatriate retirees in Spain were placed in a position in which

38 Go to Appendix 2 for a timeline involving COVID-19, Brexit, and fieldwork.
age-defying performances and monitoring were no longer possible. Their age was something they could not deny in a pandemic where it unequivocally marked them as “at risk”, leading them towards unprecedented experiences of vulnerability and precarity. In other words, COVID-19 made evident the ambivalently privileged and vulnerable social positioning of British expatriate retirees abroad, highlighting the flaws within their later life ‘ageing better’ life projects.

In 2020, the virus reduced the social fabric of British expatriate retiree communities to their homes for over 3 months of strict lockdown and over 2 more with restrictive measures. Their lifestyles passed from being busy with social and physical activities, to being confined to their homes. Those with bigger houses, even villas with swimming pools, said their homes became the center of their world: gardening, cleaning, and general upkeep became projects of the everyday life. Cooking became a central distraction as well, with some couples creating competitions between themselves revolving around food, like seeing who could make the most delicious meal out of the least ingredients (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 25/03/2020). Meanwhile, social activities like dinners and parties were substituted by frequent video calls using Facetime, Skype, or Zoom. Some even partook in Pub Trivia nights via Zoom with their families and friends while others joined Zoom workout classes or choirs. Religious services were also conducted through online platforms. Finally, passing around funny memes or videos was something many did for the first time in their lives. “It has been a great learning curve for tech dinosaurs like me”, replied 79-year-old Eliot via email when asked about his use of the Internet during the pandemic.

What was most missed during those initial months of lockdown was the ability to go out an exercise; a key factor of ‘ageing better’ lifestyles in Spain. Cycling, trekking, and long walks by the beach weren’t possible anymore, leaving the ‘ageing better’ life project on hold. This was frustrating for many informants because UK restrictions weren’t as severe (Martha & Mick, 57 & 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). To keep fit, some resorted to walking up and down stairs, or around their apartments or homes, while others used YouTube videos or Zoom classes (Martha & Mick, 57 & 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; John & Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2020). Lacking their regular physical activity many informants reported gaining weight and/or losing their capacity to keep up the level of activity they had pre-pandemic. In an interview, Sophie explained how tired she was after her first long walk on the beach once exercise outside was allowed, saying: “who would’ve known we used to do this every day before? Crazy!” (73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). She says she had to spend the entire day in bed to recover.

Exercise outside was permitted around May 2020, but it was through specific time slots assigned by age groups; meaning that age was once again the central contributing factor to their COVID-19 reality as an “at risk” group. The “at risk” label generated an overall sense of quotidian insecurity, uncertainty, and, thus, vulnerability and precarity. This widespread sense of risk was made evident by gendered responses within British expatriate retiree couples and how they distributed daily tasks. Whatever involved going out and meeting up with strangers was deemed risky, so going grocery shopping or picking up medication at the pharmacy turned into high stakes activities. This resulted in
men taking up duties that were normally done by their wives. Niall and Sophie, aged 73, were one of these couples. Niall appreciated being able to leave the house, even though he had never done the shopping before throughout his marriage. Meanwhile Sophie was content staying at home because she feared the virus: “I don’t feel very safe right now. I don’t know how I would get over the virus if I got it” (Sophie, 73, Costa Brava: Interview: 2020). This sort of distribution of “risky” tasks was a way of establishing gender roles in a new social context. Men, the pre-established gendered risk takers, started performing house tasks that traditionally were performed by women.

As the pandemic progressed, other issues appeared beyond the virus’ repercussions on health, its steady spread, and how to avoid it. Fear of long-periods of loneliness and its toll on mental and physical health started to rise between informants. Ramsay, a 69-year-old man living on the Costa Brava, was one of several informants who were experiencing extreme loneliness due to spending the pandemic alone. He had a partner, but when rumors about lockdowns started, she decided to go spend it with her children from a previous marriage in the UK, leaving on one of the last flights out of Spain before borders closed. This left Ramsay alone in his Costa Brava apartment. At first, he didn’t mind because he thought the lockdown would take a couple weeks up to a month. As time crept on, and it became clearer that the COVID restrictions on mobility, socialization, and health were persistent, Ramsay felt increasingly unsteady:

“I am really worried for my physical and mental health. I cannot go trekking and that is one of my passions. When I am on the street doing my essential shopping (he does air quotes with his hands) I see people I know and they just wave at me from a distance. People are scared of socializing, so am I but I miss speaking with people face to face.”

- Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Ramsay saw his “good life” compromised by COVID-19 and the measures put in place to fight it. His own condition as an over 60 made him aware that socializing was risky, but by being on his own, his experience of vulnerability was two-fold, due to the virus and his loneliness. Overall, Ramsay’s case highlights how the importance of having a partner during later life instances of unexpected vulnerability, while also illustrating how the pandemic eroded support networks between British expatriate retirees.

Without their busy lifestyles that helped maintain vital relationships, British retirees in Spain became isolated, severing ties within their communities. Other informants, like Ramsay, assured that after initial months of the pandemic they lost touch with several groups and people they previously had close contact with, leaving them with a smaller social circle (Costa del Sol and Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2021; Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; John and Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2021). This can be attributed to their less busy lifestyles, as the activities they did together kept them in touch and established feelings of community belonging.

Further complicating matters was the obstacle COVID-19 represented for mobility. Movement between countries started to require proofs of vaccinations, masks, and more paperwork than ever before. Also, taking a plane, train or boat to the UK became
a high-risk activity. This put in question the mobility habits many informants had, not only within Spain but within Europe and around the globe. This was a new experience for informants who were accustomed to moving seamlessly through borders due to their geopolitical positioning and whiteness.

This shift from busyness to loneliness, as well as a generalized sense of risk, was a significant lifestyle change for British expatriate retirees. Their once significantly privileged ageing life projects based on busyness had to be thought over, revealing their paradoxical proximity to vulnerability. How could they maintain their ‘ageing better’ life projects? How could they maintain their support networks without spaces and activities to bound them together and foment belonging? How could they maintain their mobility habits between their home and destination country in a global pandemic? Precarity started to encroach upon the ageing lives of British expatriate retirees, upturning their later life projects, questioning the meaning they had given their ‘busy’ retirement lifestyles in an unprecedented manner. Adapting to the pandemic meant yet another (re)construction of identity that would shape their experience as ageing individuals, (re)constructions which this section will delve into.

6.5.1. Poking holes in life project plans

The pandemic did not only affect personal life project plans, but entire communities. It exposed weaknesses within retirement life projects, highlighting the privileged geopolitical and bureaucratic grounds these were built upon, while questioning the concept of what a ‘successful’ retirement looks like within Global North paradigms. Furthermore, it evidences how the notion of searching for a life-work reward or ‘good life’ in retirement is often a fallacy of a life period that is still subject to the production logic of power and vulnerability that capitalist societies generate.

One of the most notable weaknesses that COVID-19 laid bare in expatriate retiree lifestyles was the pre-existing disconnection with local Spanish communities, which the pandemic further aggravate. As a community that maintains strong transnational ties, especially when it comes to the consumption of news and TV entertainment, British expatriate retirees found that it was hard for them to keep track of the ever-changing laws, restrictions, and safety recommendations in Spain and within their own Autonomous Community (O’Reilly, 2000). Simultaneously, there were few local governments’ who were aware of this isolation, meaning that official governmental help was lacking. The exceptions were found in some localities on the Costa del Sol, where Northern European retiree migrant communities have a strong presence. This resulted in the creation of emergency phone lines to answer questions regarding the pandemic restrictions in a variety of Northern European languages. Despite the latter, most informants experienced the cost of their invisibility within governmental policies and

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39 Reminder: The Costa del Sol is found in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia and the Costa Brava is in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. As the pandemic progressed, different Autonomous Communities had different restrictions depending on contagion levels.
local communities. Aggravating this situation further is the fact that most British expatriate retirees lived in secluded areas with few Spaniards. Thus, the transfer of knowledge regarding COVID-19 restrictions was slim between British expatriate retirees and local Spanish neighbors. All these factors combined resulted in an individualization of a process of learning and acquiring local knowledge that, pre-COVID-19, was dealt with collectively, edging their experiences closer to vulnerability.

Many British expatriate retirees struggled with this individualization. Those more technologically savvy found local online sources that translated news into English, while others resorted to online translation tools to understand local news and government announcements: “Whenever some new change comes up, I try to decipher it, using Google Translate or my Spanish textbook. I think it’s good practice, but I have to be in the mood” (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Despite these efforts, most informants were more well versed in British news than Spain’s, resulting in them using our weekly phone calls and texts to ask me about new restrictions.

For those with deficient Spanish speaking skills and/or internet skills, their lack of local knowledge was evident. Case in point, Rachel and Brian, 79 and 81 respectively, were a couple living in the Costa Brava for 15 years with very limited technological knowledge and struggling to understand the local events. The couple resorted to Spanish television, attempting to understand the local news with their limited Spanish skills: “we’ve got British television, but we sometimes watch Catalan television in the morning but I’m not sure we watch it but (laughs)... we try” (Brian, 81, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

For these informants, menial tasks like going to the pharmacy, shopping for groceries, or attending doctor’s appointments were upended by the pandemic, changing quotidian life as they knew it in Spain. Brian spent a month at the beginning of the pandemic without his hearing aid because he didn’t know where to get spare batteries for it. He usually went to a local optician that sold these batteries, but the shop was closed due to sanitary restrictions. He couldn’t consult his doctor because the medical system was in a state of emergency that prioritized COVID related issues. Exacerbating this further was their lack of knowledge about local restrictions. This left Brian feeling disheartened, trying to find alternative routes to solve his hearing aid problem:

“We are getting old, we have some chronic illnesses like my hearing, it’s normal, but we need help sometimes. [...] We’ve been thinking that we’ll ask our local pharmacist because they have known us for a while, and I think they’ll be able to understand what I need. But it is all a bit frustrating, you know? Not knowing and feeling like the rug has been pulled from under you? But I guess that is normal, because the majority of what we know is from the English press really.”

- Brian, 81, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

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40 In Chapter 3, section 3.2.2., the legal invisibility upon which these lifestyles are built is explained. Later, in Chapter 7, said legal invisibility will be investigated ethnographically.
Brian's concern about his hearing aid encapsulates how a basic task the couple had learnt how to deal with through their local social services was now altered due to COVID. Their lack of language skills and knowledge of the local news made him feel uneasy with his situation in Spain. Thankfully, the local pharmacist who turned out to speak a bit of English ordered the batteries, replacing them on time. Even though the problem was solved, the incident made the couple feel vulnerable, something they didn't expect to feel 15 years after migrating (Rachel 79, Costa Brava: Interview: 2020).

The circumstances brought forth by COVID-19 exposed how British expatriate retirees had been able to get by with minimal contact with locals. Once the pandemic hit, this lack of contact with Spaniards that used to signal a privileged migration trajectory, when intersected with ageing, became a risk. Similarly, other aspects of informants’ lifestyles became risks. For instance, Jacqueline, 101, was now experiencing even more loneliness and a heightened sense of vulnerability:

“I am very nervous about the virus, so I told Mari to come less and when she does, I lock myself up in my room. She does some cleaning and I get my shopping from friends from the Club that drop it off on my doorstep.”

- Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2020

Jacqueline spent the initial months of lockdown completely on her own, depending on her radio and phone calls for news regarding the virus. This severely affected her quality of life, “it feels like time just crawls now” (Jacqueline, 101, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2020). However, Jacqueline knew she was lucky to have help from those from the Club, who were the first to come see her once it was permitted.

Situations like Brian’s or Jacqueline’s became a common day occurrence during initial stages of the pandemic, uncovering a lack of contact with locals, language skills, and fragile social and care networks. This resulted in different degrees of vulnerability and/or precarity depending on a web of intersecting factors, one of the most notable ones being formal care structures provided by governmental frameworks (Hall, 2021). Those who suffered the most were people who already were experiencing vulnerability in their quotidian lives’ pre-pandemic, depending on these structures, and now found these vulnerable experiences exacerbated.

This is what occurred to Tim and Andrea, the Costa Brava couple that heavily depended on local health services and extra hired help to tend to Andrea’s health needs after a serious stroke. The infrastructure Tim had built for Andrea’s wellbeing, and his own, was undone during initial weeks of lockdown when these services were suspended for sanitary reasons. Tim found himself in an instance of unexpected vulnerability in which he barely had time to answer phone calls or attempt to find a solution to the matter because he had to take care of his wife at all hours of the day. Eventually, thanks to his language skills, persistence, and the evolution of the pandemic into more stable measures, he was able to contact social services and get some carers to come in despite the virus. Regardless, many things changed, and his fear was constant:
“We have cleaners coming in and I’ve stopped the cleaners. I have a weekend carer and I stopped the weekend carer and now I have someone to do the shopping for me. But we still have three different people coming in three times a day. They are so close to Andrea, their bodies are touching, and their faces are no more than 10 centimeters about. So, if they are going to bring any infection, we are going to get it. They wear masks and gloves but whether that is enough I don’t know.”

- Tim, 83, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Their new routine required Tim to take on more care responsibilities than before, leaving him with less time for himself. Meanwhile, the risk of the virus entering their household through carers they needed was palpable, participating in a generalized feeling of uneasiness.

The greatest difference between Tim and Andrea's situation and Jacqueline's is one's live-in support network. Jacqueline’s wellbeing would have improved considerably if she had more direct support at home, generally the type of support given by a partner or family member that is hard to receive through paid help. This highlights the importance of partners or family members while ageing abroad as key support networks actors. These provide informal care, alleviating sharper instances of vulnerability and precarity (Hall, 2021).

Adding to the uncertainty created by COVID was the impossibility to go to social places, like the Club Villa or the Charity's coffee morning. These spaces assure social reproduction of support networks abroad as well as allow for information to be exchanged between members; solving doubts and issues that could arise within the British expatriate retiree experience through social face-to-face get-togethers that ceased with the virus. Fortunately, entities found a different utility during the pandemic beyond the social: they acted as news sources, facilitating the flow of information through their official communication channels to all their members. Niall, who was the president of the Organization during initial stages of lockdown, dedicated a great part of his time sending out emails to all members detailing information about the pandemic:

“I spend a great chunk of the day looking at the webpage of CatSalut (health services in Catalonia) and the other part translating it. I try to keep people informed, especially those Life Members that are older and have a harder time getting their information from local news. It’s the least I can do!”

- Niall, 70, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

About a year after this interview, in an Annual General Meeting of the Organization over Zoom, many members thanked Niall for those emails saying that they were grateful to have them during such uncertain times (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 07/04/2021). Other entities like the Club in Costa del Sol, or the Anglican Church in Costa Brava, used their monthly newsletters and Facebook pages for similar purposes, all of which helped maintain the links between members alive.
Not only were these channels used for news dissemination, but they were also used to organize help for other members. This was already a function within entity channels pre-pandemic, but it’s use rose during initial stages, especially regarding organizing shopping runs for older members. Younger members of these communities would post on a Facebook page, newsletter, or email chain the days they were going shopping and older members would send their shopping lists to them via the same channels or by phone call. Once the shopping was done, younger members would drop off the shopping on people’s doorsteps and receive a bank transfer, assuring that no contact would be made throughout the transaction. This way, older British expatriates wouldn’t have to leave their homes and put their health at risk. It must be noted that volunteer shoppers weren’t abundant, because most British expatriate retirees were considered an “at risk” group. So, it was common for family members or younger friends, who weren’t part of these entities, to volunteer their help in these communities.

Overall, entities were maintained alive throughout the pandemic by acting as news sources and volunteer organizers. However, the activity and support these groups created pre-pandemic was significantly reduced. Even a year after the first lockdown, in 2021, pre-pandemic levels of activity hadn’t been reached. Thus, the pandemic has imposed significant changes in British expatriate retirees’ lifestyles. They no longer have the same access to social spaces and physically, mentally, and socially challenging activities that constructed their ‘ageing better’ life projects. This, compounded with Spain’s underfunded family-oriented care structures, leaves many British expatriate retirees in what Hall calls a “care gap” (2021). This means British retirees in Spain must resort to a patchwork of formal and informal structures to assure their care needs are met (Hall, 2021). Thus, creating more vulnerable experiences out of the quotidian and generating precarity in otherwise privileged life projects.

6.5.2. Return in times of COVID

The pandemic spread thin the ‘ageing better’ experience retirement migrants were searching for due to a rising sense of uncertainty and risk that affected lifestyles and future life project plans. A significant part of this uncertainty could be attributed to the obstacle COVID-19 posed to mobility, affecting how British retirees moved between Spain and the UK. There were restrictions in movement involving new regulations from vaccination certificates to closing off borders if deemed necessary. This meant fewer visits from family members and friends to Spain and less trips to the UK, severely affecting the way in which many informants had envisioned their ‘good life’ in Spain. Consequently, the pandemic put into question the viability of their retirement migration projects, making them feel unexpectedly vulnerable and at risk within their own quotidian lives.

It is worth mentioning that this feeling of uncertainty due to mobility already existed pre-pandemic due to Brexit. This geopolitical shift affected the bureaucratic and legal foundations upon which British expatriate retirees constructed their retirement migration projects, meaning their life projects were effectively endangered by this
change. However, COVID magnified and aggravated the issues Brexit posed to mobility and travel, adding new bureaucratic procedures and health risks to mobility.

COVID-19 specifically brought to the forefront the fine line between privilege and precarity of their life projects, highlighting the importance of support networks in old age, like family. Accordingly, return migration started to surface as an option to consider within one’s later life project plans, moving closer to family members, assuaging the possibility of vulnerability and precarity in later life. Between British expatriate retirees, return migration has been somewhat taboo, being associated to health and/or financial vulnerability and dependency triggering return. Thus, explaining the lack of intention to return found between British retirees in Spain (Warnes et al., 1999; O’Reilly, 2000; Huete, 2009; Giner-Monfort, Hall & Betty, 2015; Giner-Monfort, 2018). However, return, or migrating closer to family, has been documented between retirement migrants despite these low intentions (Hall & Hardill, 2016). Consequently, COVID-19 has made visible the emotional and rational wrestling that takes place when deciding whether to stay in Spain or move elsewhere. Highlighting how even privileged ageing life projects encounter dependence, vulnerability, and even precarity abroad.

Mary, a now widowed 86-year-old who had lived in the Costa Brava for over 30 years, was going through this very decision-making process. During initial stages of the pandemic she lived alone in a small house that she loved:

“It has this beautiful tiny secret garden. The house is very cute; it has stone walls and round ceilings. It even has a small swimming pool! Only fit for one or two, but it's enough. [...] I have made it my own”
- Mary, 86: Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

She moved into this house after her husband passed away and she couldn’t take care of the bigger house they had together. Instead, this one was closer to the town center, meaning it was walking distance of amenities. For Mary this change was her way of accepting her old age and finding a home to spend her last days in. The house was big enough for her to have her family over but small enough for her to take care of with the limited hired help she could afford. She also became friends with her neighbors who helped her in the past when she broke her leg. Therefore, Mary had no wish of moving because this arrangement seemed to work well.

However, the pandemic made her reconsider. She no longer felt comfortable having hired help enter her home to clean, so she did it herself. She would rely on her neighbors to accompany her on walks and do her shopping, but no longer could partake in coffee mornings with her friends in the town square. All of this made her feel lonely. Her three daughters asked her to consider moving away from the Costa Brava and closer to them in Holland, the UK, or USA. That is why, at the time of the interview, Mary had put

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41 Chapter 7 is entirely dedicated to bureaucratic processes and how these have changed due to Brexit and COVID-19. That is why this section mentions these but doesn’t explore them in more depth.
42 Mary was first introduced in section 6.2., speaking about her working-class background as the co-owner of a Pub in the UK with her late husband.
her house on sale but wasn’t sure if she would accept any offers. She was content in her home and felt like she belonged there but at the same time felt the pressure of her age:

“I am not going to get any younger, I am 86 now. So, I mean in a couple of years I won’t be able to move very quick and not do the things that I used to do. So, I might need a little bit of helping.”

- Mary, 86: Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Despite feeling the pressure of her ageing condition, Mary pointed out that whenever she went to visit her daughters, she felt very lonely. This dissuaded her from wanting to move elsewhere entirely:

“They are always out! In and out to work and shopping, with friends. It’s normal. But when I’ve gone, I have thought many times I would be better off at home. And home is here.”

- Mary, 86: Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Mary’s situation highlights the complexity of return migration or migrating closer to family members. She shows how she made compromises in her old age to continue ageing abroad, while attempting to maintain her independence in a place she now calls home. Despite the latter, her lifestyle still suffered during the pandemic, making her consider abandoning it entirely.

The Coronavirus pandemic put pressure on the British expatriate retiree community by labeling them as “at risk” and placing their lifestyles in danger, evidencing the thin line they walk between privilege and vulnerability, leading to increasing experiences of precarity. Aspects of their lifestyles that weren’t initially considered to be problematic, like lacking language skills or contact with locals, placed British expatriate retirees in unexpectedly vulnerable positions situations. This hit the fabric of British expatriate retiree communities to its core; questioning their capacity to continue pursuing their version of the “good life” in Spain safely, making individuals reevaluate their lives in Spain. Thus, the pandemic revealed the complexities behind the intersections of privilege, ageing and migration in the experiences of British expatriate retirees (Hall, 2021). It magnified the issues that already existed between those ageing abroad, making them unavoidable. Leading to the consideration of return migration in groups with historically low intentions of return.

This chapter has illustrated how ageing intersects with privileged experiences and can create instances of vulnerability and even precarious experiences. In British expatriate retiree communities, where being “old” or “ageing” is a complex topic that is communally monitored and individually avoided, vulnerability comes as somewhat of a shock because their privilege makes vulnerable and dependent experiences invisible (Hall, 2021). Their dinner parties and nights out, their nice houses with gardens and sea views, and their
access to private healthcare and hired at home help, cover the urgency of certain ageing experiences tipping towards vulnerability and precarity. Leading these communities to experience the latter as unexpected.

However, COVID stripped away that gauze and made evident the faulty logic upon which these privileged later life projects are constructed. It was a collective moment of recognition of ‘oldness’ in which conflicting discourses about ageing in Western societies found generalized resistance in the embodied ageing experiences of all British expatriate retirees who had to face their “at risk” label. It revealed the complex web of factors that come into play in an ageing abroad experience - like support networks, access to formal or informal care, and economic background - while also questioning the viability of searching for the “good life” in old age abroad. Ultimately, what the Coronavirus did was trigger conversations around dependency and vulnerability, revealing the paradoxical proximity ‘ageing better’ life projects in Spain have between privilege and precarity.

This privilege-precarity paradox already existed pre-pandemic, but it mostly manifested itself in the experiences of lone women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As illustrated throughout the chapter, those who experienced uncertainty and risk more acutely were women migrating alone with limited resources and, thus, were closer to precarity. These women’s experiences in retirement reveal the importance of an intersectional approach to ageing, illustrating how gender, socioeconomic class, work, migration, and old age intersect; reflecting the influence of power structures throughout the life course (Calasanti, Slevin, & King, 2006; Calasanti & Giles, 2017).

To conclude, in British expatriate retirees’ communities being seen as ‘old’ must be avoided through independence and activity but growing old is a factual inevitability (Lamb, 2018; Allain & Marshall, 2017). Thus, the identity (re)construction processes ageing British retirees embark on in Spain are filled with incongruities. This becomes evident in their individual lifestyles and their community behaviors, that highlight the complexity of ageing in a Western society were accepting old age decline is hampered by discourses and social imaginaries that insist upon the importance of later life activity and independence without considering other intersecting factors (Degnen, 2007; Lamb, 2018). Incidentally this is the very thing that places them on that fine line between privilege, dependence, vulnerability, and precarity. This delicate balance, tied to unrealistic later life expectations that Western old age discourses impose, is a recurring theme throughout this thesis and will continue to resurface throughout coming chapters.
Chapter 7

Using bureaucracy to locate privilege

7.1. Bureaucracy, paperwork, borders, and all that ‘red tape’

For British expatriate retirees, bureaucracy has become a key characteristic of their migration experiences due to contextual and sanitary changes that have altered the bureaucratic and legal parameters upon which mobility and ‘ageing better’ lifestyles in Spain used to be constructed. Brexit shifted the geopolitical relationship between the UK and Spain, while the COVID-19 health crisis generated issues regarding mobility and movement across borders as well as problematizing the age of those crossing them. Both these events had significant repercussions on British expatriate retiree lifestyles, shaping experiences abroad, changing life project plans, triggering identity (re)constructions, and shifting the group’s privileged positioning in an unprecedented manner. Thus, how legal procedures are conceived of and how they are dealt with, provides a window into British expatriate retirees changing privilege, while also illustrating actions and discourses through which identities are (re)constructed in later life.

Providing a more concrete approach to these changes are borders, where these geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts find themselves materialized in passports, VISAS, and vaccination certificates. These are the first administrative procedures a migrant faces and has been used as a vehicle for othering practices within governmental frameworks; foreboding other migration experiences (van Houtum, 2010). Through the exploration of borders and the relationships British expatriate retirees have with them, the growing disparities between British expatriate retirees are materialized, illustrated by the range of bureaucratic related anxiety and uncertainty some suffer over others. The different feelings and emotions that these experiences hold exemplify the effect of structural power relations upon lived experiences (Jones et al., 2014).

Bureaucracy provides a unique avenue to explore the intricacies of privilege, and its’ paradoxical proximity to vulnerability, within retiree migrants’ experiences. Its ethnographic analysis allows for the intersections of categories of difference like gender, socioeconomic class, past work experiences, whiteness, and nationality to become evident in ways other aspects of migrant experience do not illustrate. Consequently, this chapter explores the relationship British expatriate retirees have with bureaucracy and paperwork, especially post Brexit and COVID-19. Illustrating through it how ‘ageing better’ in Spain is becoming increasingly commodified and unattainable to those with less socioeconomic resources.
7.2. Bureaucracy and the migrant retiree: anxiety and privileged legal loopholes

Lidia⁴³ was one of the British expatriate retirees living on the coasts of Spain that was struggling with Brexit and its legal side effects. At 85, she had been living in Costa del Sol for over 7 years without being on the official registry (the Padrón) and consequently without the opportunity of accessing permanent residency (residencia) in Spain. Despite having a daughter and son in law that lived close by, she disliked asking for their help because she didn’t want to be a burden to them and extremely valued her independence. It wasn’t until Brexit was announced that she revealed to them that she had never done the correct paperwork to be a legal resident in Spain:

“I tried to get all the paperwork done about 5 to 6 years ago but I went to the police station and the policemen were so rude to me for not speaking Spanish! They made me cry (says in a whisper). I really didn’t want to go back there or tell anyone what had happened.”

- Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

That is why, early on a Tuesday morning in February, Lidia stood for over 45 minutes in front of a police station waiting for it to open. “It was very hard to get an appointment. Everyone wants one! My son in law was on the phone for over an hour to get me this slot, I’m not about to lose it.” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 19/02/2019). So, even though she had an appointment, and even though there was no need for standing in line once inside, Lidia spent an entire morning on her feet waiting for her turn. Her nerves were palpable; she was anxious that the authorities would “kick [her] out” if they knew how long she had been living in Spain without legally establishing herself. “Honesty, nothing ever happened to make me feel unsafe here. I went to the UK. I came back. No one ever checked anything” (Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). With Brexit, this was all changing, and she intended to make it right to stay in Spain, where she wanted to live out her last days.

Lidia didn’t speak any Spanish, so she contacted the Charity to help her find a volunteer interpreter to accompany her to the police station, who sent her to me. When we stepped into the policeman’s office, she was in a daze caused by nerves and exhaustion. Lidia hadn’t translated a couple documents to Spanish and was missing the S1 document that secures healthcare in Spain. This frustrated her and made her give in to her daughter’s pleas: hire a solicitor to guide her through the bureaucratic process. Service which her daughter had offered to pay in full several times before.

Lidia had partaken in the legal limbo that many other British nationals abroad had used to sidestep taxation, asset control, and avoid the general hassle paperwork and bureaucracy represents, especially if it is in a foreign language. Under the guise of the Article of Freedom of Movement, Lidia and others had lived in violation of EU migration laws without any legal repercussions. Once Brexit was underway, this strategy to maximize one’s privilege turned into something that affected Lidia’s wellbeing. She

⁴³ Lidia was first introduced in Chapter 6, section 6.2.1, to illustrate the how past work lives affect later life retirement choices. Her case was also used to show gendered experiences in retirement migration.
started suffering from anxiety and hadn’t slept well for months, worrying about what would happen to her if she didn’t get the paperwork correctly on time before the official Brexit date. To her disdain, this date was pushed back twice as no firm agreements were reached between the EU and the UK, which simply added to her sense of uncertainty.

Lidia’s case illustrates that of many other British expatriate retirees who found themselves in an unexpected instance of vulnerability due to their previous strategies to maximize their privileged positioning within Spain. The uncertainty of legal parameters between Spain and the UK during the long transition period had tangible repercussions on the experiences of British retirees in Spain. The group felt their privilege shift. Bureaucratic and legal issues that previously seemed impervious to them, were now generating community discomfort. The socioeconomic differences within the group were accentuated as access to economic resources and proper bureaucratic information became central to securing one’s legal positioning in Spain. Meanwhile, paperwork and bureaucracy slipped into quotidian conversations. Things like recommending solicitors to one another (gestor in Spanish, word many used), talking about who had decided to be a ‘risk taker’ with a laissez faire attitude and not legalize their situation, or asking each other about bureaucratic processes and what they entailed, all became common topics throughout fieldwork.

Before moving forward, it must be noted that informants spoke of paperwork and bureaucracy interchangeably throughout fieldwork. Processes like opening a bank account, hiring a phone line and internet, attaining one’s residence card, purchasing a home, gaining access to public healthcare, or establishing one’s will and funeral plan, all fell underneath the same umbrella in the field. Even though some of these processes aren’t directly related to the Spanish state and government, they were emically considered as bureaucracy and paperwork. Despite these terms being emically interchangeable, I use the term paperwork when referring to the material and physical aspects of a bureaucratic task and bureaucracy is used in a more general tone, entailing the entirety of the process, not only the physical papers and actions but also the people involved. This chapter focuses mainly on the governmental bureaucratic processes that these communities interact with. In many instances both governmental and non-governmental processes, like opening bank accounts or hiring an internet service, are interconnected and represent the same issues, therefore some reference to non-governmental processes are made but they aren’t central to the thesis.

7.2.1. Bureaucratic processes pre-Brexit: helping hands, hired help, and getting it done

Firstly, it is important to review the legal process required by the Spanish state to live in Spain as an EU retiree because this is the procedure British retirement migrants who migrated before Brexit had to follow.

When arriving to Spain as an EU member citizen, you can spend up to 90 days in the country as a tourist. After that, one must legalize their situation as a resident. If you aren’t working and are retired, you must prove that you have enough economic resources
to sustain yourself in Spain. To go through this process, one must first get their NIE, *Número de Identidad de Extranjero*, which is a number that identifies ‘foreigners’ and is used for bank accounts, social security, and other processes like contracting Internet or a phone line.

Then one must also register onto the *Padrón*, the official registry for local municipalities if living in Spain for over 6 months (Casado-Díaz, 2006). This has no legal effect other than calculating the population in the municipality for the creation of public policies and public spending. The *Padrón* is a rather controversial state tool, as it has been used by Spanish conservative government parties to detect people in legally irregular situations and take measures upon their irregularity, disproportionately affecting racialized migrants. This registry provides a document that states where you live that is later used to access social security services (Gustafson, 2008).

Accessing the entirety of social security services isn’t immediate after registering onto the *Padrón*. Certain governmental aid for disability, like a handicapped car licenses or at home care services, require being registered for at least 5 years prior to soliciting the services. This has proven to be problematic for many Northern European retiree migrants who unexpectedly find themselves in vulnerable situations (Government worker 1, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; O’Reilly, 2020). Gaining an NIE and being on the *Padrón* leads to residencia or residency, which indicates a stay superior to 3 months and inferior to 5 years. These must be renewed every 5 years. If after those 5 initial years the EU retirement migrant wants to become a permanent resident, they must go through another bureaucratic process like the one of residencia.

Besides state and governmental related bureaucracy, there are also other tasks that involve paperwork. Of these, the most important is opening a bank account, which is necessary for various governmental procedures. Other tasks involving paperwork are buying or renting properties or installing Internet and a phone line. All these bureaucratic processes were mostly conducted in Spanish or Catalan, with exceptions depending on workers’ English-speaking skills. This makes undergoing bureaucracy and paperwork complicated for retirement migrants, who tend to lack Spanish skills, which many informants attributed to their ageing condition; saying it made it harder for them to learn a new language later in life.

Town Halls in each municipality attempted to disseminate this information targeted at Northern European retirement migrants through different mediums like informative pamphlets, websites, welcome talks, and office hours; always depending on the budget of each municipality. These were disseminated in various languages including English, German, Norwegian, Dutch, Finnish and more.

One might think this information can be found through the Immigration Department at Town Hall, but this wasn’t always the case. In Costa del Sol, where there were greater numbers of Northern European retirement migrants than in Costa Brava, there were entire departments that targeted retirement migrants and holiday homeowners, like for example the Mijas Foreigners’ Department, or *Departamento de Extranjeros*. The Mijas Foreigners’ Department was the first of its kind in Spain, created in 1985, as the municipality observed the uptick in Northern European migration,
specifically retirement migration, leading them to create a department focused on this groups’ needs (Government worker 1, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). In Mijas, this department co-existed with Immigration Departments and the services they offered made clear the economic differences between those labeled as “foreigners” and those labeled as “immigrants” as understood in Spanish social policy. For example, the Immigration Department would offer aid in finding work through workshops on how to write a CV. Meanwhile, the Foreigners’ Department would provide aid in finding apartments to buy (Government worker 1, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Other services the Costa del Sol Foreigner’s Department offered were translation and interpreter services for English, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish and German; languages which reveal to whom the services are directed towards. Other areas of Costa del Sol did not have such a department, but offered services catering Northern Europeans within their Tourism Departments; showcasing the proximity between retirement migration and tourism once more (Government worker 2, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

Meanwhile, the Costa Brava did not have a Foreigner’s Department or include retiree migrant services within Tourism Departments. All migrants, despite their origin and intention of migration, had to resort to the Immigration Department and its’ Servei d’Acollida or Reception Service for governmental guidance. This includes bureaucratic and legal orientation. There are no services specially tailored towards Northern European migrants, showing the difference in scale between the Costa del Sol community and the Costa Brava community (Government worker 3, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Despite the existence of these separate departments dedicated to different types of migrants, the Spanish government was struggling to reach Northern European retirement migrants or know how many of them were living in Spain. This is because, like academics have noted, there is a tendency for Northern European retiree migrants to not register upon arrival (O’Reilly, 2000; 2020; Hurtado, 2010). This is due to various needs depending on country of origin and the EU agreements between both countries, but mostly have to do with avoiding taxation and not trusting Spanish authorities (O’Reilly, 2000; 2020; Engdahl, 2021). This is simply aggravated by the fact that most did not resort to official governmental channels when they had a bureaucratic issue, or any other issue for that matter, as reviewed in Chapter 6 (Government worker 1, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

The latter became evident when the Mijas Town Hall launched a massive “Empadronamiento” campaign to reinforce the registration of European migrants onto the Padrón with the hopes of jumpstarting more enrollments.

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44 The distinctions between these categories of migration in practice on the ground will be explored in Chapter 8.
45 The Costa del Sol Immigration Department also had translation and interpreter services, but for other languages like Arabic or French.
46 “Empadronamiento” or “empadronar” is a verb that refers to the action of registering onto the Padrón.
In their campaign they appeal to the importance of being registered through the visual metaphor of being a missing puzzle piece, further stating in their written media that being registered is a way of helping the Spanish government serve their needs (Empadrónate Pamphlet, Mijas Ayuntamiento: 2019). The campaign took over Mijas and its neighboring municipalities with pamphlets, billboards, and informative meetings in various languages, all of which were English or Nordic. They contacted local Northern European associations, urging them to hand out pamphlets, like Figure 147, and start the conversation about the importance of the Padrón with their members. Telling them it was the first step towards understanding how state bureaucratic processes in Spain worked (Government Worker 1, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

As Mijas’ investment into the Empadronamiento campaign suggests, official channels were struggling to reach Northern European expatriate retirees. This is because they relied on other avenues of information that didn’t involve official governmental channels: the Internet, support networks, and the private sector.

Firstly, many described researching on the Internet the legal requirements for living in Spain before migration. This wasn’t always easy because official governmental information was mostly in Spanish, and it was written in legal jargon that was hard to

47 For the inside of the pamphlet, go to Appendix 4.
follow. Some reported reading articles from newspapers, blogs written by expatriates, or consulting social media groups such as Facebook. Ultimately, using the Internet as a research tool was a common way of generating a general bureaucratic process checklist but not the procedures details:

“I took a look on the Internet of what I would need before even coming here. [...] But it was a bit outdated, it said as soon as you arrive you have to go straight to the police station and register. Of course you don’t. You have to make an appointment and go down to Fuengirola, which I did, which was a nightmare. I got it all done but, for example, registering with my GP took 18 months to get my [social security] card (laughs). Um, not quite knowing how to do things and not speaking the language definitely did not help.”

- Jane, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview: 2019

Accessing reliable bureaucratic information through the Internet was useful but also presented issues. That is why having a reliable support network abroad was key to the British expatriate retiree experience. Having a friend or acquaintance that has gone through the same bureaucratic process helps both alleviate stress associated with bureaucratic misunderstandings as well as supply advice on the matter. However, having a sturdy community in initial months post-migration isn’t common. Only those with previous ties to Spain, through family or as a holiday destination, had these support networks before migrating.

Social organizations like the Club, Charity, or Organization put in contact recently arrived expatriate retirees with those who had lived in Spain for longer and had gone through the same bureaucratic process upon arrival. By joining these entities, newcomers found a social space that could yield both advice and reassurance. Molly, treasurer of the Club in Costa del Sol, would speak about how the Club had been central in guiding her through the purchase of her home in Spain and all the proper paperwork around it:

“Again, it goes back to the Club. If somebody hears something about... ‘you need to do this’ or ‘I’ve just done this’, you share it with everybody else. And some things prompt you to think do I need to do that? We are fortunate that there is a network of people who keep an eye out and are filling you in to things that need to be done.”

- Molly, 73, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

These support networks, knitted together through social entities, become indispensable for British expatriate retiree access to bureaucratic information. By joining newcomers with veterans, the flow of information and possibility of lending a helping hand was facilitated.

These social organizations also advertised paid legal help during meetings or coffee mornings, triggering conversations on paperwork and bureaucracy between retirees who might’ve overlooked certain aspects of their migration plan. In both the Costa del Sol Charity and the Costa Brava Organization, law firms oriented towards managing wills, funeral plans, getting NIE’s and residencias, were given time slots in coffee
mornings or general meetings for them to speak to members about how to go about these processes.

In one case, a law firm specifically aimed towards funeral and will arrangements, made a presentation during a weekly coffee morning at the Charity. As the law firm was speaking of death and its repercussions abroad, the audience became uncomfortable, inducing jokes about death and ageing to relieve the tension. Despite the jokes, many Charity users started to think about their own funeral plans due to the firm’s presentation, raising questions about their remains and whether they wanted them expatriated to the UK or not. The president of the Charity, David, age 85, already had a funeral plan but believed it was important for others to hear about all the planning that must be done:

“Once you die everything spirals out of control for your loved ones. You don’t want them to have to think about those things, even if planning for it may seem rather morbid. I don’t know if they’ll actually use their services (referring to the law firms), but it gets them thinking about planning ahead. Many people do not like doing that, but it is important because you never know what may happen. Especially living in another country.”

- Field Diary, Costa Brava: 11/04/2019

David, as the president of the Charity, expressly chose to bring a law firm to speak of these issues to stimulate the flow of information regarding bureaucratic procedures related to living, and dying, in Spain. His experience volunteering for the Charity had brought him to realize that these sorts of arrangements weren’t done or prepared as often, or soon, as they should. Once again, depicting the complex relationship British expatriate retirees have with ageing and its’ ties with vulnerability and death.

Sudden deaths have the potential of triggering an instance of unexpected vulnerability for a partner of a deceased retiree migrant or family member, who must deal with paperwork in a foreign language and funeral system (Hall & Hardill, 2016). David had witnessed this as a volunteer, telling me about sons and daughters of deceased Charity users coming over to Spain with no idea how to navigate the system while also dealing with their own grief; or about widowed partners that were extremely overwhelmed by the amount of work and money involving funerals.

Therefore, the private sector, involving law firms, interpreters, and real estate services, provided paid help to the British expatriate retirees who could afford it. A key private sector player in Spain is the gestor, a person who oversees administrative and legal activities of a person, entity, or company. A gestor would be the equivalent of a solicitor in English. They can also have legal knowledge and aid in processes such as getting one’s residency, getting a Spanish driver’s license or Spanish car plates, purchasing, or selling property, and much more. These gestors work in firms or alone, and many would gain new clients by word of mouth between expatriates that would recommend their services to acquaintances as a way of offering help in a moment of need. A notable majority of the informants who had hired a gestor had done so through mutual friends.
Rose, a 70-year-old woman who had lived in the Costa del Sol for over 15 years, found her own gestor through friends. She was a local Spanish woman, Pilar, who had been a family lawyer for many years and now had a consulting firm that focused on British expatriates, most of them Club members. Pilar was a very important resource for Rose, especially during her husband’s death:

“Pilar is a lovely lady [...]. She spoke perfect English too. I’ve had to use her twice over really. First of all, when we bought everything (referring to her apartments and cars). We became great friends with her. If people came in the Club, and Tony (her husband) was the president of the Club for 2 and half years, and if people needed service, he always recommended Pilar. When Tony died, Pilar took everything over. I had no worry at all, she did the whole thing. She used to say, ‘I need you to sign some forms’ and she would tell me what they were about, and I would sign them.”

- Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Rose and her husband were part of this chain of offering information and recommending hired help to friends and Club members, being on both the receiving and offering end at some point of their migrant lives. Thus, Rose’s testimony illustrates how the private sector and support networks abroad overlap in their functioning. This speaks to the commodification of British expatriate lifestyles and how it is not attainable to all, as socioeconomic class plays a key role in attaining private services that can palliate instances of unexpected vulnerability (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). If it weren’t for Rose’s economic capacity to hire Pilar, the intersection between old age, death, and migration that her husband’s death entailed could’ve triggered an instance of unexpected vulnerability. Rose’s socioeconomic capacity of accessing private services, not only economically but also through friends who recommended Pilar’s services as trustworthy, mitigated her experience of vulnerability and even precarity in later life.

Being able to afford legal services is key when understanding the anxiety-levels bureaucratic procedures may or may not cause within each British expatriate retiree experience. This was especially true during Brexit, and the legal uncertainty it created. Gwen and Eliot, 75 and 79 respectively, had just enough economic resources to pay a quarterly fee to a law firm that kept them up to date on all the Brexit matters and made everything less stressful for them:

“It’s been a real help, real help. They’ve helped us get all our documentation together to make sure we are officially resident and everything. They took us to the place in Sant Feliu (where the police office is) and went through all the process of that (becoming a resident). [...] If something new comes through from the government they contact us. [...] One of the employees is actually a Dutch lady who speaks English, Spanish, Catalan...the whole lot. We just go in and say, ‘what do we do about this’, and she says, ‘this this and this we need to find out so and so’. By the time you’ve gotten home and open your email, she’s done it! When they started with Brexit, seriously, there were messages coming from the consulate saying you
need to have this this and this in order. It was overwhelming and... it’s just worth our while paying the quarterly to deal with everything.”

- Eliot, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

For Eliot and Gwen, paying a quarterly fee was something they could afford and gave them the benefit of calm in processes that caused anxiety, especially with Brexit that was shaking the legal parameters of the lives of British expatriate retirees (more on that in section 7.1.3.). Having access to a professional that could solve doubts quickly made Eliot and Gwen’s retirement migration experience more enjoyable and consistent with the overall goal of the migration trend: to ‘age better’.

Those who could not afford these sorts of services could only count on the strength of their support networks and Internet research skills to sustain them through these processes. This would lead to stress and anxiety that went against the idea of ageing ‘successfully’. It also dampened the ideal of Spain as a holiday and retirement destination that was ‘laid-back’.\footnote{The social construct of Spain as ‘laid back’ was explained in Chapter 6.} Especially because paperwork is the opposite of relaxing, going against this social construct.

Said bureaucratic related anxiety could lead to the hustle of getting by exemplified by Lidia’s opening ethnographic vignette. Many retirees like her would find ways around the legal system to avoid the ‘headaches’ caused by paperwork as well as the money and time required to either hire legal assistance or understand a foreign system. These experiences contrast those with organized and well financed legal support or a general laisse faire attitude, briefly mentioned earlier and explored in more detail in coming sections (7.1.3 and 7.3.), giving a sense of the different mechanisms people use to navigate the Spanish bureaucratic system.

The following sections continue to explore these mechanisms, illustrating how bureaucracy is conceived as anxiety inducing in different measures depending on a variety of factors, while also depicting the effects these mechanisms have on the ageing experiences of British retirees in Spain.

**7.2.2. Anxiety-inducing bureaucracy and how it is experienced**

The British retirees who attempted to engage with bureaucratic processes like obtaining their NIE, residencia, or even car plates without any hired help described the process as generally uninteresting and tiring. Dina\footnote{Dina was introduced in Chapter 6, where we explored her situation as a single woman migrating to Spain and her experiences with vulnerability and precarity.}, who had recently moved to the Costa Brava at the time of the interview, described the process in the following way:

“I found all of that pretty exhausting, especially while I was recovering (from her accident). I was going back and forth to Sant Feliu to get my residence (where the police station is). I had to go four times before I was able to get it. I got my Padrón and you need to get an...
appointment and fill in forms. It’s a process you have to go through in any country and it’s long. It’s cumbersome but, also, you come across awkward people. There were one or two really unpleasant police officers in Sant Feliu, but there were one or two absolutely charming ones that couldn’t have been more helpful. It’s the same anywhere in the world. On the whole, the Spanish system is okay. I’ve only been here now about 8 months and I have got my residence, my medical card should be coming through before the end of this month. I got my Padrón. I went through six of the seven hoops to get my car registered and am going through the last stage to get my license plates and driving license. And that’s it, I got everything. “

- Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

In the previous chapter we observed how Dina was plunged into an instance of unexpected vulnerability after suffering a serious accident during her initial months post-migration. In that instance, not only did she suffer because of the physical consequences of recuperating from her accident, she also had a very limited support network to count on. When it came to undergoing bureaucratic processes, Dina’s access to avenues that gave a steady information flow on bureaucratic matters was rather limited. Adding to the latter, her economic situation wasn’t the best, as exemplified by her need to engage in itinerant informal work. So, the Internet became her greatest ally to navigate the bureaucratic system in Spain:

“ I would use Google Translate to understand the official webpages and everything. But sometimes I just couldn’t get it on my own, so I would send whatever link it was to my niece for help. Other than that, I did it mostly on my own.”

- Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

When Dina made the above comment, she smiled wide, later telling me how she was proud of herself of being resourceful and getting all the bureaucracy necessary for living in Spain done on her own, with minimal help from her niece, her closest family member and support in Spain. Her pursuit for legalization became part of her identity (re)construction, reaffirming her own agency and independence in later life. As mentioned in Chapter 6, it is a common occurrence between women migrating on their own to give meaning to retirement migration by asserting themselves away from traditional family roles. Actions such as putting their family ties at risk or, in this case, going through bureaucratic processes alone, were ways in which one’s ‘ageing better’ abroad experience was reaffirmed and tied with an ethos of independence and agency that these women lacked in their past work lives (be it reproductive or productive). It must be noted that Dina’s experience with bureaucracy could have easily become into an instance of unexpected vulnerability on the edge of precarity. Many women migrating on their own, struggle to go through these bureaucratic processes solo, as demonstrated by Lidia’s experience cited in the beginning of this chapter. This highlights how intersectionality takes on different shapes depending on the web of factors at play. Here,
Dina’s experience with researching on the internet and her past work life as a lawyer informs her experience with bureaucratic processes, making it into a positive one.

Despite the self-affirming nature of Dina’s bureaucratic experience, she described it as “work”, “exhausting” and “cumbersome”, which other expatriate retirees did as well. Even those who paid for legal help described the process similarly. These sorts of remarks aren’t surprising, as part of the socialization around bureaucracy in Western countries involves it being perceived as time consuming and tedious (Herzfeld, 1992). That is because bureaucratic systems are like a ball of tangled yarn: in order to untangle one bureaucratic procedure, you must untangle three more. Things like unexpected fees that must be paid in cash on the spot or discovering that you need a certified photocopy of a document to get another one, are just a couple examples of some of the tedious moments bureaucracy and paperwork can create. These measures are part of greater state and private structures that seek to perpetuate a particular social hierarchy (Gupta, 2012).

Bureaucracy has historically been an instrument of power with an aim to reduce existing multiplicity of perspectives through an impersonal organization and classification of administrative functions (Graeber, 2012; 2015). These functions seep into people’s everyday lives through the materiality of paperwork, or administrative “red tape”, that places material limits onto daily life, maintaining hierarchies of power through these bureaucratic acts (Gupta, 2012). This is the structural violence bureaucracy wields through the materiality of paperwork (Gupta, 2012). However, the power of bureaucracy is obscured by the indifference it inspires in the people it subjugates; making it difficult for individuals to work towards change as it generates what Greaber calls “dead zones of the imagination” (Herzfeld, 1992; Graeber, 2012; 2015).

Migrants, as foreigners to these systems, fall prey to the structural violence it implements due to lacking knowledge about it and language used to navigate it. Accordingly, the indifference these systems are designed to create is heightened in the case of British retirement migrants because of their migrant condition and its intersection with their ageing condition.

“I’m too old for this stress, I can’t afford it” was something Julia, 66 years old, living on the Costa Brava with her husband Max, 69, would say when speaking about bureaucracy (Interview, 2020). Julia’s remarks rang true for other British retirees whose bureaucratic experiences seemed to go against their life project plan of ‘ageing better’, finding that bureaucracy and paperwork induced enough anxiety to overpower their retirement migration project goal (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 19/02/2019). Julia explained the frustration felt when attempting to navigate a foreign system and language:

“We had an English car and had to change over to Spanish plates. And we did it all ourselves. And yes, the process is hard because sometimes it doesn’t matter how well you speak the language, sometimes you miss things in translation. Which is bloody frustrating when you get somewhere, and you realize that’s not where you are supposed to be or that’s not the paperwork you were supposed to have.”

- Julia, 66, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020
In the above excerpt, Julia is describing how bureaucracy effectively generates feelings of alienation, illustrating how bureaucracies can effectively “render anybody stupid” (Graeber, 2012). Having a close support network during these processes is key to stay on course and achieving bureaucratic goals, while surrendering to frustration. Julia had her husband Max, who was quite fluent in Spanish and a bit of Catalan and helped her get through these processes. However, Max’s support couldn’t mitigate the frustration brought on by language miscommunications. As bureaucracy is governed by the minutest details, fully understanding instructions is key (Graeber, 2012). For a person unfamiliar with the system and language, these misunderstandings are more common, and feelings of alienation become more intense due to the minutiae that keeps bureaucracies functioning.

All types of migrants who are foreigners to a country, and its administrative systems, feel this magnified alienation. However, British expatriate retirees aren’t any type of migrant. They are classified by themselves, and within a broader shared social imaginary, as expatriates. In Chapter 3, we reviewed how the figure of the expatriate is constructed in opposition to the ‘othered’ figure of the immigrant, representing a Weberian ‘ideal’ type of privileged migrant that symbolizes whiteness and wealth within global mobility regimes (Kunz, 2016). As a tool to maintain structures of power in place, bureaucracy is applied and experienced differently between migration categories. By observing how these processes are experienced, the differences between those categorized as ‘immigrants’, ‘expatriates’, or even ‘tourists’ are illustrated through grounded ethnographic data. This is what the following story about Julia and Max’s bureaucratic journey in Spain depicts, marking the differences between migration categories and their intersection with socioeconomic backgrounds, shaping migration life projects.

Even though they could afford legal help due to their stock shares and high-paid jobs that yielded high paying private pensions, the couple had initially thought that hiring someone was a waste of money. However, after their unsatisfying experience with the car plates, they decided to hire a gestor.

“Max finds everything humorous and entertaining. He took the car plate changing as a challenge! But for me, it was too much. He is just so laid back that he doesn’t need any more calm. Not me, I need to be in a place like this (referring to Spain as being relaxed). So, I told him, we have to get a lawyer. And we did.”

- Julia, 65, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

After some debate, they settled on hiring an English-speaking gestor a mutual friend had recommended.

For Julia, hiring legal assistance was a way of assuring her pursuit of the “good life”. In the comments above, she invokes the theme of Spain’s ‘laid back’ nature, stating that she “needs” a place like Spain to retire to, alluding to attaining a better work/life balance through retiring to Spain. Julia had a hectic past work life that involved early mornings, late nights, and world-travel. For that reason, Julia wanted the opposite in her
retirement. Mobilizing support networks for information and utilizing their economic resources to conjointly alleviate the stress caused by paperwork.

By delegating the mental, psychological, and time-consuming work that bureaucracy entails, the couple is somewhat escaping the “dead zones of imagination” that swallow people’s time and mind-power (Graeber, 2012; 2015). Thus, having a higher socioeconomic reach and sturdy support networks abroad can cushion the structural violence that other retiree migrants otherwise feel. Other migrants might not have the opportunities or choices people like Max and Julia dispose of, leaving them bare in the face of structural violence.

However, not all British expatriate retirees could do what Julia and Max did. Yes, the migration experiences of British expatriate retirees share a basal privilege that other migration phenomena do not, but the levels of privilege within the group is heterogeneous and shifting. When comparing Dina’s case to Julia and Max’s, we observe very different socioeconomic levels and support networks that influence their migration experiences. Dina is a woman and a lone migrant, with a very limited support network and limited economic resources. She must resort to personal Internet research skills when going through the bureaucratic system. On the other hand, Julia and Max transfer their bureaucratic burdens to the private sector, thanks to their upper-class backgrounds and support networks aboard that gave them a trustworthy gestor to hire.

For each example, bureaucratic processes come to mean a different thing within their retirement migration projects. For Dina, championing the bureaucratic system becomes part of her identity (re)construction process, reaffirming her agency and independence in later life. Meanwhile, for Julia and Max, bureaucracy ends up symbolizing the antithesis of their retirement migration goals and “good life” aspirations, resorting to hiring a gestor instead. These diverging experiences illustrate how gender, support networks, and socioeconomic class intersect to generate very different migration experiences in later life.

Ultimately, in both cases bureaucracy is experienced as stressful and anxiety-inducing. But the ways in which these experiences are integrated into identity (re)construction processes is different. Highlighting the importance of intersectionally analyzing bureaucratic experiences, as these show how structures of power come into play in the quotidian, exerting different levels of pressure depending on a complex web of factors.

7.2.3. Avoiding bureaucracy and other taken for granted privileges

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Northern European retiree migrants possess a legal invisibility due to global mobility regimes and governmental structures that allow them to move between EU member countries with minimal control (Ackers & Dwyer, 2004). This legal invisibility highlights their privileged condition as EU members and as predominantly white and wealthy. Between other European nationalities, British citizens have been cited as being most likely to avoid paperwork in their host country (Giner-
Monfort, 2018). Thus, Pre-Brexit the state control exerted on British expatriate retirees was rather minimal.

However, during Brexit negotiations between the EU and the UK, British expatriate retirees were seldom mentioned, highlighting how the group’s invisibility goes beyond EU structures like the Freedom of Movement Act (Benson, 2018). This governmental neglect reveals a racial bias used to implement migration control in the EU, where retirement migrants, such as the British in Spain, have an “unmarked status” that normalizes their privilege of seamlessly crossing borders (Ackers & Dwyer, 2002; Blaakilde, 2013; Pease, 2010). Consequently, before Brexit, British expatriate retirees enjoyed a legal invisibility that was both legal and social, due to their privileged geopolitical positioning as well as the shared social imaginary that conceives expatriates as wealthy and retiree migrants as stimulators of touristic economies of the retirement destinations they go to (Echezarreta, 2005).

This led British expatriate retirees to take the privilege of seamless mobility and legal invisibility for granted, using it to their advantage need be. The British expatriate retirees who took advantage of their legal invisibility did so for a variety of reasons, with the most common being avoiding taxation and government control of assets. They strived to be “under the radar” and find the most privileged positioning they could between their host country and home country (Giner-Monfort & Huete, 2021). By doing so, they were also avoiding the stress of bureaucracy, saving the money of hiring a gestor, and saving time needed to deal with bureaucratic procedures. Thus, many informants who wanted to be “under the radar” said it was also a way of assuring their “good life” in retirement.

The ways British expatriate retirees in Spain ended up utilizing this legal invisibility to their own advantage evokes De Certeau’s use of ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ (1984). Strategies are reserved for those with more resources and power, who have a better vantage point from which strategic decisions about their livelihoods can be made (De Certeau, 1984). Meanwhile, tactics are more informal, reserved for the under-privileged who make instant knee-jerk decisions without having access to the all the information a more powerful person would. Strategies involve time, economic resources, and access to information. Tactics are a guerrilla-styled decision-making process, based on instant reactions to what is in front of you in a particular moment in time (De Certeau, 1984). EU retiree migrants use their legal and social invisibility like a strategy, as they have more information, time, and resources to make these decisions. However, with Brexit, the liminality between strategy and tactic became blurred for British expatriate retirees.

Even though they all share the same privileged starting point, due to whiteness and nationality, some British expatriate retirees clearly employed strategies, while others dallied on the line between strategy and tactic. This was dependent on their overall privilege, including a myriad of factors like gender, migrating alone, or accompanied, and their socioeconomic resources.

Those most privileged start from the shared group privilege of whiteness and geopolitical positioning, but also had great amounts of disposable income from a good private pension plan, strong support networks, and access to information that allows
them to strategize the best possible outcome for themselves through this legal loophole. This was the case of Julia, 66, and Max, 69. This couple was introduced previously, and were ones who experienced bureaucracy as countering their ageing experiences abroad, leading them to hire a gestor to do their bureaucratic procedures for them after a stressful experience on their own. This negative experience coupled with financial motivations, led the couple to decide not to renew their legal situation in Spain (mandatory every 5 years), erasing themselves from the Padrón, and making it seem as if they had moved back to the UK, when they spent most of the year in Spain. Max explains how he and Julia devised this strategy to maximize their finances, in the following way:

“We had everything (referring to residencia, access to public healthcare etc.) and we just let it drop because we felt, financially, we were better becoming residents again in the UK. Tax residents. Between you and I, we probably do spend more than 6 months a year in Spain for the last three years that we have been taxpayers in the UK. It’s because of the Spanish wealth tax. We are free right now, but if we had stayed, we couldn’t escape it. So that drove us away financially.”

- Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

By abandoning their position as residents in Spain, they lost their access to Spanish healthcare, with the only options being accessing privately paid care or emergency public care (Calzada, 2017). This can trigger an instance of unexpected vulnerability, especially for those with fewer economic resources and support networks. But this didn't faze Julia and Max. They argued that, whenever they needed any serious medical help, they would go to the UK and then back to the Costa Brava without encountering any issues at the border. They took for granted both their health and their privileged movement, prioritizing their finances over possible health issues within their strategies.

It must be noted that Max and Julia are notably wealthier than most informants in this research. Before retiring to Spain, they were highly paid executives that were given early retirement with a great pay out. The unexpected expense of travelling for emergencies and medical appointments to the UK did not affect their finances. Similarly, if they ever had to use local health services, and pay out of their own pockets, it wouldn’t be detrimental to their economic standing. Also, if they were ever forced by Spanish authorities to return to the UK for encroaching legal parameters, they owned a home in the UK to go back to. Therefore, they didn’t have to rely on selling their home in Spain to return to the UK; a strategy many British expatriate retirees used until the economic crisis, when housing prices plummeted and this option was no longer reliable (Williams, King, & Warnes, 1997; O’Reilly, 2000; Hall, 2011).

People with the socioeconomic background of Julia and Max could afford the economic risk that taking advantage of this legal invisibility entailed. Not all British expatriate retirees had the opportunity, resources, support networks, and capacity of making such a strategic decision. Lidia, 85, introduced in the beginning of this chapter, also used this legal invisibility to her advantage, but not in the same conscious way Julia and Max did.
When Lidia described how she ended up sidestepping bureaucracy it sounded unintentional. At first, Lidia had tried to legalize her position in Spain but had a very negative experience that dissuaded her from moving forward. With no direct support from a partner, no hired help, lack of Spanish skills, and wanting to assert her independence from her family, Lidia let her legal situation slide. This was only reaffirmed once she saw there were no immediate repercussions to her not having an *NIE* or not being registered on the *Padrón*. Instead, she only saw advantages:

“I didn’t pay any taxes on my car and things like that. I was also younger and regular access to healthcare didn’t seem like something to worry about. I knew I could get medical care in the UK, where one of my daughters’ lives, or emergency care here. So, when the policemen were so mean all the time and I always got things wrong... I just postponed it until I stopped thinking about it.”

- Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

For Lidia remedying her legal situation meant dedicating time, energy, and money that she did not want to expend or have. By evading the bureaucratic process entirely, she was able to avoid the stress associated to bureaucracy and pursue her ideal “good life” in retirement, which was largely associated with asserting her independence.

Lidia had worked all her life in a factory with a husband she described as “controlling” that didn’t allow her to “do anything else but work or be at home” (Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Migrating to Spain after she was widowed became a reflexive personal later life project that meant a lot to Lidia, allowing her to achieve a calmer later life as well as finding her own independence. She didn’t have a great pension plan and accordingly didn’t engage in many social activities that required spending money. In fact, she was currently “apartment sitting” for a friend of hers’, an arrangement she was happy with because she didn’t have to pay any rent and only had to worry about finding a place to stay for the summer, when the family came over for holidays. She disliked asking for her daughter’s help if she could avoid it and didn’t like it when she felt she couldn’t take care of things on her own (Field Diary, Costa del Sol, 3/09/2019). Therefore, engaging in stressful bureaucracy that made her feel inadequate, and entailed paying taxes out of her limited pension, seemed to go against what she desired from retirement. Being in her late 70’s at the time she migrated to Spain, and in good health, things like access to healthcare didn’t seem that important to her, especially while still having access to healthcare in the UK. This sort of assessment is very common between retiree migrants who, informed by the successful ageing paradigm, tend to avoid thinking of old age and its repercussions leading to greater issues in the long run - as explored in Chapter 6 (Hall & Hardill, 2016).

Ultimately, Lidia also took for granted her legal invisibility and her health, making her only see the advantages of using this loophole to her benefit; just like Max and Julia did. These advantages encouraged her to think about the now versus the possibility of a more dire future:
“I never thought this [Brexit] could happen. It was completely unexpected; I never thought my place here [in Spain] could be in danger. Never. Honestly, I just didn’t think that far off. I just stopped thinking about it.”

- Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Lidia’s comments reveal her privileged position as a British expatriate retiree. She simply “stopped thinking about” bureaucracy and assumed she was safe in her legal positioning in Spain. Not all migrants are granted the same lenience. Then, the normalcy with which she expresses her surprise at the turn of events Brexit supposed, reveals feelings of entitlement that are tied with her privileged condition as a white and relatively wealthy migrant that benefits from global mobility regimes (Pease, 2010).

However, Lidia finds herself straddling the line between De Certeau’s strategy and tactic (1984). Several times throughout the interview, she alluded to not thinking about how her decisions would affect her future, leading her to the unexpected instance of vulnerability she was currently experiencing. In fact, the lackluster way she decided to maintain her legal invisibility in Spain reminds us of De Certeau’s tactics, simply reacting to the situation she was in at the time, fruit of her less privileged socioeconomic positioning as a lone expatriate retiree woman. Therefore, Lidia engages in borderline tactic-like strategies that, when encountered with shifting contextual occurrences, can create instances of unexpected vulnerability, feelings of uncertainty, and even precarity. This places Lidia closer to the figure of the ‘immigrant’, characterized by its precarious conditions, as opposed to the figure of the ‘expatriate’, characterized by its privilege. Meaning her experience challenges the foundations of these traditional migration categories, while illustrating the privilege-precarity paradox further.

In the very beginning of this chapter, we see how Lidia struggles to sleep due to her paperwork not being in order, how she struggles to understand the bureaucratic processes she must go through, and how she finally accepts her daughter’s help and pleas for hiring legal assistance. For years prior to that moment, Lidia had enjoyed a legal invisibility that allowed her to avoid the money of hiring a gestor, sidestep the stress of bureaucracy, and be independent from her family. However, this all came at the cost of the uncertainty she felt later, describing herself as feeling “agitated” and “overwhelmed” whenever the topic of paperwork came about. Adding to that, her advanced age made her worry even more than in earlier stages of migration and her life (Field Diary, Costa del Sol, 19/02/2019).

Here is where Lidia’s privilege shifts. Brexit tweaked part of the shared privilege all British expatriate retirees started out with: the Freedom of Movement Act. When this privilege is undermined, Lidia finds herself with a shifting social and legal status that makes evident her limited resources, economic and social. Her limits were transformed into feelings of uncertainty and doubt that shaped her ageing retiree experience abroad, making her aware of impending instances of unexpected vulnerability, nearing her experience towards precarity.

Unlike Lidia, and her borderline tactic-like strategies, these feelings of uncertainty are subdued in the experiences of those who have well-planned privilege-maximizing
strategies like Julia and Max. The couple had a clear strategy with the intention of maximizing their privileged status - focused on their finances - between the UK and Spain. This strategy was carried out from a privileged vantage point: they owned a home in the UK and Spain, they had great pensions schemes, owned stocks that constantly generated revenue, they had strong support networks in the Costa Brava and in the UK, and had access to professional legal assistance. This privileged position sees itself translated into feelings of security when it came to experiencing the geopolitical shift brought on by Brexit, saying things like “It doesn’t scare me or worry me at all” (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). In other words, Julia and Max’s ‘ageing better’ life projects are left practically intact by Brexit, not having the same identity and experience altering effects it had on Lidia.

Both cases exposed throughout this section enjoy the same geopolitical and racialized privileges of owning British passports and being white, as well as having enough disposable income to embark on a retirement migration life project. Pre-Brexit, legal invisibility could be added to this list of privileges but, after it was announced in 2016, this pivotal shared privilege was dismantled and so were the myriad of strategies and border-line tactic-like strategies British expatriate retirees had used to maximize their privilege. Those who had adhered to this legal invisibility now had to face their legal and bureaucratic transgression. This led to the sharpening of differences between British expatriate retirees in Spain, revealing the groups heterogeneity, illustrated by how differently bureaucratic uncertainty was experienced. By examining British expatriate retirees’ relationships to bureaucracy, the nuances in privilege within the British expatriate retiree experience is mapped, revealing its complexities.

7.3. Uncertain living: Brexit transition and initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic

Due to Brexit and COVID-19, British expatriate retirees were experiencing unprecedented levels of political, legal, and sociosanitary uncertainty that affected their wellbeing and altered their lifestyles. For instance, it wasn’t until July of 2020 that measures between Spain and the UK started to become clearer when Spain announced they had determined a Withdrawal Agreement with the UK. This agreement established the legal playing ground British citizens had to abide by until the UK officially left the EU on December 31st, 202050. Adding to the political and legal lag in decision-making was COVID-19, putting everything on hold during its initial stages in 2020 and affecting how people could move across borders due to everchanging sanitary protocols. These contextual changes were significant in the lives of British expatriate retirees, altering

50 In this agreement, those with legal residence did not have to apply for a new residence status. This Withdrawal Agreement established clear bureaucratic rules to follow during the transition period. Overall, the Withdrawal Agreement assured rights of residence, free movement, and social security to those migrating between July 6th and December 31st, 2020, issuing residence permits in the form of a TIE, Tarjeta de Identificación Extranjera, or Foreigner’s Identity Card. Those who migrated to Spain after that date would have different rights and migration requirements that weren’t clear at the time.
their relationships with bureaucracy and their life project plans. These unstable circumstances highlighted the tediousness and stress-inducing capacities of bureaucracy, while also emphasizing the group's shifting privilege and the shortcomings of their 'ageing better' life projects.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, uncertainty was already at an all-time high, as the legal measures concerning British expatriate retirees’ futures were unclear. Throughout that period, there were constant news stories with questionable sources making alarmist affirmations about the lives of British retirees in Spain being in danger for a myriad of reasons: no healthcare access, banks refusing to open bank accounts, higher taxes...etc. This caused various degrees of stress between British expatriate retirees, as not only those who had adhered to the EU-linked legal invisibility had to worry about unpredictable bureaucratic measures. Those who had their paperwork in order had to review their own legal status in Spain and check its validity once Brexit came into effect. So, throughout fieldwork, it was common to hear rumors and general misinformation about what would occur after Brexit:

“Not that I believe everything that I read in the English newspapers, because most of it is rubbish, but have you heard that now we are all supposed to take out a new residency? I’m so angry about that.”

- Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

What Rose said was incorrect because, as of that moment in time, the paperwork needed to stay in Spain was the same as pre-Brexit, with British and Spanish authorities alike encouraging British citizens to have their paperwork under EU regulations in order (Costa del Sol: Filed Diary, meeting with British consulate, 2019). These sorts of comments were part of the general information flow that support networks participated in, explained in section 7.1.1.. However, the constant bombardment of changing news cycles and contentious rumors made this avenue of information more unreliable than before.

The circulation of misinformation was such that Town Halls organized informative sessions and newspaper articles in local outlets during this transition period to spread a sense of calm (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 02/21/2019). As noted earlier (see section 7.1.1.), these sessions didn't reach everyone or weren't able to dissipate a sense of pending vulnerability and precarity. For example, there was a couple at the Club, Betty and Tony - in their 80's - who were so-called “snowbirds” or “swallows” living in Spain for the winter months and travelling the world or returning to the UK in the summer (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019; O'Reilly, 2000). This type of itinerant seasonal migration was put in question during the Brexit transition, as freedom of movement was no longer secure. All the talk about paperwork surrounding them at the Club simply confused them more, making them nervous about the repercussions this geopolitical change would have on their lives in Spain. This overwhelmed them both so much that they decided to sell their apartment in the Costa del Sol and move back to the UK permanently, only returning briefly for holidays (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 03/04/2019). As a space for wealthier
British retirees who could afford legal assistance, this wasn’t the most common reaction at the Club and, thus, it shocked many members. It brought to the forefront how old age plays a role in creating feelings of security or uncertainty abroad:

“They are already in their mid 80’s and they don’t want to be worrying about this stuff or paying people to worry about it for them. They just are past it. Especially Tony that has to do it all.”

- Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Rose’s insight on Betty and Tony’s return to the UK depicts how old age intersected with the stress bureaucracy entails and Brexit misinformation can alter later life project plans in unprecedented ways.

In the uncertain environment created during the Brexit transition, the importance of accessing reliable information became pivotal to the British expatriate retiree experience. Before, three main avenues of accessing information were cited: the Internet, support networks, and the private sector. Due to the divisive nature of Brexit, support networks were no longer as reliable as they used to be. The contentious nature of the topic made many British retiree groups ban the topic entirely: “Oh no, we don’t speak of the B- word here” was something commonly heard across the Costa del Sol and Costa Brava to avoid conflict (Field Diary, 2019-2020).

It must be noted that those who didn’t want to talk about Brexit tended to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, having enough economic resources to hire a gestor. For them, speaking about Brexit, and its repercussions on paperwork, wasn’t necessary because they already had hired someone to deal with it for them. Speaking of this issue, for instance, at the dinner table at a dinner dance party, simply made them uncomfortable. This is what happened at a Costa del Sol Club dinner dance party when the topic of Brexit came up over dessert:

“When I asked them if they expected Brexit to go how it is going [referring to the uncertainty and political ambivalence] and if they were worried, they replied that they had everything set: they were retired and had their pensions and savings straightened out, they had their gestors to handle any changes and, overall, they had nothing to worry about. ‘Its you young people who will have it the hardest’, said one of the men at the table. Meanwhile, the women sighed and didn’t even want to talk about Brexit, saying that Club rules were clear when it came to speaking about politics: you just didn’t.”

- Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 23/02/2019

This excerpt from the field shows how ethnographic spaces like the Club interacted with Brexit and the bureaucracy around it. As these groups had enough economic resources to access hired legal assistance, when Brexit came up in big group conversations it was simply to create a lively debate and not to relay information on paperwork or bureaucratic changes. It was in the smaller more intimate exchanges where information
was transmitted, but these were scarce, being more common in environments like the Charity.

These sorts of behaviors weakened the influence of support networks as a source of information and reinforced the importance of hiring legal assistance. Not everyone could hire a gestor because of the economic resources it entailed. But many made the effort to do so, stretching their pensions thin in exchange for the feeling of security it gave them. This limited some people’s economic reach, meaning that class differences were amplified.

Karen, age 67, experienced the economic changes brought on by Brexit after her retirement to Costa del Sol in 2015. She migrated right before Brexit was announced and found that, as the pound started to fluctuate, so did her pension. Karen and her husband had come into some inheritance money after the death of a relative, giving them the opportunity to change their retirement plans and pursue the dream retirement in Spain they wanted, but couldn’t afford before. Karen and her husband sold the house they had purchased to retire in the suburbs and used that money to buy a home in the Costa del Sol instead, saving the inheritance money as a safety net for bigger unexpected expenses. However, due to Brexit, they had to dip into those savings much sooner than anticipated:

“When Brexit was announced the pound dropped. We really weren’t expecting that. Then for about a couple months or so things didn’t get any better, so our pensions were also less, and we couldn’t get to the end of the month. So, we started using our savings from the inheritance, thank God it’s quite a sum! (laughs) [...] We ended up hiring a gestor to help us with all the paperwork, which we weren’t planning on but, because of Brexit, everything seemed more confusing. So, hiring a professional just seemed the right thing to do. It’s money we would’ve used for maybe going on holiday around Europe, but it’s well spent because it makes us feel a little safer.”

- Karen, 67, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Karen illustrates the direct economic and legal repercussions Brexit has had on the lives of British expatriate retirees from lower to middle class socioeconomic class backgrounds. People like Karen suffered from the fluctuating change between the Pound Sterling and the Euro, making their livelihoods unstable. Adding to this sense of uncertainty is bureaucracy. These British expatriate retirees are also the ones’ who would’ve undergone bureaucratic measures on their own or would’ve sidestepped them entirely. However, now they felt a pressure to understand and adhere to bureaucratic regulations they hadn’t felt before. This pressure translated itself into a need for hiring legal assistance that could carry that weight for them, using money they would’ve destined to other aspects of their ‘ageing better’ life projects.

Being able to have a gestor became part of the “good life”. It reduced stress related to bureaucracy and paperwork that hindered the ‘ageing better’ life project. Thus, not having access to legal assistance created a significant difference in later life experiences. Informants with lower class backgrounds would resort to entities like the Charity in the Costa del Sol to supersede gestors duties, without having to pay hefty fees. Despite the
support these entities gave, informants with limited economic resources would attempt to find other ways of accessing a gestor because of the high levels of stress they felt. Lidia, for example, ended up hiring a gestor with the economic help from her daughter, something she would’ve refused in the beginning of her bureaucratic journey in Spain (85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Therefore, people like Karen or Lidia sacrificed parts of their later life projects by hiring legal assistance, to ensure their “peace of mind” (Karen, 67, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

With COVID-19, this previous necessity for hired legal help rose even more. Due to the necessity for social distancing, especially in the first stages of the pandemic, gaining an appointment at a police station for bureaucratic procedures was complicated. This was because all appointments had to be done through an official governmental website that was in Spanish and wasn’t equipped for the level of traffic it was receiving throughout the pandemic. British expatriate retirees who had to hand in paperwork to formalize they legal status before the transition period was over, found themselves having to navigate websites that weren’t functioning properly that were in languages they did not master. Complicating matters further, accessing information about these processes from support networks was hindered by the complete halt in social activity. This made the necessity for hired legal assistance rise in demand.

This is what happened to Martha and Mick, 57 and 74\(^5\), who had been living on the Costa Brava for over two years. Just before the pandemic hit, they had started to formalize their legal situation in Spain and found themselves struggling to handle a system that was not only foreign but undergoing changes due to the pandemic. Thanks to their middle-class background and their connections at the Organization – where they were members - they were able to afford a gestor who guided them through the process:

“I knew someone... because I edit the Organization newsletter. He was a guy who was quite knowledgeable about that stuff (bureaucracy) because he had been here a long time. [...] He recommended someone, and we got them to do the first stage of getting our CatsSalut (healthcare credentials) [...]. This all happened, of course, when the Coronavirus had just started, and we had to go into his office and I said we couldn’t go in. So, we went home and did it online and there were only two options, and I could understand but not quite. The website was also so slow, and I didn’t know if it was our internet, the website or what. So, we got the gestor to do the first part bit online because we didn’t know how to. I had learnt some French in school so I could sort of make it out, but it was better this way... [...] Because of the Coronavirus it’s hard to get appointments and stuff, so we just trust that the gestor knows what’s best right now.”

- Martha, 57, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Martha utilized her existing connections to access a trusted gestor that guided them through the process of gaining their social security coverage throughout the pandemic.

\(^5\) The couple was introduced in Chapter 5, speaking of their disenchantment with the UK and why they choose the Costa Brava as a retirement destination.
As Martha’s account illustrates, the pandemic magnified issues that already existed for her beforehand, like not being able to understand the language or know how to navigate the Spanish bureaucratic website that was increasingly slower. Ultimately, the trust Martha expresses in professional help highlights how the pandemic magnified the discomfort caused by these sorts of shortcomings; discomfort which is quieted by their capacity to hire legal assistance.

Those who couldn’t palliate problems with hired help, relied on their support networks that were also being suppressed by the pandemic. As previously mentioned in Chapter 6, Niall, 70, was president of the Organization and spent a great part of his day in lockdown sending emails with health information as well as bureaucratic information. He would even attach his phone number to emails, just in case members had any questions and wanted to call him:

“I am no expert on any of this, but in these times of need people want to feel supported. I try to keep myself informed and pass that information on to those that have a harder time accessing it.”

- Niall, 70, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

That is also why Niall asked an insurance broker to participate in the Annual General Meeting of the Organization (the AGM), to give information to those who didn’t have it (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 7/04/2021). These were the sorts of actions that made many organization members thankful for Niall’s presence. He maintained the flow of information within support networks alive in a time where its organic functioning was hindered by social distancing.

Despite the capacity of some British expatriate retirees to hire legal assistance, and the efforts of entities like the Charity or Organization to help those in need, a generalized sense of uncertainty around Brexit and COVID-19 continued. This affected the groups’ overall relationship with bureaucracy, aggravating the confusion it tends to create and maiming the support networks that used to boost its understanding.

7.3.1. Attitudes towards (im)mobility and borders

Considering geopolitical and sociosanitary changes, various informants manifested the uncertainty they felt in their day to day lives by reflecting on their mobility practices and how these could potentially change. For instance, Martha stated she was stressed about the implications the pandemic and Brexit would have on her and her husband’s mobility:

“Both our mothers live in the UK, and I don’t know when we’ll be able to go see them. We never miss Mother’s Day, and we did this year […] Brexit, now COVID… it makes you wonder what moving around Europe will look like now. I always knew it would be different but now you wonder if it’ll be more than just getting in a different line when you arrive at the airport.”

- Martha, 57, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020
Martha was one of many informants who expressed doubt around her current lifestyle, fearing her relationship with her family in the UK would suffer due to Brexit and COVID-19 changing her privileged and flexible mobility practices. This uncertainty around mobility and, ultimately, border crossing, brings to the forefront how the privileged status of British expatriate retirees in Spain is shifting. Through the discussion of how border-crossing attitudes change from experience to experience, the nuanced effects these geopolitical and sociosanitary events have had on British retirement migration are materialized, becoming tangible. The following pages explore how borders encapsulate this unprecedented shift in privilege, as these are crucial in migration trajectories and are very telling of the types of migration trend one is engaging in.

Before moving forward, it must be mentioned that borders are a deeply contested topic within many fields of study, such as migration studies, geography, politics and more. This section does not wish to describe what a border is nor enter those debates; it aims to provide a grounded approach to borders as an epistemological tool to understanding how privilege is experienced in the context of British expatriate retirement migration to Spain.

Borders hold different symbolic meaning depending on socioeconomic backgrounds, racialization, reasons for migrating, gender, sexuality and other categories of difference and life trajectory circumstances. They are the initial bureaucratic and administrative state procedure that a migrant or traveler faces and the way it is experienced is affected by nationality, race, and socioeconomic background. In other words, for the privileged, they are a simple formality that denotes social status, for others it is an obstacle (Croucher, 2012). Borders have been used as vehicles for othering practices, symbolizing who is the desired type of migrant and who is not (van Houtum, 2010). In the EU there has been a clear ordering of who is and isn’t an acceptable migrant through their border policies, as well as the graphic barbed wire that marks certain borders, perpetuating global inequalities through these practices (Van Houtum, 2010). Thus, following Schewel’s aspiration-capability framework, borders represent sites that determine one’s capacity to be (im)mobile, giving way to either desired or undesired experiences of (im)mobility (Schewel, 2020).

Before Brexit and COVID-19, most British expatriate retirees experienced desired (im)mobility. Due to the EU’s freedom of movement and their ‘ageing better’ abroad life projects, British expatriate retirees had the capability and the aspiration to be either mobile between Spain and the UK or immobile in their chosen retirement destinations. Despite bureaucracy-related anxiety, especially when intersected with old age, most British expatriate retirees experienced crossing borders through air, by sea, or road as a perfunctory administrative ritual. This was reflected in nonchalant border-crossing attitudes: “for me a border is driving and suddenly seeing another sign” (Rachel, 78, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). These carefree border-crossing attitudes encapsulate the privilege British expatriate retirees enjoyed while they were EU citizens. However, once Brexit hit, British expatriate retirees had to (re)conceptualize what EU borders represented to them; as this change forced a shift in how the British abroad relate to
bureaucracy, and thus borders and mobility in the EU. Despite presumed notable changes in paperwork needed to cross EU borders – VISAS, needing to request a foreigners identity card (TIE in the Spanish acronym), or higher economic thresholds to gain residence\textsuperscript{52} - what most informants commented on when speaking about intra-EU mobility was the switch from the “EU” passport line to the “non-EU” passport line at airports. These held different symbolic meanings depending on political stances and how those shaped their identities. Some had very visceral reactions against this change; others pointed at the fact that the “non-EU” line was normally shorter, and this would save them some travel time. Ultimately, what most informants agreed on was that this change in passport lines symbolized the need for more forethought on paperwork when it came to mobility within Europe, regardless of what the actual measures ended up being.

This newly added layer of planning needed to travel had the potential of generating border control related stress that these groups had seldom felt before. Nevertheless, there were those with more travel experience, who traveled and/or lived abroad for long periods of time and would proudly express their lack of stress when it came to this issue. Attributing a sense of superiority to their travel knowledge. These were the British expatriate retirees that described themselves as “cosmopolitan” or “well-travelled”\textsuperscript{53} (a variety of interviews and Field Diary entries).

The social distinction between those with more or less travel experience became clear in a focus group when Susan, 73, said:

“I can’t see, personally, that providing that all my paperwork is up to date, that I should have any more of a problem travelling than I did before.”

- Susan, 73, Costa Brava: Focus group, 2020

Susan and her husband, Raymond, had travelled the world as teachers for the British Forces. They had lived within Europe and outside of it, meaning they experienced more stringent border controls compared to intra-EU mobility and knew what paperwork-related issues at borders were like travelling outside of the EU. After Susan spoke, another focus group member, Rachel, 78, countered with a concern about health insurance:

“We won’t have to worry about health insurance when in Spain or in the UK, because as you say Susan, we’ll have our paperwork up to date. But we’ll have to worry about being insured when you cross over to France or anywhere else. It’s another worry we didn’t have before and now we do.”

- Rachel, 78, Costa Brava: Focus group, 2020

\textsuperscript{52} These measures aren’t explained in full because throughout fieldwork these legal requisites were uncertain. Thus, these changes were looming threats to British expatriate retirees’ lifestyles and not tangible issues informants had to deal with.

\textsuperscript{53} Being “cosmopolitan” and “well-traveled” are explored as labels in relationship to identity (re)construction and community belonging in the upcoming chapter, Chapter 8.
Rachel and her husband Brian never travelled outside the EU, and when they travelled within its’ confines it was always for pleasure, never for extended periods of time related to work. Susan did not know this and answered to Rachel’s qualms with a simple: “Well, like whenever you travelled anywhere outside of the EU. You just get on with it” (Susan, 73, Costa Brava: Focus group, 2020). Rachel countered by repeating that this worry was indeed new, despite what Susan was saying, but she didn’t mention in front of others her lacking travel experience.

This exchange reveals the different experiences privileged migrants have with borders and its’ related paperwork; nuancing experiences beyond political differences Brexit might have exacerbated, highlighting economic differences and its’ ties to status. Travel denotes an embodied cultural capital that participates in the creation of social capital and identity, creating a sense of status and belonging within a community (Bourdieu, 1986). Travel was mobilized within British expatriate communities as a way of establishing social positioning, along with other issues regarding taste and class (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; O’Reilly, 2000).

In this instance, despite Rachel and Susan having similar political stances and economic backgrounds, Rachel’s silence on her own lacking cultural capital regarding travel reaffirms the power it has within the configuration of identity and status between British expatriate retirees. Being “well-traveled” meant having a certain level of acquired expertise and travel knowledge that later facilitated mobility processes in retirement. Susan was “well-traveled” and thus, the changes triggered by Brexit did not worry her beyond the political. Meanwhile, Rachel couldn’t say the same, as she struggled to conceive how travel could be comfortable with the worry of health insurance and other paperwork occupying her thoughts. This established a difference in status between them, something Rachel’s silence made evident. Consequently, for those who didn’t identify as “well-traveled”, reconceiving border control as a non-EU member generated more uncertainty than their more experienced counterparts, something they couldn’t share openly due to its status implications. Brexit also triggers a shift in cultural capital and the meanings it is given. In this manner, Susan and Rachels’ differing border-crossing attitudes highlight the already pre-existing nuances of privileged migration experiences even further, exemplifying how socioeconomic and cultural differences are reproduced and magnified due to contextual geopolitical changes.

Similarly, initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered contextual geopolitical and socio-sanitary changes that were unprecedented, having a substantial effect on border-crossing attitudes as well. Health restrictions unique to each country put into question the itinerant lifestyles many British citizens abroad had crafted for themselves, like British retirees who swayed between migration and tourism with no steady stay in the UK or Spain over the years (O’Reilly, 2020). Such changes on border control led to a general shared reflexivity on past privileged migration experiences, wondering what the long-lasting effects on their mobility would be.

In an e-mail written during early stages of the pandemic, Niall, a 70-year-old Irish man, reflected on how easily he travelled to the USA on a student VISA and how different his experience was to Irishmen in the 19th and 20th century who migrated to the United
States during the potato famine. This then prompted the following sentence: “Writing that set of thoughts, by the way, I am struck by the realisation that ‘easy global travel’ may never return as we have known it for the last 30 years or so” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 13/04/2020). Niall’s reflection on his own privileged migration experience shows the significance of COVID-19’s effects on border-crossing and travel attitudes. As a father of 5, and grandfather to many, Niall found himself wondering how he could continue being an involved father and grandfather when his family found itself scattered across different continents with different health restrictions. His wife felt similarly to such a degree that the couple decided to move closer to one of their children in summer of 2020; evidencing the complexity behind deciding to migrate closer to family members mentioned earlier in section 6.5.2.

As Niall points out, “easy global travel” post-COVID-19 is more cumbersome. Now, travelling implies disposing of enough time and resources to pay for requested tests, possible quarantines, as well as holding correct vaccination documents. This burdensome travel experience finds itself intersected by Brexit and British expatriate retirees’ position as an “at risk” group in terms of COVID-19 due to their older age. Thus, British expatriate retirees’ previous capability of travel is severely downplayed by both COVID-19 and Brexit, resulting in a dissonance within previous experiences of (im)mobility that were mostly desired (Schewel, 2020). An 82-year-old woman named Elle, living in the Costa Brava since 2002, summarized in one remark how both Brexit and COVID-19 participated in this generalized shift in privilege:

“Last year we were worrying about Brexit and this year we’re worrying about the virus. But we feel trapped at the moment. It’s not nice to have freedom of choice taken away. Is it?”

- Elle, 82, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Elle captures a shared feeling of having privileges stripped away, revealing how retirement migration from the UK to Spain is substantially changing. Many interlocutors like Elle hadn’t experienced such feelings of powerlessness prior these events. These are understandable when considering the significance and reach of both Brexit and COVID-19, affecting the entirety of the British expatriate retiree community in Spain in varying degrees. What Elle is describing is undesired (im)mobility, of not having a choice of where to retire and when (Schewel, 2020).

Some informants started to be dissuaded from travelling altogether, an action that is instrumental to the lifestyles crafted by many British retirees in Spain. This was already visible in the accounts of informants like Mary, 86, living in the Costa Brava. Mary’s case was introduced earlier in Chapter 6 (section 6.5.2.), when speaking of the intersections of old age, migration, and middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. During her interviews, Mary said that, due to her old age, she was starting to detest travel:

“I start off not feeling too good. You have to get up about four in the morning to start, it’s just not convenient. It’s a mess. Last time, I took a train to and, I don’t know, I got to Holland
and then got a boat to England and then a plane to Spain, it was... my head goes round and round. It's not a thing that you can do at 86. [...] and now? With Brexit and COVID! It just seems even less likely for me to actually go places.”

- Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

It is obvious from Mary’s excerpt that crossing borders administratively is no issue for her. She cites boats, planes, and trains as some of the means of transport she has used when travelling through the EU. However, what is an issue is her advanced old age. The action of travelling has now become tiring for her, mentally and physically. When this is intersected with geopolitical and socio-sanitary contexts that place her in a more vulnerable position, Mary is even less likely to travel. Both COVID-19 and Brexit exacerbate Mary’s oldness, leading her to consider moving to Holland, closer to one of her daughters, to avoid travel on both their parts and be closer to strong support networks as she reaches her 90’s (Mary, 86, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Mary represents other interlocutors who, the older they get, the more they detest travel. That moment of crossing a border, of being mobile and having to worry about having certain documents in order, are moments that have become increasingly complex for British expatriate retirees due to their age, their nationality as non-EU members, and their positioning as an “at risk” group due to COVID-19.

It must be noted that these communities are still privileged in their mobility and border-crossing experiences, especially considering their whiteness and nationality which imply being met with more lax border controls as well as having access through the NHS to COVID-19 vaccines, now necessary for travel. Despite still disposing of privilege, border-crossing attitudes reflect significant changes and highlight how experiences are becoming increasingly skewed; benefitting those who are younger, in good health, with strong support networks, disposable income, and travel experience.

Borders are spaces that reflect these changes in a material manner that other bureaucratic procedures do not. Brexit places more administrative hoops at the moment of crossing a border like, for example, new non-EU member lines in airports and new paperwork like travel insurance. Meanwhile, COVID-19 physically shut down borders and placed restrictions that enhanced the general cumbersomeness of the bureaucracy of migration. When such changes find themselves intersected by differing realities, differing ages, health conditions, socioeconomic backgrounds and even travel experiences, the basal privilege British expatriate retirees used to share is diluted resulting in a magnification of pre-existing inequalities within the group.

7.4. Security and entitlement: giving meaning to bureaucratic procedures

The number of British expatriates registering on the Padrón has increased in recent years due to Brexit (Giner-Monfort & Hall, 2021). The Padrón suffered a great downfall in registries in 2013, which can be attributed to the economic crisis, suggesting that there might’ve been an increase in returns and/or an increase in irregular migration practices post-crisis. Establishing which one of these is most likely is complicated, due to the legal
invisibility these groups had at the time. However, in 2016, when Brexit was announced, there is statistical evidence that suggests a rise in registries as well as a rise in returns (Giner-Monfort & Hall, 2021). Although the statistics on return migration seem to designate Brexit as a significant push factor away from Spain and back to the UK, this cannot be affirmed (Giner-Monfort, 2018). The increasing registry of return cases can be attributed to the more rigorous data keeping Brexit forced onto bureaucratic and administrative measures (Giner-Monfort, 2018; Giner-Monfort & Hall, 2021). This suggests that the irregular relationship British expatriate retirees had with bureaucracy and paperwork, which gave them certain privileges, has been somewhat regularized. This leads to the following question: how is said regularization given meaning in these communities, beyond the uncertainty and anxiety its procedures create in lived experience?

Throughout this chapter, the ways in which British expatriate retirees' relationship with bureaucracy and paperwork has changed has been explored, using borders as the final metaphor to illustrate how much this relationship has changed, resulting in the accentuation of pre-existing inequalities within British expatriate communities. However, foregrounding this sense of uncertainty - fueled by external uncontrollable change – is an underlying sense of security or entitlement that characterizes the relationship between the UK and Spain. As discussed in Chapter 5, Spain is commonly seen as the antithesis of the UK. Such opposition reveals an underlying sense of superiority given by power dynamics between both countries that are exacerbated by notions of Spain as a fringe European country (Grosfoguel, 2003). It is this power dynamic that gives most British expatriate retirees a sense of security, and even entitlement, when it comes to Spain and its’ bureaucratic procedures and repercussions.

Revisiting Lidia’s case, when speaking of her bureaucracy-linked anxiety post-Brexit, she would often make comments like these that seemed to sooth her uncertainties: “With all the money we bring to Spain, I don’t think they’d let us leave, right?” (Lidia, 85, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Lidia, an 85-year-old woman in a vulnerable legal situation in Spain, found solace in the power relationship between the UK and Spain. She assumed that Spain’s dependence on British tourism, residential tourism, and more, gave her legal security in her chosen retirement destination. Sharing Lidia’s sentiment was Jane, who also was a woman in a vulnerable legal situation due to her lacking economic resources, her condition as an informal worker, and diminishing support networks, saying:

“Some people are worried about a lot and I say to them quite often “don’t worry so much, because I don’t think Spain is going to want all of us to go back home”. What’s going to happen if we all go? I don’t think so. The mayor of Mijas [...] says that, as far as she is

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54 Statistics on COVID-19 and their connection to return migration and Padrón registries have yet to be released.  
55 Jane was introduced in Chapter 6, where her situation as a single woman migrating to Spain and her experiences with vulnerability and precarity were explored.
Jane’s quote reveals a pivotal aspect of the expatriate retiree experience: the supposition that Spain is economically dependent on British tourists and residents. This supposition is simply a privileged discourse that is constructed to legitimize sense of entitlement and superiority over Spain, giving the British abroad a sense of bureaucratic security and legal protection (O’Reilly, 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Pease, 2010). However, what is noteworthy in Lidia and Jane’s cases, is how this sense of entitlement intersects with their vulnerable and borderline precarious situations. Even in their vulnerable situations, these feelings of entitlement prevail, giving them solace and a sense of security to hang on to within their near precarious experiences.

These feelings are reinforced by actions local governments took that visibly attempted to keep British communities satisfied. As Jane points out in the above quote, the mayor of Mijas made various communications to the British communities of the area ensuring them of how welcome they were despite geopolitical changes. Other municipalities conducted meetings with the UK consulate and open Q&A events. Conveying to British expatriate retirees that they were secure in Spain, seeing their feelings of entitlement reaffirmed through these official governmental actions. Also, in many of these events, communications, and even the legal requirements established during the Brexit transition, assumed that many British migrants in Spain weren’t meeting previous EU stipulations. Meanwhile, there was no mention of legal repercussions, further reassuring British expatriate retirees’ feelings of security in Spain.

The end of Jane’s quote makes her precarious situation resurface once more, as she expresses a degree of worry in relationship to access to healthcare abroad. Therefore, this sense of security coexists with the uncertainty triggered by Brexit, and later COVID-19. This sense of entitlement and subsequent security is experienced more acutely within the lives of British expatriate retirees with more economic resources and stable support networks abroad. Thus, the degree to which entitlement and security are felt, demonstrate different ways of experiencing the unequal power relationship between both host and native countries. In turn, this reveals the existent heterogeneity between British expatriate retirees; all evidenced through the examination of informants’ relationships with bureaucracy.

Despite Brexit and COVID-19 uncertainty, this sense of entitlement and security largely prevails. Revealing the pervasive privilege of retirement migration between the UK and Spain, even with the grave shift in legal and bureaucratic privilege these groups have experienced. When speaking about this sense of entitlement and where it came from, Rachel, age 78, made an observation that went to the core of this remaining privilege, even after Brexit:
“I think that’s why we [referring to British people] don’t feel anxious. I mean those poor immigrants from all over the place... we don’t have a problem because we can go back to the UK. We have more options. Both of us have families in the UK. I have a large family. We can always go back there.”

- Rachel, 78, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Here, Rachel makes a generalization about British retirees in Spain, saying they have the ability to go back to the UK if life in Spain doesn’t unfold according to plan. However, as examined throughout the thesis, this isn’t possible for all British retiree migrants. Many of them migrate to Spain at the cost of selling their UK homes to fund their retirement plans, while others see their support networks and family connections eroded by the decision to migrate in later life. What Rachel’s comment illustrates is an existing shared social imaginary that constructs British expatriate retirees outside of the migration category of ‘immigrant’. This inherently grants them privileges other migrants do not have and invisibilizes potential vulnerabilities British migrants might experience. Thus, not being categorized as an ‘immigrant’ holds an implicit privilege that not even exiting the EU, or suffering a global pandemic, changes.

However, due to their position as non-EU members and as a mobile group between two countries with different COVID-19 restrictions, British expatriate retirees must engage in bureaucratic measures. Now, legal requirements like registering on the Padrón or having correct vaccination paperwork are stricter requirements needed to maintain mobile and ‘ageing better’ lifestyles. As discussed throughout this section, such changes have mildly affected their sense of security and entitlement despite increasing feelings of uncertainty between certain demographics. Altogether, it has resulted in new ways of giving meaning to bureaucratic procedures, using that same sense of entitlement and security as a starting point.

Before moving forward, it must be noted that within British expatriate communities, entitled behaviors such as assuming Spaniards should know English to aid their needs were heavily associated with the label ‘expat’ and the overall figure of the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, deemed to be ignorant. As previously mentioned, this figure has negative connotations, and its associated behaviors are avoided by informants. This influences how bureaucratic procedures are given meaning, as British expatriate retirees must navigate this negative association between entitlement and the ‘expat’ label while crafting their ‘ageing better’ life projects abroad. The latter process is complicated further when considering that feeling a certain degree of entitlement and thus security in Spain is very common within the British expatriate retiree experience; even post-Brexit and COVID-19. This is further explored in Chapter 8.

In the field, informants who did have their paperwork straight, or were in the process of doing so, attached a moral connotation to bureaucratic procedures that denoted belonging and dedication to their life project in Spain. This hasn’t gone unseen by other academics, who have described actions like paying taxes in a retirement destination as a "membership fee" that symbolizes a proportional contribution to the destination country, establishing feelings of membership and, hence, belonging.
(Blaakilde, 2013). Those British expatriate retirees who decided to prove their assets in Spain and/or pay the taxes pertinent to their homes, vehicles, and more, developed a discourse that connected these sorts of bureaucratic procedures as a way of “helping” Spain, invoking notions of “fairness” towards fellow Spaniards. All of this is meant to express a sense of belonging and respect towards the host country, while simultaneously stepping away from the dreaded ‘expat’ label.

For instance, Eliot and his wife Gwen would continuously speak about the importance of registering on the Padrón. Eliot particularly would continuously make comments like the following:

“People don’t know that if you want that pothole on your street fixed you should at least be on the Padrón. This way the Ajuntament (local government) knows how many people actually live here! It is important to know that, especially because it can be helpful to an entire town.”

- Eliot, 79, Costa Brava: Field Diary, 29/02/2020

Eliot would tell this to fellow retirees in the spirit of helping Spain and the area where he lived on the Costa Brava with Gwen. He attached moral meaning to the Padrón, attempting to step away from individual ways of thinking and employing community-thinking beyond the British expatriate community, including local Spanish neighbors.

Similarly, John, 56,78 and living in the Costa del Sol, would give great importance to bureaucratic procedures like the Padrón or obtaining his NIE. Whenever the topic of paperwork came up, he would boast in front of friends how he and his wife, Kelly, had straightened out their paperwork as soon as possible after arriving to Spain; showing off his dedication to his life project in Spain from an early start. Having arranged for one’s paperwork to be filed correctly, even before Brexit was announced, was now given a different moral meaning by informants like John, who used this fact as a sign of dedication and belonging to Spain and their life project of ‘ageing better’ abroad. John explicitly added to this bureaucratic-related discourse notions of “fairness” as well:

“Oh, yes the Padrón and NIE. We’ve had that for years. You know, we decided that if we are not Spanish, we are going to be as close as we can to being in the system. It’s only fair.”

- John, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Registering on the Padrón or paying taxes becomes a practice that denotes belonging and (re)constructs identities by giving them a moral meaning of being “fair” and “helpful” to Spain and its’ citizens. This establishes a moral high ground that separates informants who do have their paperwork in order from those who do not. Associating the latter with the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure and all its negative connotations. Thus, these bureaucratic measures become a way of constructing one’s identity away from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’

56 John and his wife Kelly were first introduced in Chapter 6 to illustrate how later life project plans that search to ‘age better’ may generate a gap between ageing experiences and old age discourses.
figure and its' prejudices and stereotypes, while also asserting one's permanence and belonging in Spain.

However, in Eliot's display of wanting to “help” and John's display of “fairness”, there is an implication that they have a choice whether to engage, or not, with these procedures despite post-Brexit and COVID-19 legal requirements. This brings us back to the perceived unequal power relationship between Spain and the UK. As discussed in Chapter 5, there is this shared idea of the Spanish government being inefficient and slow, leading some interlocutors to compare it to countries in the Global South, like Venezuela (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). This perception of laxity pushed many British expatriate retirees towards using their legal invisibility to maximize their privilege pre-Brexit. This is the backdrop against which Eliot and John crafted their bureaucracy-related discourses; a past in which bureaucracy is perceived as a choice. This perception persists even post-Brexit, as demonstrated by two instances in the field where insurance companies gave talks to social clubs or charities. These were meant to both spread awareness about new bureaucratic procedures post-Brexit and to sell their services. In these talks, the assumption of Spanish permissiveness came to light in a manner that made clear how deeply rooted and common these perceptions were. In one of these, an insurance broker said the following:

“Green cards were always necessary, but they never really asked them. Now they might start to ask for them more, so it's' better to be ready.”

- Insurance broker, Costa Brava: Field Diary, 07/04/2021

These insurance brokers are trying to sell their administrative services to British expatriate retirees, but their comments do not denote a sense of urgency or fear around bureaucratic processes. This is a tone that is seldom found between other types of migrants, especially those categorized as “immigrants”. This explains why people like Eliot and John speak of choosing to register, paying taxes, changing one's car plates, getting their residency card...etc. as a moral act. It is because their privileged positioning as an "expatriate", not an "immigrant", still hold residual privilege related to whiteness and nationality that Brexit and COVID-19 have not altered.

Those informants who chose to not follow bureaucratic regulations also use these interactions and decisions, or lack thereof, to (re)construct their identities abroad. Despite tightening procedures due to Brexit and COVID-19, some informants still avoided bureaucracy, establishing their identities as mobile, 'cosmopolitan', or even British or English. Meaning the absence of paperwork is also a way of (re)constructing one's identity within the British expatriate retiree community. Becoming an act that reaffirms how essential some British retirees believe they are to Spain's economic wellbeing. Being “essential” is a much-coveted social policy descriptor that is often tied to economic connotations that are closely determined by those more privileged (Salazar, 2021). This became obvious during COVID-19, as economic interests, and those who yielded them through their high socioeconomic positions, were who and what decided what was or wasn’t “essential” regarding mobility (Salazar, 2021). Informants who ascribe to the
narrative of being “essential” to Spain, and thus feel more strongly entitled than others to remain mobile outside of bureaucratic constraints, tend to come from highly privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, meaning they are able to afford the repercussions a breach in legality might lead to. This (re)constructs their identities as highly mobile individuals that cannot be constrained by administrative processes, while also assuming that their economic privileges will provide them security, be it in or outside of Spain. These sorts of behaviors find themselves expressed under the label of cosmopolitanism, explored in the coming chapter. In other cases, it is also associated with British-ness and homemaking, rationalizing that not doing paperwork in Spain means doing it in the UK, one’s home. With Spain exclusively being a retirement and holiday destination.

Max and Julia are an example of highly socioeconomically privileged British expatriate retiree couples who self-identify as cosmopolitan and mobile, while expressing strong feelings of entitlement. They (re)constructed their identities by purposefully undoing their paperwork in Spain. As explained earlier in this chapter, there are various reasons for this; firstly, they do so for economic reasons like saving on taxes. However, the couple also expressed an intention of wanting to maintain their mobile freedom, to be “spontaneous”. They believed said spontaneity was easier to maintain without heeding to Spain’s bureaucratic procedures, especially considering Spain’s “corrupt” government which, according to the couple, was exacerbated post-Brexit and COVID-19 (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). When asked about potential legal repercussions, Max expressed feelings of security as well as entitlement enshrined in a discourse of being “essential” to Spain:

“[With Brexit] life will continue on. We need Spain; Spain needs us. We are not going to be prevented from going to our house any time soon. I am going to have a few more stamps in my passport, so be it. I am very relaxed, and it is going to be onerous for anyone who lives there and travels, but that is my gut feel. No, it doesn’t scare me or worry me. We’ll deal with whatever comes. Worst case scenario, we up and go somewhere else.”

- Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Max finds security in assuming Spain’s economic dependence, as well as legal laxity, regarding British expatriate retirees; stating that he does not believe he could legally be stopped from visiting a house he owns in an area he pours money into (69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Then, he reduces the bureaucratic procedures of moving between Spain and the UK to passport stamps. Following the latter remark, Max goes on to make a privileged claim that denotes his economic class: if encountered with issues he dislikes, he’ll simply move somewhere else.

Max resorts to bureaucratic avoidance to maximize his own privilege by relying on the unequal relationship between Spain and the UK and his own socioeconomic standing. Meanwhile, said avoidance also (re)constructs his identity as mobile and “spontaneous”, giving identitary meaning to his lacking relationship with bureaucratic procedures. Through this action, or lack thereof, they were (re)constructing their
identities as mobile, maintaining through their privilege the opportunity of spontaneous mobility or immobility.

Richard B.\textsuperscript{57}, age 81, had a similar experience with bureaucracy but with a different identity purpose: that of reaffirming his Englishness. Richard B. had been living in the Costa del Sol for about 8 years at the time of the interview with his fourth wife, also British, who had lived and worked in Spain for over 20 years. He had a highly paid job as a salesman for a big corporation, meaning he travelled a lot for work. Once Richard retired, he wanted to do so in Spain, where his fourth wife lived, but without actually registering or doing any of the paperwork, stating the following:

“We actually come here, and we actually spend money and its good for the economy but I personally doubt if I will [get registered and become a tax-paying resident]. I built up a pension fund in England that keeps us both in food and that sort of thing. But with medical treatment I know whether I am confident or not, I know the system and that sort of thing [in the UK]. Heaven knows what should happen as we get older, but my natural feeling is that I'll remain English as long as I can.”

- Richard B., 81, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Richard B. connects the notion of being “essential” to Spain, his lack of paperwork, and his desire to “remain English”. Richard presupposes that Spain has an economic dependence on British expatriate retirees, which he uses to justify his lack of engagement with bureaucratic procedures. Unlike Max, Richard B. articulates this through an identity (re)construction process linked to his English-ness. For him, not doing paperwork in Spain, and thus maintaining stronger bureaucratic ties with the UK, is a way of reaffirming his English-ness abroad. In fact, Richard B. later explained how he travels back and forth from the UK in order to get medical checkups there, in a system he knows and understands. Traveling for health also makes him feel proud of the NHS as a quintessentially British organization (81, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). However, being older than Max and Julia, Richard B. seems more aware of his age and how health might change his plans and strategies for remaining English. Ultimately, he chooses bureaucratic inaction from a place of security awarded by his economic and national positioning that is then expressed through feelings of entitlement.

Bureaucratic inaction is interpreted by those who do have their paperwork in order as a lack of commitment to the life project of ‘ageing better’ in Spain. Therefore, bureaucratic inaction (re)constructs identities but isn’t as powerful in generating belonging beyond the British expatriate community in Spain. That is why Max’s lacking bureaucratic involvement was surprising to other informants and community members, as Max and his wife Julia were well known within the British Costa Brava community due to their participation in several activities that increased community mingling and boosted feelings of belonging. That is why the couple kept their bureaucratic decision to disengage

\textsuperscript{57}Richard B. first appears in the beginning of Chapter 5 when speaking of his experience living in housing estates on the outskirts of Fuengirola in Costa del Sol.
with Spanish paperwork to themselves, knowing it might be associated to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure they didn’t want to be linked with.

Richard B. and Max both come from wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds that allowed them to pursue an identity (re)construction process through bureaucratic avoidance. Both informants have enough economic funds to provide a sense of security when faced by legal repercussions their bureaucratic avoidance could bring. The latter solidified their feelings of security in Spain, opening a gateway towards increasing entitlement.

Due to the legal invisibility British expatriate retirees used to have pre-Brexit, those with less economic resources could also adhere to feelings of entitlement and strategies of constructing their identities as cosmopolitan, mobile, or English/British through bureaucratic avoidance. However, taking both Brexit and COVID-19 into consideration, these sorts of identity (re)construction processes became strategies reserved for the more privileged members of the British retirement migration phenomena in Spain.

In a post-Brexit and COVID-19 context, where bureaucracy and legal restrictions for British mobility and movement have become more stringent than ever before, complying or not with bureaucratic procedures becomes another avenue through which to (re)construct one’s identity in later life. The ways in which it is given identity meaning is built upon the unequal relationship between both countries that stimulates varying degrees of entitlement and feelings of security in Spain by British expatriate retirees. Despite it being in different degrees depending on the experience, the pervasiveness of said entitlement and security highlights the remaining privilege this group has versus other migrants.

Bureaucracy and paperwork are key aspects within the British expatriate retiree experience in Spain. As ageing privileged migrants with varying socioeconomic backgrounds, support networks, health conditions, and overall migration experiences, bureaucracy serves as a vehicle through which one can understand the uniquely intersectionally privileged, and possibly precarious, situations of this heterogeneous group. These bureaucratic procedures, and its’ mind-numbing paperwork, become a dimension of everyday life that permeates each experience differently. This is especially true in a post-Brexit and COVID-19 time, where bureaucratic and legal conditions are constantly changing. Thus, British expatriate retirees find themselves in an unprecedented geopolitical and sociosanitary impasse. The bureaucratic and legal foundations upon which their retirement migration life projects in Spain where constructed are shifting. Shaping their ageing abroad experiences and changing their later life project plans in different ways. Most notably, the legal invisibility many British retirees in Spain were utilizing to maximize their own privilege - avoiding spending money, time, and mind power on paperwork, bettering their later life experiences – was now void.
It is within these circumstances that feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, entitlement, and security appear within British expatriate retirees’ experiences in varying degrees and regarding different contexts. For those older informants, with health issues, poor socioeconomic backgrounds and support networks, the negative connotations surrounding paperwork – burdensome, cumbersome, time and money consuming, undecipherable, and overall stressful – come to a head, deeply affecting longstanding life project plans. This heightens feelings of uncertainty, a precursor of precarity, leading to instances of unexpected vulnerability related to bureaucracy (Grenier, Lloyd, & Phillipson, 2017; Hall, 2021). Meanwhile, those with more socioeconomic resources and stronger support networks, find themselves being able to make bureaucratic and legal decisions from a more privileged vantage point. Leading to strategies that further their privilege abroad while their less resourceful counterparts are left with tactic-like strategies that lead them towards more uncertainty and possible precarity (De Certeau, 1984). The latter ultimately suggests that the inequalities between British expatriate retirees in Spain are growing, as indicated by the disparities in bureaucracy-related experiences. The degree to which uncertainty, anxiety, entitlement, and security are felt and experienced become a barometer for privileged to precarious experiences. These feelings indicate the presence of strategies versus tactic-like strategies, the presence of assumed Spanish dependence on the UK or fear of legal repercussions.

Emphasizing these disparities are borders, which provide an administrative space where changes in the group’s privileges can materially be observed. The ways in which borders are experienced, crossed, and conceived of post-Brexit and COVID-19, reveals how British expatriate retirees are experiencing unprecedented undesired (im)mobility between the UK and Spain. However, borders also highlight another key aspect of the British expatriate retiree experience in Spain: their surviving privilege as white and British nationals, and what that means within global structures of power and mobility (van Houtum, 2010; Schewel, 2020).

All the latter influences how bureaucratic measures are integrated within identity (re)construction discourses. There are those who do engage in bureaucratic procedures and (re)construct their identities as belonging to the British community in Spain and Spain as a whole. Conversely, there are others who avoid bureaucracy and reaffirm their identities as either British, English, cosmopolitan, and/or mobile. What both these identity (re)construction processes have in common is the underlying sense that bureaucracy can be a choice to most British expatriate retirees in Spain, remitting back to the unequal relationship between retirement destination and sending country.

This chapter uses bureaucracy and paperwork as a means of illustrating the complexity behind the notion of privileged migration, and how this is changing in the specific case of retirement migration from the UK to Spain. Migrants like British expatriate retirees in Spain experience privilege while also teetering near vulnerability and precarity. This privilege-vulnerability paradox, already discussed in Chapter 6, is product of widening inequality gaps between British retirees in Spain, as contextual changes deeply affect the foundations upon which retirement migration to Spain was previously constructed. However, by utilizing bureaucracy as a vehicle of investigation,
the remaining privilege these migrants have is made evident; further illustrating the pervasive importance of whiteness and nationality in migration and mobilities phenomena. Thus, British expatriate retirees are simultaneously experiencing a decline in privilege, while still retaining part of it. This engenders a fertile ground upon which to explore identity (re)construction in later life, which is what the following chapter explores in more depth.
Chapter 8
Expats, tourists, and cosmopolitans:
identity and belonging discourses and practices

8.1. Triggering identity (re)construction, eliciting belonging, and organizing communities

British expatriate retirees must navigate a myriad of labels that describe their ageing experiences abroad. The list of labels that tinge their experience is long and associated to different types of privileged connotations: *tourist, residential tourist, guiri* which is Spanish slang for tourist, *foreigner, estranger/extranjero* in Catalan and Spanish, *retiree, pensioner or jubilado/jubilat* in Spanish and Catalan, *British, English, Scottish, European,* and finally ‘*expat*,’ the most popular label of them all. These are used differently by the media, other lifestyle and retirement migrants, locals, and those back in their home country to underline different aspects of the groups’ retirement migration experience. Adding to these labels, is the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure, a caricature of the British abroad that refers to prejudices and stereotypes tied to British historical, social, and political underpinnings regarding colonialism, imperialism, and the white working class58 (O’Reilly, 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Hayes, 2018). British expatriate retirees must learn how to navigate all these labels and the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure that haunts their privileged experiences abroad, while also (re)constructing their own identities and sense of belonging within their British communities in Spain.

To fully comprehend how privilege is experienced and constructed into identities and categories of difference, this chapter calls attention to labeling practices used on the ground, resulting in feelings of belonging, and the organization of British expatriate retiree communities abroad. These labeling practices require a self-reflexivity that is characteristic of retirement migrants. They also reveal a slippage between labels that is characteristic of privileged groups, illustrating how privileged-adjacent labels can be ambiguous and viscose59 while also redrawing class lines through the accumulation and transformation of social and cultural capital (Becker, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Oliver, 2006; Saldanha, 2007; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Kunz, 2020). Consequently, the following pages will explore how these processes of labeling occur in and around British expatriate communities and what effects they have on them.

The labels explored arose from the field and must be contextualized within a British shared social imaginary as well as British social, political, and cultural structures, as identities are a context-specific construction (Brah, 1996). Accordingly, labels are approached as a category of practice, not analysis; allowing a contextualized and

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58 Revisit Chapter 5 for more on the British context that acts as a backdrop to UK to Spain retirement migration and mobility practices.

59 Viscosity is a concept taken from Aaron Saldanha (2007), first mentioned in Chapter 3. The concepts’ foundations are revisited in the coming section and appear throughout this chapter.
intersectional investigation of the label and its wide and contradictory applications (Kunz, 2016).\(^{60}\)

Throughout the following pages, the most prominent labels associated to the British expatriate retiree experience are discussed, including the label ‘tourist’, ‘expat’, and ‘cosmopolitan’. It will discuss how labeling practices trigger identification and belonging and how they act as organizing markers within British expatriate retiree communities, conveying different types of social, cultural, and economic capital through emic concepts such as “integration” (Bourdieu, 1986; Hall, 1996).

8.2. Choosing, using, and rejecting labels

“I don’t really agree with labels. I suppose I am an expat. I don’t consider myself to be a migrant, that has a connotation of something slightly different, doesn’t it? You might migrate from Syria whereas you wouldn’t if you migrate from the UK. I don’t think I’ll ever be a local because I can’t be, I’m English. Although I don’t identify with being… I’m not quite so proud to be English as I once was.”

- Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Mick\(^{61}\) had lived in Spain for less than three years at the time of the interview, moving away from the UK after suffering great disenchantment with his home country. For Mick, Brexit wasn’t the trigger of such disenchantment, as it was for many other British retirees. After having suffered from a severe bout of cancer and a prompt recovery, Mick found himself appalled at the capitalist and consumerist inclinations of the UK: “I think there is a different focus in the UK, it is very much for show. It is very much ‘look at my house, look at my car, isn’t it good?’ I don’t want to be part of that anymore” (Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Spain presented itself as an ideal destination to escape these behaviors and start anew in retirement\(^{62}\). This is what caused Mick to question labels such as English. However, he didn’t firmly adjust to another label, saying he did not “agree” with them and then proceeded to list labels he could ascribe to but doesn’t particularly like - like the label ‘expat’ - or directly rejects - like the label ‘immigrant’.

Labels have the power to stigmatize and other, while also bringing people together and giving them a sense of belonging (Becker, 1973; Spivak, 1988; Zanna & Olson, 1994; Link & Phelan, 2001; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). However, what happens when someone is capable, due to structural and geopolitical privileges, to nitpick between labels without particularly ascribing to one or another? This is what Mick was doing in the excerpt above, something which other British expatriate retirees in the field did too.

\(^{60}\) This was discussed in Chapter 3 in relationship to the label ‘expatriate’.

\(^{61}\) Mick has appeared regarding different aspects of the British expatriate retirees experience throughout this thesis; first appearing in Chapter 5 and later in Chapter 7.

\(^{62}\) What escape narratives are is explained back in Chapter 5.
Those with more privilege have more agency over their lifestyles and can choose from stratified identity categories in ways others cannot (Bauman, 2004). As a migration and mobility trend that is individualistic and a product of commodifying lifestyles, British expatriate retirees are part of an individualistic, reflexive, socioeconomically, and geopolitically privileged group that has no urgent strategical need for political, economic, or legal recognition underneath a shared label (Spivak, 1988; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Their uniquely privileged position allows them to choose between labels, while their individual tendencies make it harder for labels to bring a generalized sense of group belonging (Croucher, 2012). Moving between labels is an action that exposes how slippery labels can be within relatively privileged migrant contexts. Hence, the act of saying you do not agree with labels is an act of privilege that people like Mick take for granted. Mick does not fully depend on the classifications of others to classify himself, due to the intersection of his whiteness, British nationality, and access to enough expendable income to engage in retirement migration (Skeggs, 1997). Such privilege is frequently taken for granted by white Westerners overall, who naturalize being able to choose and reject labels, as their privilege has been globalized through geopolitical power dynamics that create eurocentrism and other biases (Pease, 2010).

This is due to the viscosity of white and Western associated labels, practices, and even places (Saldanha, 2007). As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, Saldanha’s concept of ‘viscosity’ illustrates the flexibility of labels with privileged origins. Nevertheless, said flexibility is two-fold. By switching between identity categories, the very privilege these groups enjoy is reaffirmed, making certain labels stick to places and practices (Saldanha, 2007). Thus, privileged labels have viscose, blurry, and ambiguous edges that are continuously transgressed due to their open-ended-ness, while also allowing people like Mick to nitpick between labels. This ultimately ties those places, practices, and labels back to whiteness and privilege (Saldanha, 2007).

In the case of British expatriate retirees, the viscose labels they move between are continuously stuck with the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure; a Weberian ideal type that is an amalgamation of stereotypes and prejudices of British behavior abroad (Weber, 1949). This figure projects a negative light onto those who go to British bars, eat British food, only mingle with British people while in another country, and have not consideration for local history, culture, food, or people. This figure does not exist in the field, it is a cautionary tale tied to British historical, social, and political underpinnings regarding colonialism, imperialism, and the white working class (Thompson, 1966; O’Reilly, 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Jones, 2012; Smith, 2012a; 2012b; Hayes, 2018). It is the haunting of this figure that makes Mick opt for label-lessness, without realizing that by doing so, he is reinforcing the very privileged foundations that tie him with this notorious figure (Saldanha, 2007).

Since labels are ascribed by the self and by society, British expatriate retirees, as active agents within the (re)constructions of their own identities, must learn how to navigate the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure that encompasses a variety of labels at their disposition (Zanna & Olson, 1994; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Meaning special attention must be placed onto how British expatriate retirees answer to the ascription of labels by
others and how they use them to label others, triggering an act of self-identification while also revealing what is believed to be undesirable within the context of a British retiree community in Spain (Hall, 1996).

Through the observation of the three most recurrent labels in the field, ‘tourist’, ‘expat’, and ‘cosmopolitan’, this section observes in a grounded, situated manner the complex and ambiguous relationship British expatriate retirees have with labels and how it affects identity (re)construction in later life and feelings of belonging. Each label is discussed in detail, explaining which prejudices and stereotypes are associated with it and how it is utilized in day-to-day life to elicit belonging and convey social, cultural, and economic capital in covert ways (Bourdieu, 1986). This illustrates how identities are an ongoing situated process, site of constant negotiations between the self and society, with ambiguous categories of difference that are viscose when associated to white westerness (Brah, 1996; Saldanha, 2007).

8.2.1. Aversion to tourists

“Lisa is always pretty much in vacation mode, she enjoys walking on the beach, going sightseeing (even though she has seen everything around the Costa del Sol many times), and goes to British bars and restaurants for a Sunday Roast. However, she made extremely clear to me that she did not consider herself a tourist in any way, even though she only spends 3 to 5 months in Spain. In fact, she doesn’t like it when she is treated like one. During Sunday Roast today she told a story of a Mexican restaurant they visited that tried to charge her wrong twice, now she has declared she will never go back because she thinks they tried to trick her because she doesn’t speak Spanish. ‘They thought we were tourists! We are not; we have been coming here for years. They can’t trick me!’ After saying that Lisa declared she would never return to that restaurant ever again. She seemed deeply offended, and, what was most surprising to me, everyone else listening to this anecdote agreed with her.”

- Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 26/03/2019

Lisa and her husband Richard were not permanent residents in Spain. They were so-called “snowbirds” or “swallows”, meaning they lived in Spain during the winter and went elsewhere – UK or travelling - in the summer (O’Reilly, 2000; Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). Despite not being permanent residents in Spain, Lisa’s story about the Mexican restaurant, and how offended she was by the staff confusing them with tourists, brought to the forefront the following question: why such aversion to being called a tourist when many British retirees, even the permanent residents, engaged in tour associated activities?

Lisa and Richard weren’t the only British retirees that every summer went sightseeing to “pueblos blancos”63, trekked up a hill in Fuengirola to see the famous 14-meter-high Osborne steel bull, rented out sunbeds at exorbitant prices at Malaga’s best beaches,

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63 A “pueblo blanco” is Spanish for white village. It is a name used to describe villages in Andalucía, typically in the mountains overlooking the sea, offering a mix of sea and countryside.
or went to the Malaga Fair in big groups of British people dressed up as classic Sevillian dancers and bullfighters. In the eyes of locals, and even in those of the British in Spain, these activities are generally associated with tourists. However, many British expatriate retirees engaged in these activities. Some did so when accompanying visiting family and friends to visit to these spaces and activities; others did so out of a sense of tradition, like Lisa and Richard, who had done these activities well before retirement when they visited Spain as tourists (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). This confirms the strong ties British retirement migration has with tourism, emphasizing the persistence of the tourist gaze as well as a visual and cultural consumption of Spain that seeps into retirement life projects (Meethan, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Considering the ‘ageing better’ life projects British expatriate retirees craft in Spain, these tourist-associated activities could potentially fit within them. They stimulate the mind, body, and social ties, represent new activities that escape those available to them in the UK, and challenge the notion of old age as stagnant (Oliver, 2006; Lamb, 2014). These activities are leisure oriented and imbued with all the Mediterranean possibilities a coast like Costa del Sol can offer. Despite the latter, ‘tourist’ is a label that is charged with negative prejudices and stereotypes between the British in Spain. Being a tourist within British expatriate retirees’ social imaginaries denotes a lack of local permanence, and belonging to the expatriate retiree community. It is also associated with a low cultural capital, as the British tourist is a notorious figure in the British media that is associated with drunken, lazy, and bordering on criminal behavior (O’Reilly, 2000; Oliver, 2006; Field Diary, 2019-2020). The socioeconomic class of the ‘tourist’ is rarely addressed directly in British expatriate retiree conversations because, in these retirement destinations, socioeconomic class is meant to lose its’ social importance in an effort to allow migrants to start anew (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010).

In the absence of more direct socioeconomically classifying language, using the term ‘tourist’, or speaking of tourist-associated behaviors related to food, dress, and choice of leisure, becomes a way of detecting and ascribing social class to others (Oliver, Blyth, & Roe, 2018). For instance, in an interview with Gabe, 74, he spoke about package holidays that in British social imaginaries are associated with cheap travel and the white working class (Andrews, 2006):

“We have taken a couple package holidays and you see how people fly somewhere else, get off the plane, and go straight to a bar, a British bar. [They] all sat along, and they have football on the telly, the premier league. Why go to Spain to sit in a British bar and watch football on the telly? [...] We didn’t take many more package holidays after noticing that.”

- Gabe, 74, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Above, Gabe negatively comments on those attending British bars to watch British sports on television, implying that local culture isn’t appreciated, and travelling isn’t utilized to challenge one’s own identity and its’ limits. Comments like the latter reveal how British

64 Gabe was first mentioned in Chapter 6 when speaking of the importance of volunteering in later life.
tourists are thought of as members of lower economic classes, with a low social and cultural capital, revealed by their taste in activities during travel (Bourdieu, 1986; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Thus, the label ‘tourist’ and tourist-associated behaviors reveal how class is still present in British expatriate communities in Spain, disguised in terms regarding taste and choice of activities, food, and ways to dress (Douglas, 2008; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010). In other words, British expatriate retirees are evaluating other British people’s habitus while abroad, as these sets of ingrained habits, dispositions, and daily practices are product of contact with sociocultural power structures (Sweetman, 2003; Bourdieu, 2007). Thus, resulting in the attachment of certain habitus to the label ‘tourist’, denoting a particular type of social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital that insinuates socioeconomic class (Bourdieu, 2007; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010).

Beyond its ties to class, the label ‘tourist’ and its associated habitus are also used to point at inappropriate ‘ageing better’ practices between British expatriate retirees. In the field, and in some contexts more than others, actions like drinking or sunbathing ‘too much’ were looked down upon. This was not only because they were associated with being a tourist, but also because they were perceived as detrimental to health and the overall life project of ‘ageing better’ in Spain (Oliver, 2006). This connection links tourist-behaviors with a non-compliance of the ‘ageing better’ life project British expatriate retirees share, that is fundamental to their community belonging (Oliver, 2006; Lamb, 2014). This explains why, when (re)constructing one’s identity in Spain, British expatriate retirees actively rejected the label ‘tourist’ when it was ascribed to them. This action triggers an identity (re)construction process that simultaneously constructs one’s identity away from that of the ‘tourist’, and its’ associated behaviors, and reaffirms a community belonging through ‘ageing better’ (Oyserman & Swim, 2001).

In the quotidian, this took shape in the avoidance of certain tourist-associated behaviors, habits, practices, places, and spaces. For example, John and his wife Kelly rarely visited British places and/or spaces like bars, restaurants, or even supermarkets. In the following excerpt, we can observe the construction of the British ‘tourist’ label and the barrage of negative prejudices and stereotypes associated with it, which is reminiscent of the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure. The construction of this label classifies certain activities, behaviors, and spaces in a hierarchy of habitus that deems them acceptable or non-acceptable within the bounds of the British ageing retiree experience in Spain. This is John’s comment on British bars:

“We don’t like the British bars. [...] There are some successful British bars in Arroyo de la Miel... but mainly it’s for tourists, and off with their shirts, and they get too drunk... you don’t get many Spanish people. We prefer the family Spanish life. [Also] they sell bad wine...they sell the bad stuff. The people that come down from Britain don’t care! They just want cheap wine! While we say, we are too old to drink a bad wine. Some of our friends [from the Club] go [to a British bar] once a week, they invited us, and we brought a good bottle of wine to the bar, because we knew they were rubbish there. We even suggested to [the] bar staff, [...]"

65 John and Kelly appear in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.
that if we bring a good bottle of wine, they could serve it to us and charge us your normal charge. And they wouldn’t do it! We enjoy our friends from the [the Club] but [they go to] areas that are touristy.... we are not snobbish people, but we don’t like those places.”

- John 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Firstly, John explains that they do not like British bars because of the type of tourists that go there. These are insinuated to be British and white working class people. This is inferred through his comments made on the bars’ clientele’s supposed bad taste in wine and alleged binge drinking habits. Like Gabe’s comment, implied in John’s testimony is the assumption that going to a British bar is a sign of lacking interest in local sites, denoting a lower socioeconomic background. These behaviors and tastes imply that said tourists do not travel to “reflect on and assess who they are in the world”; but they do so to experience “England in the sun” (O’Reilly, 2000; Meethan, 2006; Oliver, 2006). John and Kelly mark themselves as different from the ‘tourist’ by highlighting their disinterest in spaces like the British bar and emphasizing their supposed more developed taste in wine. Thus, one’s choices in food, drink, and places to socialy mingle, like restaurants and bars, become a way of signaling one’s own socioeconomic class within the British expatriate retiree community in Spain (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010).

Even though John says they prefer the “family Spanish life”, the couple cannot completely avoid British ‘tourist’ places, spaces, and practices because the area they live in is highly touristic. The latter is true for most British expatriate retirees living in Spain, but those in Costa del Sol suffer from this the most because of the area’s many British owned establishments and the higher frequency of British tourism. Couples like John and Kelly must navigate these British touristic areas, which they deem undesirable, daily. It is this very proximity to the type of tourist habitus that is negatively judged which makes the label ‘tourist’ viscose within the British expatriate retiree experience (Saldanha, 2007). It is a label that follows people like John and Kelly, who thus find themselves continuously transgressing the labels limits to reject it.

With this context in mind, John’s anecdote about the “good bottle of wine” in the British bar takes on a different meaning; illustrating how interactions with touristic areas can be done in a way that constructs one’s own sense of identity and belonging through the rejection of a space and label. It is a way of creating a sense of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘other’, designating himself as having supposed ‘good’ taste in wine and a higher social and cultural capital, while also attributing a lower socioeconomic class to some of his Club friends (Gardner, 1994; Oyserman & Swim, 2001).

Moreover, in his remarks John implies that drinking cheap ‘bad’ wine is a habit that, besides being a sign of supposed bad taste, also goes against ageing successfully saying: “we are too old to drink bad wine” (John, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Here the previously discussed link between tourist-behaviors going against ‘ageing better’ practices appear anew. Avoiding British bars, attending Spanish spaces, and splurging on expensive wine, was John and Kelly’s way of both ‘ageing better’ abroad, covertly

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66 The concept of the British white working class is debated in more depth in Chapter 5.
communicating their socioeconomic positioning, and establishing their difference from the dreaded British ‘tourist’. Thus, by rejecting the label of British ‘tourist’, and projecting those prejudices and stereotypes onto others, the couple is constructing their identities away from that label and it’s ‘wrong sort of Brit’ associations; conveying that they do not have a lower social and cultural capital, while simultaneously affirming their appreciation for the ‘ageing better’ project that British expatriate retiree communities in Spain share, building belonging.

This connection between avoiding ‘tourist’-associated habitus and ‘ageing better’ life projects create a noteworthy intersection between old age and socioeconomic class. Adding a layer of complexity to practices like monitoring, examined in Chapter 6. Revisiting John’s final comments about his friends liking “touristy” areas, we can classify these remarks as part of monitoring ‘ageing better’ practices. Since places associated with the British ‘tourist’ label, like British bars, are believed to lead to unhealthy habits, like drinking excessively; frequenting these places can be interpreted as going against ‘ageing better’. Through these comments, John isn’t only asserting social and cultural capital over his friends, he is monitoring the ‘ageing better’ appropriateness of their habitus. Thus, if acting like a ‘tourist’ means having a lower socioeconomic capital, while also going against ‘ageing better’ life goals, then, ‘ageing better’ is a goal that isn’t accessible to those who act as tourists and share that habitus. Consequently, this places a socioeconomic limit on ‘ageing better’ life projects within the British expatriate retiree community. Something which can be traced back to the successful ageing paradigm and how it inadvertently excludes ageing experiences that count with less resources (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001).

It must be noted that John and Kelly do not explicitly label their friends as ‘tourists’ in any moment. But by associating them with that label, and the spaces, places, and practices British ‘tourists’ are believed to frequent and engage in, the couple is emphasizing their friends lacking social and cultural capital. In other words, they are using the stigma associated to the label ‘tourist’ to (re)construct their identities abroad, reproducing their own social and cultural capital through the identity act of comparison (Goffman, 1963; Bourdieu, 1986). The latter illustrates the complexity of the ‘us’ and ‘others’ dynamic of identity construction and belonging, as it is not a clear-cut dualism. In practice, labels and identity categories are slippery and nuanced. In this case, John and Kelly use the label ‘tourist’ as a measuring stick to assess their friends’ belonging, class, and ‘ageing better’ experience. This either inches them closer or further from their own concept of ‘us’ or ‘other’.

Detecting this separation between the British expatriate retiree ‘us’ and the British ‘tourist’ ‘other’ is easier between fellow British expatriate retirees than local Spaniards, other Northern European retiree migrants, or tourists who cannot make these distinctions. The nuances of the British ‘tourist’, and the stigma it carries, are lost on most non-Britons because it is a label shaped within British social imaginaries and power structures. To the eyes of those outside of these imaginaries and structures, the lives of British expatriate retirees seem the same as that of British tourists. They both are British, have leisurely lifestyles, relatively privileged socioeconomic standing, and a presupposed
whiteness. Retirement migrants break the binary between host and guest that have marked touristic relationships and studies, which is why classifying them from the eyes of locals or other tourists can be challenging (Urry, 1990a; 1990b; Oliver, 2006). Thus, when faced with tourist-confusion by those outside of the British expatriate community, British expatriate retirees emphasize their permanence as opposed to tourists’ transience.

This emphasis on permanence highlights the desired immobility of many British expatriate retirees, who choose to stay in Spain for long periods of time and have the means to do so, revealing their privileged migrant condition (Schewel, 2020). However, as mentioned in Chapter 7, desired (im)mobility has been limited by geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts that have changed the foundations of retirement migration from the UK to Spain, mismatching one’s capability and aspirations to be mobile or immobile (Schewel, 2020). Despite the latter, emphasizing one’s permanence in Spain is still a way of (re)constructing one’s identity as dedicated to the ‘ageing better’ life project in Spain and, thus, belonging within the British expatriate retiree community.

In practice, asserting one’s permanence in Spain can be done in a variety of ways. For instance, in an interview with John and Kelly, they said the following about how they faced tourist-confusion, illustrating ways in which permanence is elicited:

“Kelly: Well, a tourist is someone on holiday...

John: With the “looky looky boys” (peddlers) we tell them “no turista, no turista. Residencia español”. That does annoy me. They try to sell us these trinkets, it annoys me. We live here.

K: They sell to tourists, and they don’t know that we are not tourists. They just want to sell.

J: Most of the places we go we don’t get the tourist confusion. But if we go along Fish Alley (a British area in the Costa del Sol), every 30 seconds you get confused with a tourist.

K: Yeah, we are not tourists; I don’t class myself as one. Spanish people don’t know how long we have lived here but they might interpret us as tourists, because we are foreigners.

J: But we aren’t recognized as tourists because we still dress in winter clothes. Admittedly I have taken out my shorts a wee bit too early this year (gestures to his own clothing, which are shorts, a t-shirt, and a vest). The tourists are in shorts and t-shirts...If we went into Malaga now, we could be interpreted as tourists (because of the clothes).

K: That is because they don’t know us. When we go to the normal places we go to, there they know us, so we aren’t confused for ones.”

- John and Kelly, 78 and 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

This conversation took place in late spring at a restaurant terrace, in the center of Fuengirola, where John and Kelly ate frequently. It was a pricey Spanish bar-restaurant,
which catered to tourists and locals alike, serving tapas along with an extensive and well-curated wine list. Before even starting the interview, the waiter recognized the couple and brought over their usual order without even asking. It was clear that John and Kelly went there frequently enough that they weren’t treated as passersby’s, but as valued long-time customers. This setting is important to note because it illustrates the roots John and Kelly have in Spain, which they are attempting to convey in their remarks, constructing their own sense of belonging to Spain along the way (Bauman, 2004).

Throughout the couple’s conversation, a variety of factors to convey permanence were mentioned. Firstly, John spoke of his residency and how he used it to establish that he was not a tourist in front of un-discerning locals who couldn’t tell the difference between a British tourist and British expatriate retiree, saying: “No turista. Residencia español”. As stated in the previous chapter, having one’s paperwork in order and boasting of one’s residency card is a way of constructing and conveying belonging to Spain and the British expatriate community there. Then, the couple went on to analyze how their clothing could signal permanence, speaking about how locals wear warmer winter clothing than tourists. This was something that many other informants mentioned as well when separating themselves from the dreaded ‘tourist’, even calling tourists “white legs” to refer to their pasty legs when on vacation in the winter (Nigel, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). And finally, towards the end of the excerpt, Kelly says that they frequent the same restaurants and bars – like the one we were at for the interview – and how, in those places, this confusion didn’t happen due to them being regular clients, signaling permanence.

Thus, permanence becomes another key factor in identity (re)construction in the face of others. In the examples given, signaling permanence was done in the face of undiscerning locals who ascribed British retirees with the label ‘tourist’, but this could also be done in front of community members. John and Kelly signal their permanence in Spain, and thus separation from the ‘tourist’ stigma, by frequenting the same Spanish restaurants and bars, wearing warmer clothing in the winter, and having their Spanish paperwork in order. These actions also signal to other community members their desired immobility in Spain and actively establish feelings of belonging to Spain and the British expatriate retiree community there. Said actions are continuous and changing, unfolding as quotidian life moments trigger identity (re)construction processes. This forces people to assume the responsibility over their own identities, signaling and constructing through their everyday choices their belonging and identities; underlining the continuous nature of identity construction (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996; Bauman, 2004).

In the light of this reflection, I want to revisit the vignette with Lisa and the Mexican restaurant waiters that confused her for a tourist twice. As a couple of “snowbirds”, Lisa and her husband could not make the same claim to permanence other British expatriate retirees could. In fact, as a “snowbird”, Lisa could easily be classified near the dreaded British ‘tourist’ by her cohorts. However, she had vacationed on the Costa del Sol since she was a child with her parents, which was reflected in her wide web of friendships at the Club and her knowledge of the coast. Also, like John and Kelly, Lisa and Richard used to attempt to dress accordingly to the weather and had some local
friendships with Spanish neighbors and restaurant owners. These factors were frequently brought up by Lisa when establishing her own sense of belonging within the British expatriate retiree community. Her public indignation towards being confused with a tourist was part of her identity (re)construction as permanent in front of other Club members. It was these sorts of actions that assured Lisa and her husband social capital within the British expatriate community (Bourdieu, 1986). Unlike other seasonal migrants, they belonged, which was affirmed when other Club members agreed with Lisa and her decision to never return to that Mexican restaurant.

Despite the latter, the label tourist ‘sticks’ to British expatriate retirees’ places, spaces, and even people, because of the viscosity of the ‘tourist’ label and its’ associated spaces and habitus (Saldanha, 2007). People like Lisa and her husband, or John and Kelly, are trying to transgress the limits of this label and escape its stigma by rejecting ‘tourist’ habitus and declaring their permanence in Spain through acts like having one’s residency, dressing appropriately to the climate, having Spanish friendships, and going to Spanish bars, etc. all actions done in front of other community members to gain their recognition. However, the label is ‘dense’, returning to its white and western roots which British expatriate retirees share. Thus, resulting in the ‘sticking’ of the ‘tourist’ label onto British expatriate retirees depending on the context and actions they make (Saldanha, 2007).

The rejection of the label ‘tourist’ is complex. There are undeniable similarities between British expatriate retiree lifestyles and tourist habitus that make the label ambiguous and viscose. However, the stigma associated to the label ‘tourist’, particularly the British ‘tourist’ and its ties with the white working class and the overall ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure, triggers identity (re)construction processes that attempt to create distance from the label for a variety of purposes. First, separating oneself from the label ‘tourist’ acts as a covert way of indicating socioeconomic class. To do so, terminology associated to ‘taste’ is employed. Then, said separation from the ‘tourist’ affirms a belonging to British expatriate retiree communities. This is made clear by judging ‘tourist’ associated habits as going against the shared ‘ageing better’ life project these communities have. In the field, informants would achieve the latter separation from the ‘tourist’ label in a variety of ways depending on their day-to-day lives. Some used their Spanish residencia to denote permanence and (re)construct their identities against the itinerant ‘tourist’, while others did the same by avoiding British places and spaces that were ‘tourist’ adjacent. Ultimately, by stating what they are not, they are stating what they are: permanent migrants with an interest to age ‘well’ through culturally appreciating foreign spaces and people as well as engaging in the healthy habits the Mediterranean can offer.
8.2.2. Increasingly reluctant ‘expats’

“Calling all Expats. People like you – people like us- we have a special club” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 04/02/2019). That is what was written on the cover of pamphlets advertising the Costa del Sol Club (see Figure 2, below). On it you could see a simple drawing of a Villa, representing the Club’s headquarters, and palm trees. Underneath there was the Club’s email and phone number flanked by a British flag and a Spanish flag, one on each side. In this pamphlet, the term ‘expat’ is used to refer to British migrants, something that was rather common in exclusively British spaces abroad, reflecting how British retirees aboard widely used the term to refer to themselves and the community at large; making this term an identity category and, thus, a label. It is quite clear from the language used in this pamphlet, that ‘expat’ is meant to elicit feelings of belonging, denote uniqueness, and insinuate exclusivity and privilege. Therefore, despite being a term originally meant to refer to high-end corporate working professionals abroad, ‘expat’ was an omnipresent label in the field, being a term that referred to their unique migrant positioning in Spain and their belonging to British communities there.

Figure 2. Cover of the Club’s promotional pamphlet

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67 For the inside of the pamphlet, go to Appendix 5.
As discussed in Chapter 3, the label ‘expat’ or ‘expatriate’ is a migration category that is now generally used to describe North-South migration and mobility practices, assuming whiteness, post coloniality and power (Kunz, 2020). Thus, it stems from systemic geopolitical and racial privilege that allows British retirees to choose between a myriad of labels available to them (Croucher, 2012). Notwithstanding, in the field, other Northern European retiree migrants would strictly use the term to refer to British nationals because of the Imperialist and colonialist past of the term. This made the label ‘expat’ uniquely British and white, succeeding in separating British retirees from other migrant categories like the ‘immigrant’ or even ‘foreigner’. Thus, revealing taken for granted racialized hierarchies of migration categories tied to the UK’s geopolitical privileges and colonial imperialist past. The geopolitical baggage and power inequalities the label ‘expat’ carries, as well as its’ capacity to elicit feelings of belonging between the British abroad, were made evident in a focus group at the Club, where a participant and member said the following:

“We are expats because we aren’t immigrants, we pull our own weight. No one needs to take care of us. But we aren’t foreigners because we try to mingle and set up a community.”
- Costa del Sol: Focus group, 16/04/2019

The focus group participant states how migration categories are constructed within the British expatriate retiree communities in Spain, ranking expat above ‘foreigner’, which is above ‘immigrant’. When speaking of the category ‘immigrant’, he alludes to the undesirability of the label, evoking prejudices that characterize ‘immigrants’ as taking advantage of State welfare and aid (Brah, 1996). Meanwhile, when referring to the label ‘foreigner’, he highlights the permanence that British ‘expats’ craft when abroad, excluding them from the label ‘foreigner’ in his judgement. These comments stress the sociopolitical inequalities that imbue migration categories, while also highlighting assumptions tied to them. His assumptions construct a picture of ‘expats’ are economically independent and community driven, assuming privilege and imposing socioeconomic class while also illustrating how this term elicits belonging with others.

However, the belonging and privilege that the term ‘expat’ carries also has negative connotations, and even stigma. This can be observed in how British media outlets use terms like ‘ghetto’, ‘enclave’, or even ‘colony’ when describing British expatriate retiree communities in Spain (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010). These terms are commonly used pejoratively, referencing to the UK’s imperialist and colonial past, simplifying the complexities of British expatriate retiree communities and their relationships with locals to imply a voluntary segregation that presupposes feelings of superiority and entitlement of the British aboard68 (O’Reilly, 2002; Gilroy, 2004; Hayes, 2018).

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68 Feelings of entitlement have been mentioned throughout this thesis, first in Chapter 5 regarding the UK and Spain’s unequal relationship and then in Chapter 7, regarding British retirees who didn’t comply with bureaucratic requisites.
This sense of entitlement is also key when understanding the negative stigma carried by the label. The stereotypical behaviors of an ‘expat’ within British social imaginaries (and also according to informants) is as follows: white British wealthy man or woman who migrated with their spouse that sips on gin and tonics all day, sun tans excessively, plays golf, always eats out, and doesn’t learn the local language (Karen, 67, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Isabel, 77, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Brenda, 72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; and more). These behaviors, or habitus, oppose ‘ageing better’ life goals because of the debauchery they suppose and the ignorance they imply regarding local history, language, and people (Bourdieu, 2007). Thus, the ‘expat’ label is associated with upper socioeconomic classes, with low cultural capital, and a high sense of entitlement abroad (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). The latter explains why other words associated with the label are “snob”, “pretentious”, or “elitist” (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2020). This stereotype has resulted from a longstanding connection between the word ‘expatriate’ and retirement migration, leading to the creation of a label with a particular geopolitical, sociocultural, and class baggage that is persistent in the field, in academia, and in British social imaginaries (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000; Mancinelli, 2021).

The label ‘expat’ starts to become ambiguous and slippery once it enters the amalgamate that is the figure of the ‘wrong sort of Brit’. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ is a Weberian ideal type that caricatures British behavior abroad. It includes prejudices concerning said behaviors that can be summarized as having a sense of entitlement towards the country of destination and having a lack of interest in local history, culture and language, and overall low cultural capital. Within the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ the figure of the British ‘tourist’ can be found, but so can the British ‘expat’. As these share prejudices the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ encompasses. Here is where ‘expat’ as an identity category becomes slippery and viscose, as the lines between this category and others starts to meld. This viscosity complicates and layers the capabilities of the label ‘expat’ to elicit belonging. Especially when considering that parts of the label aid in the construction of feelings of belonging abroad, while other aspects of it are heavily contested by British expatriate retirees who do not feel represented by the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure.

The following excerpt regarding how Mick and his wife Martha chose the Costa Brava as their preferred retirement destination indicates this slipperiness and its appearance in practices and discourses on the field. When explaining their decision-making process, Mick evidences the socioeconomic assumptions behind the labels ‘expat’ and ‘tourist’, while also illustrating similar behaviors associated with both labels that construct the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure. He says the following:

“We wanted to get away from the English. I think my view is English people abroad are not always... it can be a bit embarrassing. The two extremes are the lads who go to wherever, Magaluz, and they drink loads and loads of lager on the streets and the women too, and it’s
very embarrassing that you see that, and you think well they are English like me. And also, you get the other end of the scale. [There are] upper class English people who live here for so long and do not bother to learn Spanish. So, you know... we want to get away from that."

- Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Within Mick’s remarks, he implies a difference in class backgrounds for those “lads in Magaluz”, that could be classified as ‘tourists’, and those “upper class English people”, who could be classified as ‘expats’. However, when he narrates the behaviors of each - excessively drinking and not learning Spanish despite spending years in Spain - these behaviors could easily be switched and made to refer to either label. In fact, many informants associated these sorts of behaviors indistinctly to either ‘tourists’ or ‘expats’ depending on the context; illustrating how they are both part of the same ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Cost Brava: Focus group 1, 2020; Costa del Sol & Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2019-2020).

Mick continued to imply in his interview that said behaviors, or habitus, signal a low cultural capital that materializes in ‘unhealthy’ habits and lacking interest in Spain on a variety of levels. Consequently, these go against the foundations of shared ‘ageing better’ life projects that are fundamental when constructing community belonging in Spain. This is because said behaviors presuppose a lack of stimulation – social, mental, and physical – needed to age ‘successfully’. By avoiding these behaviors, Mick and others like him, are searching for a ‘better’ later life abroad, while also denoting a higher social and cultural capital that constructs their identities away from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ and it’s associated labels. This illustrates how the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, and its’ stigma and stereotypes, actively shapes life project plans of British expatriate retirees.

Ultimately, the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ is a cautionary tale and acts as a stereotype of “bad” British behavior abroad, shared by both the UK and Spain. This stereotype blurs the lines between the British ‘expat’ and the ‘tourist’ on the ground because both are associated with the same behaviors. As active agents of their own identity constructions and notions of belonging, British expatriate retirees had to navigate these prejudices associated to British people abroad, which they faced daily in their communities and contact with local Spaniards, (re)constructing their own identities in the process (Bauman, 2004; Zanna & Olson, 1994).

Despite the latter, ‘expat’ wasn’t as widely rejected as the label ‘tourist’. It was still a very common way British expatriate retirees defined themselves while abroad. This could be attributed to the unifying powers labels hold, which came to life for British expatriate retirees when in contexts away from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’. For instance, the same people that sometimes used the label ‘expat’ in a derogatory way – like Mick - would then use it when describing community members, saying things like “yes he/she is an expat too!”. These comments signal a recognized sameness with that other individual and build a sense of belonging to an overall community. The latter illustrates how the label expat is used in a context specific manner, having both positive and negative uses. It can elicit feelings of belonging in some instances, while in others it inspires rejection if
associated with certain practices and behaviors. Thus, highlighting the situatedness and ambiguity of identity construction.

However, coming to terms with the colonial connotations, and the geopolitical privilege the label presumed, was something British expatriate retirees on the field had mixed reactions and feelings towards. Some informants like Nigel, who were former corporate expatriates during their work lives, were aware of these ties and tried to move past them, saying:

“It is tied to colonialism, I guess. But personally, I see the word expatriate as a more elevated way of saying foreigner. It doesn’t necessarily link with colonial times, especially because Spain wasn’t a British colony.”

- Nigel, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

For people like Nigel, the label ‘expat’ had been present in their lives before retirement, making it an integral part of their identities despite its colonial ties. Hence, Nigel, who identified as an ‘expat’, wrestled with the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ associations the label had, highlighting in front of others his Spanish speaking skills, which not everyone could boast of, since he was a linguist before entering the world of textile corporations (Nigel, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). He also made clear in his comments that the term no longer held colonial-connotations for him because of the lack of colonial history between both countries. What these comments illustrate isn’t the terms’ separation from colonialism, as Nigel wanted to suggest. It illustrates the complex dialogue British expatriate retirees have with the label ‘expat’, questioning their own sensibilities towards colonialism and the long-lasting geopolitical privilege it has provided British citizens. This dialogue got increasingly complicated with Brexit, as the prejudices against the label ‘expat’ gained more weight and were politicized because of how it made evident the inextricable tie between British nationality, white ethnicity, and the label in question (Evans, 2017; O’Reilly, 2020).

In the field, when speaking of the label ‘expat’, the conversations between informants would slowly take on political undertones as they transgressed, even if these didn’t explicitly cite Brexit or any politicians or political parties. Consequently, Brexit set the scene for the label ‘expatriate’ to become the site through which quotidian conversations regarding migration categories, nationality and power relations took place. This connection became evident in interviews with people like Karen, a 67-year-old woman who had been living in Spain for 4 years at the time of the interview and used the label ‘expat’ regularly in both its positive and negative iterations (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). When asked about her feelings about the label ‘expat’ she said the following:

“I hadn’t really thought about why we call ourselves expats and not immigrants before Brexit. But now, after witnessing the Leave campaign that was based on so much racism against immigrants arriving to Britain for jobs, searching for a better life… I realize that I am not that different. I have moved here for a better life too; we don’t even do anything
‘productive’ (does air quotes). We are retired! Now, when I call myself an expat, it makes me think about the racism in Britain... I don’t like the word that much anymore.”

- Karen, 67, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

The above quote illustrates the tonal shift surrounding the label ‘expat’ due to Brexit. There were many people like Karen who, post-Brexit, were realizing the privilege they had within migration categories and the power relations that hid behind that privilege. Karen brings up many issues that inform hierarchies of migration such as racialization, labor migration, and the desire for a ‘better’ life achieved through migration.

Brexit led many informants in the field like Karen, to start searching for alternative terms to use instead of ‘expat’ in their daily discussions and self-identification. Despite the awakening Brexit had triggered in some, the label ‘immigrant’ was still at the end of the list of labels informants were willing to choose from:

"Uh, immigrant? That’s bad. It has connotations to illegal immigrants; you don’t want to be an immigrant. If people ask you if you are an immigrant you say, no, I’m not! I’m just a foreigner living in Spain’. I’m an “extranjero”. Not the word expat. It’s on my registration card, that I’m an ‘extranjero’.”

- Jane, 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Being an ‘immigrant’ was still rejected despite the newfound dislike for the label ‘expat’, displaying the negative connotations ‘immigrant’ holds and it’s positioning within global migration category hierarchies. Consequently, even though expatriates are migrants with a variety of backgrounds, the reticence to identify as an ‘immigrant’ suggests that there is a tension between migration categories (Kunz, 2020). Jane goes on to identify herself as a ‘foreigner’, or ‘extranjero’ in Spanish, using a legal document as a means of asserting her connection to this label. This was rather common, as bureaucratic and administrative processes, and their results, like identification cards, were commonly used by British expatriate retirees to justify feelings of belonging and trigger identity (re)construction processes (as seen in Chapter 7). However, switching from ‘expat’ to ‘foreigner’, ‘extranjero’ or ‘estranger’ is significant, and a wider pattern found in various informants’ discourses, reflecting the group’s self-reflexivity. The label ‘foreigner’ still denotes privilege but reflects an active intention of separating oneself from stigmatized behaviors associated to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’. Thus, this switch also had political undertones. Informants opted for other labels outside of the ‘expat’ to communicate their disenchantment with the UK, participating in the “Bad Britain” discourse many British expatriate retirees have displayed for decades that has evolved with Brexit and the geopolitical change it supposed (O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Smith, 2012a; Evans, 2017).

69 Jane is referring to her Número de Identidad Extranjero, or NIE, document used to identify foreigners in Spain. A description of the document and its’ use appears in Chapter 7, section 7.2.1.
On a wider scale, entire British entities in Spain stopped using the word ‘expat’ or ‘expatriate’ in written pamphlets, newsletters, or emails. Instead, expressions like “English speaking foreigners” took ‘expats’ place (Costa del Sol & Costa Brava; Field Diary, 2019-2020). This did not occur in places like the Clubs on either coast, where numerous members had been corporate expatriates in their working lives and getting rid of the label seemed unnecessary to them (Nigel, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Patricia, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). This pushed these British entities to preserve the use of the term ‘expat’ in their official websites and pamphlets, despite individualized problematization of the term in others’ experiences (Costa del Sol and Costa Brava, Field Diary, 2019-2020). On the other hand, ethnographic spaces like the Organization and the Charity decided that these changes were necessary, not only because of political reasons, but because this change of terminology was more “welcoming” to other retirees from other origins living on Spanish coasts (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 14/02/2019).

It must be noted that the rejection of the term ‘expatriate’ for others like ‘extranjero’ wasn’t necessarily indicative of being anti-Brexit. It was a way of showing general disenchantment with the UK. And such disenchantment was not mutually exclusive from a pro-Brexit view. Mick, 74, is an example of this, being pro-Brexit while rejecting the term ‘expat’. In Chapter 5, Mick’s disenchantment with the UK, and how that informed his retirement life project, was illustrated through quotes regarding his disagreement with rising British consumerism and work-centered lifestyles. Said disenchantment was oriented towards a pro-Brexit vote, as he believed the geopolitical shift would reinvigorate the country, politically and economically (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 4/03/2020). This led him towards being a reluctant ‘expat’, saying that he “supposed [he] was an expat” with not much conviction (Mick, 74, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

The way in which Mick reluctantly accepts the term ‘expat’ brings us to the crux of British retiree identity construction, particularly in relationship to the label ‘expatriate’: the privileged viscosity of white identity categories. White identity and privileged categories are open-ended and susceptible to transgressions, meaning they are ambiguous and movable (Saldanha, 2007). However, “an escape from whiteness can perversely reinforce it”, meaning that these labels end up recurring to the same patterns which inherently tied those places, practices, and labels back to whiteness (Saldanha, 2007:10). Thus, when people wield the privilege of transgressing the limits of a particular place, space, or activity associated to particular label, that very act of transgression reinforces the white western roots of their privilege. This is what occurs with the label ‘expat’. It can be understood as viscose because it is a term that sticks and slips on British retiree migrants throughout their identification processes, as well as certain places, spaces, and practices the group frequents.

In other words, the label ‘expat’ is open-ended and susceptible to transgressions, as exemplified by how British retirees in Spain move between different identity categories from ‘expat’ to ‘tourist’ or ‘foreigner’ in a grounded manner, depending on context. However, British retirees’ capacity to reject the label ‘expat’, to transgress its borders into the realms of other identity categories and labels, is due to their privilege.
This privilege is deeply rooted in their whiteness and nationality. This inevitably brings the British retiree experience in Spain back to the label ‘expatriate’. This engenders reluctant expatriates who disagree with the label and/or are aware of its’ negative stigma due to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, especially post-Brexit, but still use it because “it’s easier and everyone understands it better” (Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

Consequently, the growing rejection of the label ‘expat’, and it’s associated behaviours, does not mean that its use is disappearing; it is still the label that is most often used by British retirees when referring to British migrant communities. The British social imaginary around the label ‘expat’ is very powerful. It still denotes belonging to large communities; it’s a signifier of privilege, British-ness, and whiteness. The British tradition behind the label makes it the most accessible term to British expatriate retirees abroad when identifying each other as having similar shared experiences, especially in first encounters. But people have started to use the term more reluctantly, using it for its’ function and effectiveness in communication, rather than using it because they feel fully represented by it. With Brexit, the negative prejudices associated to the label were heightened by socio-political tensions and overall disenchantment with the UK. This triggered a backlash towards the term that amplified the pre-existing stigmas that saturated the label. Ultimately, when a British expatriate retiree decides to reject the term ‘expat’ they are expressing disenchantment with the UK, (re)constructing their sense of belonging to both the UK and Spain, while (re)constructing their own identities as well. Despite the latter, the label persists in these environments, spaces, and practices because of the viscosity that allows said rejection in the first place.

The relationship between the British retiree in Spain and the label ‘expatriate’ illustrates how privileged identities are constructed in contradictory manners within ambiguous, slippery, and viscose identity categories. Meanwhile, it also reveals the situatedness and continuous ongoing process that is identity construction.

8.2.3. Being ‘cosmopolitan’

Grown out of the rejection to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, appears an alternative discourse where British retirees speak of being well traveled, open-minded, and cultured. This discourse takes shape in labels like ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘international’, ‘European’, or overall label-lessness. I will refer to this as the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse, which seeks to claim social and cultural capital, while being heavily individualized; lacking the unifying qualities the label ‘expat’ has. The ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse appears as a privileged, individualized alternative to other labels associated to migration categories or other identity categories, assuring connotations of mobility and modernity to those who associate with it (Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2014). It must be noted that the label ‘cosmopolitan’ does not have the same long-standing sociohistorical roots the label ‘expat’ has within British social imaginaries. Thus, the viscosity of this label isn’t as ‘sticky’ as that of the ‘expat’, but is very ‘slippery’, as it is a discourse that encourages disconformity with labels stemming from a privileged standpoint.
As briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, within academia, cosmopolitanism has a rich
past of exploring simultaneous otherness, traced back to illustrious thinkers like
Diogenes and Kant, all who spoke of ‘world citizens’ that transcended nationalist and
kinship ties (Beck, 2002; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2014). This
discourse has become very popular in academia, politics, and mainstream media,
addressing the development of communication technologies, global and local ties, the rise
of globalization, individualization, and fluid mobility; suggesting the end of the reign
of nationalism and the rise of globalism (Urry, 2000; Beck, 2002; Levitt & Glick-
Schiller, 2004). It has also pierced the tourism realm, making ‘cosmopolitan’ into a label that refers
to ‘high quality tourists’, implying a certain socioeconomic standing and sociocultural
knowledge of the areas’ visitors and the area’s appeal on a global basis (Mancinelli, 2021;
Khan, 2011; Toyota, 2006). ‘Cosmopolitanism’ appears as the opposite of rootedness and
a way of highlighting difference over sameness (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Glick-
Schiller & Irving, 2014). These dualisms were crystallized by global elite travelers who
used the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to describe their privileged mobile migration experiences,
constructed against ‘immobile locals’ (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013). This adds a clear
layer of power to the contemporary construction of the term and the dualisms it
accompanies. That is why ‘cosmopolitanism’ has been critiqued for its ties to
institutionalized whiteness and neocolonialism (Hindman, 2009; Glick-Schiller, 2010;
Croucher, 2012; Uimonen, 2019). However, many academics are observing how these
dualisms are changing as ‘cosmospoke’ is infiltrating mainstream media and crossing
social, cultural, and economic class lines (Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2014; Amit & Barber,
2015). Lastly, the context of mobility and modernity in which ‘cosmopolitanism’ has
developed is key to understand the power structures behind its’ construction in that
particular space (Glick-Schiller & Irving, 2014).

In the case of British expatriate retirees in Spain, ‘cosmopolitanism’ appeared in
the form of a discourse, which used a variety of labels as well as label-lessness, crafting
an identity that was globalized and extremely individual. It's use within identity
(re)construction in later life was influenced by liquid and reflexive modernity and its’
market of lifestyles, leading to an extreme fluidity of identity and identity labels when
ageing abroad (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1994). For example, when asked how she would
identify her situation in Spain, Brenda, 72, would say the following: “Everything changes.
I’m English but not really, I am cosmopolitan. I just don’t fit in the boxes anymore, if you
know what I mean” (Brenda, 72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Brenda's answer
highlights the influence of liquid modernity on this ‘cosmopolitan’ way of being abroad,
which is flexible and variant (Bauman, 2000). She tries on a variety of labels with ease,
finally feeling comfortable with being label-less and emphasizing her individuality
(Hindman, 2009). The way Brenda moves between labels is slightly different form how
Mick did, in the beginning of this Chapter, who seemed to reluctantly accept the label
‘expat’ for its’ utility. Brenda feels comfortable being label-less. Because of their
socioeconomic privilege and whiteness, people like Brenda can afford to untie themselves
from the communities that labels come with – like the ‘English’ community or the ‘expat’
community (Hindman, 2009; Pease, 2010).
The way ‘cosmopolitanism’ is constructed in the British expatriate retiree context is like that of global elite travelers, igniting dualisms between rootedness and mobility from an elitist perspective (Croucher, 2012; Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Kunz, 2016). The ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse is used in these British contexts abroad to express an appreciation for sociocultural otherness from a globalized but elitist perspective. It denotes a particularly privileged life history entailing extensive travel experience and contact with other nationalities, while limiting contact with other Britons abroad. That is why those who do not identify with this discourse describe it as “snobbish” because of the socioeconomic connotations it has (Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; John & Kelly, 78 & 75, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Meanwhile, others say it is “modern” or “unique” because of how it rejects all types of community ties, accepts globalization, flexible modernity, and mobility, moving beyond Britain’s colonial past (Beck, 2002; Julia, 65, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Brenda, 72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Jasper & Emmy, 80 and 78, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Brenda is a clear example of this, having lived in various countries throughout her work life, learning local languages and customs (72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Brenda didn’t start partaking in British expatriate life until retirement, when the activities available to her in the Costa Brava were intimately linked with expatriate life; illustrating the viscosity of white privileged places that attract whiteness and reproduce it (Saldanha, 2007). However, she transgressed the ‘expat’ label veering into the realm of ‘cosmopolitanism’ to exemplify her interest in local history, art, and culture. By doing so she was signifying belonging to an upper socioeconomic class that is cultured and individualistic. Thus, this discourse also served as a tool to exclude herself from ‘wrong sort of Brit’ behaviors: “I know it might seem snobbish, but I don’t understand those who move here and don’t try local foods or visit local places. It’s absurd to me” (Brenda, 72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). The ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse opposes the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ because of its association to open-mindedness and high cultural capital that the figure lacks.

Unlike ‘expat’, the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse isn’t as popular or as unifying between British expatriate retiree communities in Spain. This is interesting because in other studies, it has been found that cosmopolitanism does inspire belonging (Jones et al., 2014). Instead, in this context, being ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘international’ still holds one of ‘cosmopolitanisms’ original dualisms, which associates being ‘cosmopolitan’ with mobility and those outside of it to rootedness. In this ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse, the ‘other’ isn’t the local Spaniard, as it has been in many other cosmopolitan studies (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013). The ‘other’ is the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, including the British colonial ‘expat’ and the British ‘tourist’, and their associated stigmas. Consequently, those who identified with the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse didn’t express the same sense of belonging rooted in Spain, or British communities abroad, that other British expatriate retirees did. That is because the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse of British expatriate retirees in Spain asks for individuality and label-lessness, constantly entering in processes of ‘othering’ that inhibits social ties and care networks that other British related labels stimulate (Gardner, 1994; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). For example, whenever Brenda spoke about British
acquaintances that identified with the label ‘expat’, she would speak of them in the following manner:

“I know nothing of the daily lives of these people. Don’t know what they do everyday. I can imagine. [...] I get the feeling that the Brits are always at their homes and their gardens. They all have swimming pools as well. And they all know each other it amazes me. Some way or other if they want to socialize they only mix with each other. Not many Catalans involved at all, or anybody else for that matter.”

- Brenda 72, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Throughout her remarks, she calls other Britons “these people” or “Brits”, evidencing how she is not speaking about her own in-group or sense of identity, making them ‘other’ (Hall, 1996; Lawler, 2014). Even though she spends time with those she is criticizing, Brenda successfully separates herself from their lifestyles, commenting on them as narrow-minded and closed-off.

In the field, ‘cosmopolitanism’ brought a rather minimal sense of belonging to a larger community; explaining the discourses’ relative scarcity when compared to other labels (Beck, 2002). It’s utility when creating long-lasting bonds abroad, which are crucial for ageing in a foreign country70, is practically null. However, the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse persists in the field because of an increasing rejection towards the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure. This further complicates how we understand identity construction in later life migration, as it poses an identity (re)construction where belonging isn’t enhanced. That is why, despite actively participating in British expatriate retiree social spaces and places, some informants would use a ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse to figuratively distance themselves from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ and other British expatriate retirees in general. This would stunt their belonging within these communities, while also (re)constructing an identity that is mobile and globally oriented.

“T: We don’t fit into this category or that category. We are somewhere in between.

S: We are English Kenyans living in Spain!

T: I would say that category sometimes applies. Sometimes. We just travel so much.”

- Tara and Simon, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Tara and Simon, a couple who had lived in Kenya most of their working lives and spoke fluent Swahili and broken Spanish, would continuously resort to label-lessness and their love for travel as staples of their identity abroad. Despite frequently participating in the social life at the Costa del Sol Club, they would utilize their ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse to maintain their individuality within the community of British retiree migrants in Malaga that they were active in. They would use this narrative device whenever faced with the

70 As illustrated in Chapter 6, section 6.4.
label ‘expat’ or ‘tourist’, even when they were at Club events with other members who didn’t adhere to such a ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse.

In a conversation with Julia, 65, this contradiction between taking part in British spaces, places, and activities abroad, while simultaneously maintaining an individual and internationally mobile sense of identity, became evident. As previously stated in Chapter 7, Julia had retired to the Costa Brava with her husband Max in their early 50’s from a lucrative but exhausting working life in a pharmaceutical company in the United States. She said the following about her identity as a retiree migrant in Spain:

“I just think of myself as a retired English person, really. Or even a foreigner, or just international. Yeah, international. Because, when we lived in America, I never considered myself an expat because we didn’t live with English people, we lived with Americans. I think even now we live in an urbanization (housing estate) that has English people but it also has German, French, Danish, Catalan... So... I don’t really see myself as an expat. I just think that expats sometimes are people that live together, socialize together, and do everything together as a group. I think that I am an expat if you put me in the Organization group, but even in that group we want to be individuals. We just don’t want to be seen as being any part of a group. You do great group activities, but you don’t want to be part of any kind of group. We are in the choir but the whole... I mean we are friends with all the Choir people, of course, but they are not our life. You understand what I mean? We have more.”

- Julia, 65, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Julia highlights her own striving for individuality and wanting to be ‘international’, speaking of friends and acquaintances with multiple nationalities. These international contacts are meant to exemplify Julia’s difference from the British ‘expat’ label and help her classify herself as ‘international’. Said classification as ‘international’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ is in direct contradiction with her crucial participation in British spaces, places, and practices. As previously discussed, Julia and her husband Max were one of the most involved couples within the Costa Brava British community, organizing events that mixed locals with British expatriate retirees, gaining social capital within the community through these. However, she claims to partake in these British-associated instances in a manner that ensures her individuality. This is where Julia implies a sense of having more cultural and social capital than fellow British expatriate retirees who base their entire life projects and support networks on the British expatriate community alone. Thus, the importance of individuality and both social and cultural capital are central to this discourse, as exemplified by her insistence on not being part of a group or category; something which was also present earlier with Tara and Simon.

It must be noted that the viscosity of the label ‘expat’ appears once more in Julia remarks. She attempts to refute the label ‘expat’ continuously throughout the excerpt, but she continues to run against it because of its association with different British social entities like the Organization or Choir. Therefore, the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse is a figurative way of making a distinction between oneself and the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, and particularly the label ‘expat’. This excerpt highlights the lack of belonging the
‘cosmopolitan’ discourse foments, trading it for excessive individualism, while also finding that the label ‘expat’ has stronger roots within the British experience abroad that cannot be uprooted easily.

This construction against the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ explains why the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse also represents an extreme disenchantment with the UK. Such disenchantment is also present in the rejection of the terminology ‘expat’ or ‘tourist’, as both highlight what are deemed to be unattractive qualities of the British abroad like extreme consumerism in the forms of alcohol consumption, laziness, and cultural ignorance (Smith, 2012b; Evans, 2017). All of which go against the core of life projects based on ageing ‘successfully’ or ‘well’ abroad. Said disenchantment strongly appears in the identity (re)construction processes of those using the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse as well, because it presents the opportunity of being a sole individual that is unattached by labels while still appreciating sociocultural otherness.

“I don’t want to regard myself as that sort of person, [as an expat]. It’s a snobbish thing to say, but I just don’t regard myself like that anymore. Also, expat, to me means foreigner here in Spain and I don’t regard myself as British anymore; I’m a European, especially now that Britain is no longer in Europe. I used to be proud to be British when I was younger. I was. But now I don’t even like to admit it. I’m European. Or simply international.”
- Dina, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Dina used to be a lawyer who traveled the world throughout her youth and became especially disenchanted with British politics during the Thatcher era (69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Just like Julia, Dina had never thought of herself as an ‘expat’ in any of those previous scenarios. Consequently, Dina’s lack of pride in her home country, and want to shed any labels associated with it, is coherent with her past life history. She starts using other labels like ‘European’ and ‘international’ interchangeably, implying that both indicate broader globalized ways of being in a foreign country than ‘expat’ does. There is also a political disenchantment at play in Dina’s identity (re)construction as ‘international’. Dina’s disenchantment goes far enough that she prefers to detach herself completely from British-tied labels but not enough to completely stop attending British spaces like the Organization. The ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse allows people like Dina to figuratively appeal to their own sense of individuality, label-lessness, and globalization while still participating in locally rooted community activities.

Furthermore, it must be noted that actions associated with the ‘cosmopolitan’ worldview, like learning local languages, being familiar with Spanish neighbors and more, has been tied to the accumulation of cultural and social capital within British expatriate retiree communities – as briefly mentioned in Julia’s case. This is normally articulated through the emic use of the term “integration”. This term, which is discussed in the following section, appears in many ‘cosmopolitan’ claims as well as other British expatriate retiree identity (re)construction processes. This highlights the complexity of labels, and the importance of context when comprehending how each label is constructed. For instance, both Julia and Dina’s accounts highlight the links between internationally
inclined and well-traveled life histories and the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse. These British expatriate retirees have previously frequented environments where the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ was frowned upon before retirement, meaning they have been rejecting British associated labels longer than other British expatriates retiring on Spanish coasts. In these instances, “integration” takes on the intention of representing individuality within the British expatriate retiree community in Spain, while others speak of “integration” with other intentions.

Overall, by appealing to a global worldview, appreciating otherness, exhibiting labellessness, and expressing a need for travel, these British expatriate retirees are crafting identities that are globalized and individualistic, stunting feelings of belonging with local British communities. Despite the latter, they still participate in local community activities while using the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse as a marker of difference. This places them in a complex dialogue with other labels available to them in the field, most notably that of the ‘expat’. This dialogue must be contextualized within geopolitical influences, past historic ties to colonialism, successful ageing discourses, socioeconomic classes, and current rise of mobility practices and modernity. Through said contextualization, the complexity of later life identity (re)construction between British expatriate retirees is emphasized, illustrating the feedbacks that occur between the self and society for identities and feelings of belonging abroad to take shape.

8.3. Attempting to “integrate”: belonging and organizing communities abroad

“You can probably tell I am someone who does make an effort. I didn’t want to come here, like some expats do, it horrifies me (says in a whisper). They come here and they complain that people speak Catalan. […] It astonished me that you would like to come here and live in some sort of splendid isolation up in your ‘urbanización’ on the side of a hill, only talk to expats, and make no real attempt to learn the language, to integrate.”

- Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Ramsay, who has lived in the center of a small Costa Brava town for over 10 years, highlights the importance of “making an effort” regarding participation in local Spanish life when retiring (69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). He uses learning local languages as an example of what “making an effort” may look like, opposing his behavior to that of the ‘expat’ stereotype and its’ associated ‘wrong sort of Brit’ habitus. As a former linguist, his interest in language was unmistakable throughout our meetings. He learned both Spanish and Catalan, which he says he learned “easier than other expats” because of his “near native French” (Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Ramsay would use his Catalan-speaking skills whenever he could: ordering at bars and restaurants, greeting people on the street, or having casual chats with cashiers at shops.

At the end of Ramsay’s excerpt, the term “integrate” appears. This term has a rather contentious state use in regulatory regimes and border control, often conflating ‘social cohesion’ with integration. This is problematic because it promotes erasure of diverse identities, and their correspondent ethnic markers, as successful ‘integration’;
separating racial categories from migration categories in social policies (Anthias, 2012; de Noronha, 2019). However, the use of the term “integrate” or “integration” in British expatriate retiree communities in Spain must be contextualized within the rise of its use in British social policies of the 90’s to early 2000’s. These marked English proficiency as key to obtaining British citizenship and constructed ‘national’ or ‘local’ identities against that of ‘foreign’ or ‘outsider’ identities (Erel et al., 2016). This construction of what “integration” entails has clearly influenced how British retirees in Spain view it, as Ramsay emphasizes the importance of language as a means of leaving his identity as a ‘foreigner’ or ‘outsider’ behind, to be considered a ‘local’ instead. Thus, he is claiming integration is a way of asserting one’s belonging within Spain and within British expatriate retiree communities.

The word “integrate” often came up in interviews with informants, between British retirees in informal settings, or appeared on social entities’ websites. The word was used when speaking about learning the local language (Spanish and/or Catalan, depending on the region), when speaking about local Spanish acquaintances or friendships, or when mentioning favorite Spanish bars or restaurants that were deemed to be ‘typical’ and ‘authentically’ Spanish. Said actions were heavily influenced by the ‘integration’ policies informants had heard of in the UK that were oriented towards the ‘immigrant’ figure; policies which were meant to facilitate ‘immigrants’ stay and reception in the receiving country (Pajares, 2005). Thus, emically, to “integrate” referred to an attempt to belong and culturally adapt to new foreign spaces; something which was also noted in Gustafson’s work of British retirees in Spain (2008). As a community joined by their pursuit to ‘age better’ abroad and the defiance of ageing prejudices, attempting to “integrate” and to what extent, was read as an action of community building within British expatriate communities that showed a dedication to the retirement destination and retirement project. These attempts towards “integration” participated in the reproduction of social and cultural capital, signaling to others a dedication to remain in Spain, shaping the social positioning of community members through actions that were interpreted as leading towards so called “integration” (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Hayes, 2018). Accordingly, attempting to “integrate” was an integral part of British expatriate retiree life in Spain that also signposts the group’s privilege, as not all migrants have the time and/or energy to spend on attempting to “integrate” with locals in the ways British expatriate retirees did.

This was reflected by Town Halls in Costa del Sol and Costa Brava, which attempted to boost British expatriate retirees’ participation in local activities in a variety of ways. For instance, Town Halls along Costa del Sol organized many activities geared towards bringing together foreign residents and locals. For example, in Fuengirola there was the Feria de los Pueblos that involved all migrant groups of the area, who gathered by nationalities and represented their home countries through cuisine, arts, music and

71 The ties between integration policies and migration inequalities are explored briefly in Chapter 3, section 3.1.1.
72 This directly translates to “Fair of the Towns”, but in this context “pueblos” doesn’t refer to towns but to different groups of people.
dance. Each country was given a booth, or caseta, for an entire week. The British caseta was organized by a myriad of British organizations and businesses that would use the occasion to publicize their services. In 2019, the British had one of the biggest casetas in the entire Feria, which they decorated with pictures of Big Ben, the royal family, music icons like the Beatles, and Union Jack flags. They offered fish and chips, pints of beer, and live music (see picture 8 below).

![Picture 8. Local choir singing inside the British caseta during the Fiesta de los Pueblos](image)

Other Costa del Sol Town Halls’ held events with the same goal of mixing foreigners with locals, like a football tournament that encouraged foreign residents, mostly “veteran football players”, to create a football team representing their country of origin (see figure 3). Town Halls in the Costa Brava did not organize these sorts of foreigner and local mingling activities, but they did encourage and helped fund them. For example, the Christmas Pantomime was organized by British expatriates of all ages and funded by various Town Halls, welcoming locals to participate in this British Christmas tradition and practice their English-speaking skills. The Pantomime was an incredibly important event in the British expatriate retiree community, with many members participating in its organization and, those who didn’t, attending as spectators. Another event that promoted mingling was the Carnaval parade, where British expatriates would organize floats and participate in the Town parades like other groups of locals did. This reveals how the concept of ‘integration’ has permeated the realm of public policy in Spain as well as influencing the socially acceptable ways of ‘being’ in Spain within British expatriate
communities. These activities reflect the widespread intention of British expatriate retiree communities to have contact with local Spaniards.

This goes against generalized stereotypes, prejudices, and stigmas attached to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure. However, these events ended up promoting mingling between British expatriate retirees or between other retiree migrants but in the context of local traditions; exemplified by the Feria de los Pueblos or the Carnaval parade, where British retirees participated in local events but did so while being part of a big British group.

Thus, attempting to culturally adapt to Spanish customs and make Spanish acquaintances was an action oriented towards British communities in Spain and not local Spaniards. This solidifies Spain as the backdrop against which British expatriate retirees imagined their ‘good life’ projects (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). As such, actions that were meant to signal “integration” became a space to express one’s dedication to the ‘ageing better’ abroad life project. In turn, this expressed cultural capital which was then converted into social capital that organized British expatriate retiree communities in Spain (O’Reilly, 2000; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Attempting to “integrate” was tied to detection of socioeconomic markers like taste or personal interests that were meant to elucidate a person’s socioeconomic standing, reproducing pre-existing socioeconomic hierarchies of class in later life abroad (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Expressing an intention to “integrate” became a technique to covertly convey socioeconomic class, respecting the
illusion of retirement migration as a space to reinvent oneself without class, while also contributing to the organization of these communities aboard.

The importance given to Spanish cultural adaption, expressed as “integration” by informants, and its repercussions on community organization is exemplified through Max and Julia, a couple that has recurrently appeared throughout this thesis. The couple underwent a change in their social positioning within Costa Brava’s British community post-Brexit and COVID-19, demonstrating how cultural adaptation is turned into social capital within these communities.

Before meeting Max and Julia, I heard about them from other informants in a variety of Costa Brava British spaces like the Organization, the Club, and the Choir. All informants urged me to meet them and speak with them about my research, saying they were a key component of British expatriate retiree life in the Costa Brava (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 24/03/2020). This highly regarded social position was given to the couple because they had been the driving force behind organizing activities that involved British retirees and local Catalans, like the Christmas Pantomime or the Carnival floats. They were the go-to couple for advice on contacting locals who could assist in anything, from paperwork to faulty Wi-Fi, to a broken window (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 15/03/2020). Consequently, they were highly valued by other community members because of their local connections and the opportunities the couple offered to participate in local events (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 24/03/2020).

Once I met the couple, I noticed they exhibited a ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse by constantly highlighting their cultural capital to separate themselves from the prejudices associated with the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, appealing to a more global and mobile way of being abroad. The latter appeared through references to “integration” and the “effort” they made to get to know local Spaniards and meld into their lives, while simultaneously trying to avoid getting too involved in British expatriate life. This is what the couple had to say on the matter:

“Making [local] friends, you have to really make an effort. We did Spanish lessons maybe three or four times a week, go to the local things that the Catalans do, go to their music, go to the theater, that type of thing. But you got to make the effort. I think a lot of people in a similar situation to us, maybe without children, they tend to stay in these homogenous groups, and we tend not to like that. We tend to prefer to mingle with the locals.”

- Julia, 65, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

“When we came it was quite easy to fall into a British expat group. There were quite a lot of people who had been here for three years, five years. And been through everything and were advising us. But we also wanted to try and make as many local friends as we could. We did quite a good job on the local front because we also used to go out ‘tapas-ing’ a lot. We went a lot to Palamós to [a restaurant there] and we got friendly with the owner lady there, who was a mad Catalan and we got friendly with them. They came to our house, we went to theirs, went to parties and so we felt quite pleased with ourselves that we had ingratiated ourselves to some sort of Catalan life and we went for it big time. It wasn’t easy, it doesn’t
come easy. [...] We tried desperately not to get too involved in the expat situation, because we know how isolating and insulating that can be. We have a lot of friends who still can’t speak a word of Spanish and only mix with all the little circle of British and expat people. We always like to think that we were not quite like that.”

- Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Like other informants, Max and Julia emphasize the importance of ‘effort’ when attempting to make Spanish acquaintances and adapt to local customs. They speak about incorporating Spanish customs like going out at restaurants and eating ‘tapas’ or attending Spanish cultural spaces, like music concerts or attending local theater, as a means of gaining Spanish acquaintances. This effort into getting to know their retirement destination beyond the British community is discursively placed in opposition to those ‘others’ who do not make enough of an effort; being reminiscent of the infamous British ‘expat’ and the general ‘wrong sort of Brit’. This establishes their own identities as open-minded and international. These practices become a source of pride for them, as well as a distinctive identity marker that makes them different from other British expatriate retirees who do not place the same effort into “ingratiating” themselves – as they say - with locals (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

What made them stand out within the British Costa Brava community was their success at making connections with local Spaniards. This highlights a general trend where migrants familiar with the destination countries’ customs, language and more, end up becoming leaders of organizations or central figures within migrant communities (Gustafson, 2008). This is what occurred to the couple, as their knowledge of Spanish and Catalan and their local connection assured them a prominent position within British expatriate communities as facilitators and welcoming agents. Julia recounts how they found themselves in this role, helping fellow cohorts with things like doctors’ appointments and paying electricity bills:

“We have helped quite a few people. At first it was nice, but not to sound too selfish, after a while you get people that have problems with their electricity or with talking to this person and that person and we would help them out but after a while we were a bit... we felt that it was a bit... it was too much. It was getting too much, we spent too much time. No disrespect, but you should try to learn some of the languages and stick through some things yourself to get through the other end otherwise you are going to have that problem every time.”

- Julia, 65, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Julia and her husband found themselves continuously confronted with the same issues from people in the British Costa Brava community. This wore them out and reinforced their views on the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, making them more reluctant to participate in these...
sorts of exchanges. Resulting in an erosion of their feelings of belonging to British expatriate communities in the Costa Brava, augmenting their adscription to the ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse.

This had an impact on their social capital. Social capital isn’t permanent and must be continuously strengthened and secured through action (Bourdieu, 1986). Helping community members was a way of assuring a reproduction of their own social capital but their decreasing feelings of belonging made them shy away from these exchanges more and more often. However, their pre-existing connections with local acquaintances and their persistent presence in what they called “integrating” activities like the Christmas Pantomime and the Carnival floats, maintained their social positioning until COVID-19 and Brexit created a context that made evident their withdrawing from the community, in exchange for a ‘cosmopolitan’ worldview (Julia and Max, mid to late 60’s, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

When COVID-19 triggered a worldwide state of socio-sanitary emergency, Julia and Max’s remaining social capital started to fall once the community discovered they had decided to spend the lockdown in the UK (Gwen & Eliot, 75 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). The action of leaving Spain for the UK redefined their identity away from the ‘ageing better’ abroad life project shared within the community; making them lose part of their social capital in the process. “They are older now and, I guess, staying here [Spain] with their daughter there [UK] didn’t make much sense. It gets to the best of us at the end. Not everyone can do this!” said an Organization member during a conversation in lockdown about the couple’s decision (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 30/03/2020). These sorts of comments were sympathetic, but also implied that the couple had either, or both, abandoned and/or failed to carry out their ‘ageing better’ abroad life project by spending the lockdown in the UK. After these comments, others came along saying that the couple had become ‘snobbish’ in their later years, and they hadn’t been spending enough time with other community members (Costa Brava: Field Diary, 02/04/2020).

As mentioned in section 8.1.1., a lack of permanence is a key quality of the British ‘tourist’. Moreover, displaying a desired immobility in Spain became a way of signaling and (re)constructing one’s identity abroad as a permanent resident and British expatriate retiree community member, dedicated to finding the ‘good life’ in old age (Schewel, 2020). Julia and Max’s return to the UK, even though it wasn’t final, was read as a step towards transience that edged closer to the unwanted label of British ‘tourist’ and away from the desired “integration”. Within these remarks about the couple’s choice, there is a covert understanding that ageing abroad and pursuing the ‘good life’ isn’t an easy vacation experience. It is an adventure that requires effort and discomfort. It is through discomfort and effort that ideals of ageing as stagnant are questioned through lived experience (Meethan, 2006; Hayes, 2018). Therefore, the couple lost part of their social capital when they decided to stay in the UK for the first COVID-19 lockdown. Others regarded this action as a sign of the couples’ wavering efforts to culturally adapt, moving them closer to transience and the possibility that they might abandon the pursuit of the ‘good life’ in Spain.
There are various paradoxes in what occurred to Julia and Max. Firstly there is the issue of having to continuously work for one’s social capital to be maintained (Bourdieu, 1986). This is complicated in a community where social capital is reproduced through a highly subjective idea of what it is to age ‘better’ informed by socioeconomic class, gender, and interpretations of the successful ageing paradigm. This includes the slipperiness of British expatriate retiree experiences with its viscose categories of difference, blurring the lines between acceptable ageing experiences and unacceptable ‘tourist’ and ‘expat’ behavior (Saldanha, 2007). Measuring the “effort” oneself and others place in adapting or “integrating” into Spanish society triggers an identity (re)construction that involves the self and the British expatriate community, as it generates feelings of belonging in the process and hierarchically organizes its’ members as well. Max and Julia took the task of “integrating” too far, as they separated themselves so much from the community that other members started to interpret it negatively – calling them ‘snobbish’.

Finding the right amount of ‘effort’ to “integrate” to be accepted into British expatriate retiree communities, dispelling ‘wrong sort of Brit’ connotations, without veering into a ‘cosmopolitan’ discourse that separates you from the British community abroad is difficult. Thus, there is a delicate balance between identity (re)construction abroad and establishing feelings of belonging abroad. All informed and made more complex by the malleable concepts of what ‘ageing better’ is and what it entails when it takes place in a foreign country.

The following pages will explore further how adapting to Spain is relevant to British expatriate retiree community building, connecting identity (re)construction to labeling processes detailed in the previous sections of this chapter. Finally, the relationships between expatriate retirees and locals will be discussed, delving into which types of relationships are more prevalent than others and why.

### 8.3.1. Monitoring and judging ‘effort’

“A lot of people have many friends and relatives to come out and see them. It doesn’t strike me that they go to Spanish places. They go to tourist places. We like to wander up in the car and take a look at the town, village or lake or something. Most of them think of this as a holiday place. [...] We don’t like being tourists and there are lots of tourist things that we haven’t yet done. For example, the Brown’s are always bringing people up to Ronda and having expensive tapas at places filled with tourists. They do this every time someone comes over! It’s tiring and boring just thinking about it. We’re too old for that sort of stuff.”

- Richard B., 81, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Richard B. had a common British expatriate retiree background and life story. He had worked in a corporate job, travelling around the world constantly, picking up some

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74 First mentioned in Chapter 5, when speaking of British migrants living in housing estates, and in Chapter 7, when speaking of bureaucracy and his feelings of entitlement towards Spain rooted from his identity construction as English.
Spanish and French skills along the way. He strongly identified as a British expatriate, when speaking of his positioning in Spain. He participated in various British expatriate social spaces in the Costa del Sol, like the Club and an English-speaking church. However, for Richard, it was important to note how he “made an effort” to go to Spanish spaces and avoid tourist behavior. Consequently, Richard would pay close attention, or monitor, those around him for behavior that could be identified with the label of ‘tourist’. Monitoring was introduced in Chapter 6 when speaking of how old age was constructed in British expatriate retiree communities. Monitoring refers to the act of controlling the behaviors of others, which in Chapter 6 was focused on old age, but here we observe how it can branch out to include other factors as well.

In the above excerpt, Richard B. is monitoring and judging the behavior of the Brown’s, considering it “tiring and boring” because of its proximity to tourist habitus. Within his comments he is implying that touristic places are inauthentic, as if they were an illusion of Spain and weren’t a space for legitimate engagement with local customs and culture (Oliver, 2006, Gustafson, 2008). He compares this to his own behavior and how he does go to “Spanish places”, (re)constructing his identity away from the likes of the Brown’s and the ‘tourist’ habitus. In the very end, he makes a connection between age and his rejection of the ‘tourist’ label and stigma, saying “We’re too old for that sort of stuff” (Richard B., 81, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). This affirmation implies that the Brown’s behavior isn’t in line with what Richard B. believes to be ‘ageing better’ abroad.

Despite Richard B.’s attempts to showcase all the ‘authentically’ Spanish places he frequented and how culturally adapted he was, other British expatriate retirees didn’t think this ‘effort’ was adequate. Some Club members would comment on Richard’s ‘wrong sort of Brit’ behaviors that ranged from him not having his paperwork in order, considered to be “entitled colonialist behavior”, to him attending Sunday Roasts almost every weekend, saying “I guess he (Richard B.) isn’t an adventurous eater and doesn’t want to integrate” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 14/03/2019; 7/3/2019).

Even though Richard B. isn’t considered to be a ‘tourist’, Club members designated his behavior as near to the dreaded British ‘expat’ label. There were also insinuations that he belongs to a lower socioeconomic class, using words like “common” to describe his tastes. Moreover, others mentioned his lack of adventurous-ness, which is seen as opposing the ‘ageing better’ abroad life project meant to subvert Western ideals around old age as averse to change (Hayes, 2018).

Just as Richard B. was monitoring the Brown’s behavior, others were monitoring and judging his. These sorts of interactions act as spaces to (re)construct one’s identity and belonging to the overall ‘ageing better’ abroad life projects British expatriate retirees share and organize socioeconomically its’ members. Consequently, monitoring and judging what is considered to be ‘tourist’ or ‘expat’ behavior is part of the monitoring and judging of old age. This adds a new layer of complexity to the practice, connecting it to the rejection of the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure, linking ‘ageing better’ lifestyles to how one can covertly detect class through terminologies not only centered on age, referencing ‘effort’ and ‘taste’ (Oliver, 2006; Douglas, 2008).
The importance of the ‘wrong sort of Bit’ figure, led informants to closely monitor and judge activities associated with reproduction of British-ness abroad. In other words, British-linked activities were observed with care. Each retiree had their own opinion on the topic of British-linked activities and their acceptability abroad, generating a space through which identity (re)construction processes could take place. Cultural and social capital was constantly mutually (re)constructed through these conversations about British-linked activities. The frequency with which one engaged in British-linked activities was a common topic that led to monitoring and judging of quotidian activities like Sunday roasts, frequenting British or Irish pubs, watching Premiere League football at these pubs and more.

To what extent these conversations on British-linked activities were a site for identity (re)construction became evident while attending a Sunday roast at a British pub with some Club members at Costa del Sol. Lisa and Richard, the couple of “snowbirds” mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, were the ones that suggested having a Sunday roast at a pub at the seafront with three other members, all living permanently in Spain, and myself. The outing was proposed by the couple with the purpose of showing me a “real Sunday roast, like the ones we used to have at home” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 24/03/2019). The other members agreed, but all of them privately let me know that they did not frequently attend Sunday roasts at pubs. This same behavior continued throughout the lunch, but in a very polite manner. Everyone agreed the meal was good and very well-cooked, but the other three members made comments like “it’s been so long since I’ve had a Sunday roast” or “I think the last time I went to a Sunday roast was years ago!” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 26/03/2019). Due to these comments, Lisa and Richard made clear that they only came to this pub once every few months, “if we are here, of course we prefer to go to Spanish places. But once in a while it’s nice” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 26/03/2019). The couple made sure that this event was understood as exceptional. In these conversations, each person was negotiating their identities with this British-linked activity, reconciling their British-ness with their own ‘ageing better’ abroad life projects that demand an intent to adapt, or “integrate”, to Spanish culture and customs.

Monitoring and judging of British-linked behaviors and activities became even clearer with shopping behaviors at British import shops. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is an increasing number of import shops on Spanish coasts, especially at Costa del Sol where one of the biggest British import supermarkets was. In these supermarkets everything was labeled in English and all products were British, ranging from food to cleaning products (see picture 9). Also, all workers spoke English. This meant that it was possible to buy all British products, without having to enter Spanish shops at all. Shopping in these places was a contentious topic because it offered the possibility of living in Spain without having to undergo uncomfortable experiences like misunderstanding non-English speaking supermarket employees or not knowing which product to buy because of deficient Spanish skills. This possibility threatens the lifestyle British expatriate retirees claim to want when ageing abroad, since shopping in a space where everything is familiar doesn’t push at the limits of old age stereotypes and how mobility and
migration is meant to incite self-reflection and trigger new identity processes (Meethan, 2006; Oliver, 2006).

In the Costa del Sol I would accompany David, 85, the president of the Costa del Sol Charity, and his wife Cristina, 82, to the Iceland supermarket after weekly coffee mornings. Each time we went, they would tell me how they didn’t go to Iceland often but, as it was on the way to my apartment, we would just make a “quick stop” there before they dropped me off. They would specify what products they were buying, normally British products they couldn’t find in local Spanish shops like specific brands of biscuits, chocolates, teas, fairy cakes, or frozen scones. Once inside, it was common to find someone from the Charity or from the Club. The exchanges were quick and followed by remarks like “we don’t come here often” or “just came to pick up a couple things” (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 05/03/2019). After the exchange, David or Cristina would comment on the other person’s cart and what they were buying. As a space directly tied to a reproduction of British-ness abroad, it was associated with potential ‘wrong sort of Brit’ behaviors, meaning that these encounters could suppose the loss of cultural capital and, hence, social capital.

While shopping with David and Cristina, there was one specific encounter with a Charity volunteer that illustrates how shopping at these establishments is tied to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure:

“The Charity volunteer had his shopping cart filled to the brim with things. The judgment from Cristina and David was extremely intense afterwards. They spent the entire car ride back commenting on the products he was buying. They couldn’t believe he had bought cleaning products and fresh produce [there] when other Spanish supermarkets were cheaper. They both arrived at the conclusion that [the British supermarket] was for specific...
things you can’t find anywhere else and doing your entire shopping [there] wasn’t only wasteful, but meant that you weren’t willing to try new things.”

- Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 05/3/2019

What products were being purchased and their quantity were key features when remarking on other people's carts. In this scenario, what irked the couple was the quantity and the normalcy of the products the Charity volunteer was buying. Things like fabric softener or fruit were considered products you buy at Spanish supermarkets, meanwhile things like Cadbury chocolates or PG tips tea bags were considered more acceptable things to buy, according to David and Cristina.

Such focus on consumption and its link to general lifestyle choices is reminiscent of Giddens’s and Beck’s reflections on identity, modernity, and lifestyle, where the products you consume are directly linked to the lifestyle you lead, giving material form to a self-narrative a person tells him or herself (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994). By monitoring what was in other people's carts, the couple was gleaning for clues as to what lifestyle choices others were making. Then, such decisions were inevitably measured against one’s own, inciting a reflexive thought. Consuming Spanish products, and developing a taste for them, was something that tied into the ‘ageing better’ lifestyle British expatriate retirees were attempting to construct in Spain denoting a possession of cultural capital; meanwhile continuing to buy British products abroad wasn’t (Oliver, 2006; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Monitoring others consumption was a way of (re)constructing their own lifestyle, entering in a process of mutual (re)construction of identities through reflexivity (Sweetman, 2003; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Therefore, despite the escape narratives British expatriate retirees construct that revolve around an anti-materialistic rhetoric (seen in Chapter 5), this aspect of subjects’ behaviors in Spain highlights the importance of consumption that marks lifestyle and retirement migration (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Benson & O’Reilly, 2015). It also emphasizes the complexities of being embedded in power relations of neoliberal and capitalist societies that are somewhat inescapable. Leading towards the inevitability of having to constantly chose, reflecting how these choices are informed by past life stories and are relative to personal experiences (Bauman, 2000; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Benson, 2016).

Consumption choices are vehicles through which individuals reflect on their own identities and signal their “effort” to “integrate” within Spanish culture and society (Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Actions like going to Sunday roast or shopping at British supermarkets gain such importance because they are the most accessible and recognizable ways for informants to detect whether others are adhering to a shared idea of ‘ageing better’ abroad, as well as elicit others socioeconomic class in a covert manner.

However, what emically constitutes as enough ‘effort’ to “integrate” changes from experience to experience. The way in which British expatriate retirees use these as measurements of class and ‘ageing better’ is very subjective, grounded in personal context (Bourdieu, 1986; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). In turn, this reflects the slipperiness of
privileged identity categories, as what is ‘tourist’ behavior and what is ‘expat’ behavior blends on the field into the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure and its’ associated habitus.

This was illustrated in the Club at Costa del Sol, when they were attempting to gain new younger members to maintain the entity running. This pushed the Club’s Board to relax the membership selection process. Consequently, new members from lower socioeconomic backgrounds than what the Club was used to were now able to enter, generating conflict between older and newer members. The older members described the younger newer members as ‘tourists’, implying that they came from a lower socioeconomic class and had little experience in Spain. Meanwhile, the younger newer members described the older ones a ‘expats’ to convey their upper socioeconomic background and their ‘old fashioned’ way of being abroad associated to a colonialist and imperialist past (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019). However, they used these labels to describe similar behaviors, practices, and situations, like not understanding Spanish or the Spanish bureaucratic system, attending “too many” Sunday Roasts, or other British-linked events, outside the Club. Thus, illustrating the relative, grounded, and ambiguous use of these labels and identity categories.

Monitoring these behaviors, and then labeling them as either ‘tourist’ or ‘expat’, was a way of organizing the community according to socioeconomic class and cultural capital (Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). It was also a way of constructing one’s own identity. By labeling others as a ‘tourist’ or ‘expat’, they were establishing what they were not, a very powerful and effective way of eliciting belonging and triggering identification (Hall, 1996). Consequently the ‘wrong sort of Brit’, and its encompassing of the ‘tourist’ and ‘expat’ labels, are identity vehicles to express belonging, acting as measuring sticks against which behaviors are monitored and judged. This draws hierarchical lines within the ambiguous spaces that are British expatriate retirees’ identities.

8.3.2. “Integration” struggles and the limits of British expatriate retiree lifestyles

As discussed above, “integration” is an emic concept that changes from experience to experience. However, a fundamental part of “integration” for British expatriate retirees that hasn’t been discussed in detail is the importance of establishing local friendships. These relationships signal a permanence in Spain while also reflecting a contribution or participation in societal structures of the receiving country (Pajares, 2005). Relationships between Spaniards and British retirees ranged between acquaintances to closer friendship ties, with the former being more prevalent than the latter. What makes these relationships significantly noteworthy are the problems British expatriate retirees had when forging them, generating experiences of frustration they had to navigate when (re)constructing their identities abroad.

It must be noted that creating ties with locals is complicated in many migration trends besides retirement migration, because migrants tend to have different lifestyles than locals, going to different spaces, places, and activities. In the case at hand, British retirees do not have children that go to a local school or have a job with local co-workers,
making language and sociocultural barriers hard to overcome in their quotidian daily lives. The latter makes evident why expecting "integration" from migrants is far more complex than what public policies may lead us to believe (Pajares, 2005).

Moreover, these experiences must be contextualized within the importance British expatriate retirees give to local connections as these are read as signs of permanence in Spain, dedication the 'ageing better’ life project, participate in the accumulation of social capital, contributing to the (re)construction of identities in later life (Meethan, 2006; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Hayes, 2018). The importance local friendships have is due to the monitoring and judgment of “integration” that occurs in British expatriate retiree communities, where having close Spanish friends becomes a way of conveying many characteristics that were valued positively within these communities ('ageing better', establishing socioeconomic class, and more). This leads to a fixation on establishing friendships with locals, leading to feelings of frustration, and even failure, when not accomplished to the desired level.

Ramsay’s one of various informants who placed great importance on making Spanish friendships and participating in local life, wanting to construct his identity in Spain away from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’. To reach this goal, he joined a Penya Blaugrana, a local club of Barça supporters that would travel to every game. He also taught English for a few years in a public school in Gerona, something he said he did “just for fun”, and directed the Christmas Pantomime (Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava; Interview, 2020). He also spoke Spanish and Catalan quite fluently. Despite participating in these activities, he found that making friends with locals was much harder than he had anticipated. In the following excerpt Ramsay explains his hardships in forging local friendships, first regarding his experience in the Penya Blaugrana and later comparing that to other abroad experiences he has had:

“I get the bus down to the games and I am the only foreigner, if you want, on the bus. I’ve been doing this for ten years! I don’t go down as much as I used to… Nobody speaks to me on the bus. I get a nod now. It is clear that I have established myself, I’m not a one off, they know my face, know who I am, see me on the street, it took me years to actually get a ‘bon dia’ as they came on the bus. [...] I am not a tourist that comes on the bus once, I come regularly, can I get anyone to recognize me? [...] I feel this distance that I never felt living in France. I was much younger, in my 20’s, and much more out and about, working and such. I never felt this unspoken distance. [...] I do make a bit of an effort, and it can get frustrating. The only way I have made Catalan friends is through teaching English and directing the Pantomime. It has to be in an English-speaking setting I have found. If they are interested in learning English, then great! If not, forget about it… it gets hard. After a while, it gets hard.”

- Ramsay, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Ramsay found himself continuously trying to create meaningful relationships with locals unsuccessfully, leading to frustration. These feelings were unexpected, as in previous

75 Barcelona Football Club.
experiences abroad – like when he was a waiter in France in his early twenties – he hadn’t had these issues. However, towards the end of the excerpt he highlights the successful relationships he forged with locals during retirement, distinguishing that these always involved language exchange. Ramsay’s testimony highlights how complicated it can be for migrants to establish close relationships with locals, highlighting the unrealistic expectations the public policy discourse of ‘integration’ creates. Especially if they have migrated to Spain post-retirement with no prior contact, aren’t working, or have family ties to the area. Ramsay’s frustration was shared by other British expatriate retirees, especially those who considered “integrating” with Spanish society a major part of their later life identities and life project plans. Thus, making an ‘effort’ to “integrate” was given positive moral value, and not doing so was frowned upon.

This is what Sophie, 73, explains in the following excerpt. As a stay-at-home mother who was incredibly involved with her children’s lives, when migrating around Europe with her family she didn’t have a hard time making meaningful connections with locals. When she retired to Spain, she found it was harder to make these connections:

“When you move somewhere new with young children it’s just easier to integrate. You have to bring them to school, you have to speak to teachers and other parents, they are learning the language, and so it pushes you to learn it as well. It’s those things that really motivate you to learn the language, make friends with other families and all that. Now, I feel bad because we did the comfortable thing. We tried to learn the language, but it was hard, we were too old. We tried to go to local events, but we just felt like outsiders. [...] It’s just so hard to make your way in, with no real thing connecting you with them [locals], like your children. After a while, it just doesn’t make sense to continue trying. Our life is good like this, but I do feel bad for not trying harder to learn the language, to make friends.”

- Sophie, 73, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

As a retiree in Spain, Sophie felt like she didn’t have any clear pathways to form friendships with her Spanish counterparts. Before, her children’s schooling allowed for a simple pathway to connection with locals; without it, crafting these relationships became harder. Establishing connections with other British expatriate retirees appeared as the easier alternative. Once again, the notion of ‘effort’ and its value reappears through her expression of frustration and guilt when Sophie speaks about her lacking Spanish skills or Spanish friends, saying she “feels bad”. The absences of these relationships within retirement lifestyles are expressed as deficiencies, using old age as an excuse as to why these came to be.

Ultimately, what Sophie is referring to and experiencing is the different lifestyles between British expatriate retirees and local Spaniards. Most Spanish retirees do not lead the same lifestyles British expatriate retirees do. They frequent different spaces and engage in different activities, complicating attempts to create bonds. Other informants also cited finding it hard to spend time with Spaniards because of the differing quantity of leisure time they had. Locals had to deal with family responsibilities or work,
complicating the creation of strong ties between locals and British retirees (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Jack & Simone, 60’s, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Even British retirees who had been able to craft relationships with locals felt these difficulties and frustrations. Max and Julia did create ties with locals during their first years of retirement thanks to their daughter. However, the couple struggled to maintain these relationships once their daughter left Spain to go to university in the UK, saying the following:

“As [our daughter] went to Uni in the UK about 5 or 6 years ago, we let [our relationships with Catalans] completely slide. I think we have become something that we said we didn’t want to be in the first place. I think 95% of our contacts are back in the expat circle. It’s probably the convenience of the language and it’s difficult to keep on top of a foreign language as well. You get older, and you get lazy.”

- Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020

Max explains how maintaining relationships with locals required constant work and contact, which their daughter provided. Bringing her to a Spanish school, meeting her Spanish friends and their parents, helped Max and Julia maintain contact with locals. This was lost once their daughter moved away. They experienced this as some sort of defeat, explaining that this wasn’t their initial intention upon moving to Spain. Later in the interview they repeated that they had been “sliding back into bad habits”, referring to their decreased interaction with locals and their edging proximity to the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure because of it (Max, 69, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Consequently, Max, who had been able to make Spanish acquaintances, experienced losing contact with locals as a failure, as he hadn’t achieved the ideal lifestyle he and his wife had planned when retiring to Spain. This failure is connected to old age at the end of the excerpt, when Max remarks “you get older, and you get lazy”, associating a cause and effect between lack of effort to maintain these friendships with old age. This is reminiscent of traditional old age constructions that associate it with a lack of action (Myerhoff & Simic 1978; Hockey & James 1993). Max’s remark reveals the hidden ageism that lies within British expatriate retiree life projects, where any sort of ‘failure’ regarding previously set expectations is associated to old age. Hence, making evident its ties to the successful ageing paradigm, as well as illustrating the neoliberal influences that construct retirement migration (Phillipson, 1982; Lamb, 2014).

Establishing relationships with Spaniards was experienced in terms of success or failure, tied it to morality. Having these relationships was a visible product of their life projects to ‘age better’ abroad coming to life, marking it a success (Benson, 2016). These black and white expectations frustrate the grey experiences of British expatriate retirees in Spain. Revealing a gap between life project expectations and lived experiences abroad; reminiscent of how old age discourses and ageing experiences interact (Degnen, 2018; Lamb, 2019).

Despite the difficulties presented by differing lifestyles and ageing projects, British expatriate retirees continuously pursued these friendships in the common spaces
between Spaniards and Britons available to them. These spaces depended on the lifestyles they led – whether they always went to the same restaurants and bars, used the same services etc. - and the personal interests they have – do they like cycling, trekking, singing, etc.- presenting different possibilities of encountering locals in their daily lives.

For example, Mick and Martha were able to surpass their lacking Spanish-speaking skills thanks to their love for biking, joining a cycling group filled with local Catalans with the same passion as them (74 & 57, Costa Brava: interview, 2020). Neither of them spoke Catalan and barely understood Spanish, but due to the English skills of locals and their shared enthusiasm for biking, they found a group of Catalan cyclists that they got along with. Another sport that bounded Spaniards and Britons together was petanque. Those British expatriate retirees that didn't belong to a Club with a private petanque course had to use public ones, which meant British and Spanish retirees had to share a social and sporting space, leading to possible opportunities of creating bonds (Costa del Sol: Field Diary, 2019; Costa Brava: Field Diary, 2020).

Others found points of connection with locals through interests in the arts, like singing or painting (Gwen & Eliot, 75 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020; Rachel & Brian, 79 & 81, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Eliot, who was a language and music teacher throughout his working career, found a space for himself in a local haveneres group (Eliot, 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). He was recruited after joining a local choir group where ads for needed musicians were passed around. This ended in him becoming an integral member of the haveneres group and even directing it for a while, playing their music around the Costa Brava for festes majors, or town parties, throughout the summer season. The band broke up because of the time constraints other band mates had due to their main source of work. Eliot keeps in touch with them, getting together to play songs from time to time. Other spaces of encounter are language exchange groups that join Spaniards and Britons together in the quest to learn the other's language. Couples like Brian and Rachel have made lifelong friends out of their language exchange partners, going on vacations with them on multiple occasions (81 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020).

Due to mutual interests and sharing of spaces, hobbies become one of the best ways for British expatriate retirees to build meaningful connections with Spaniards. However, these friendships are limited because not every British expatriate retiree finds a place within these hobbies on a local level, leading them to join British-only groups that offer hobbies that interest them.

Besides the latter, the most common way for British expatriate retirees to make Spanish acquaintances was through service providers. This includes shop clerks,
restaurateurs, waiters, lawyers, and *gestors* (solicitors). These friendships start on a professional level and then through time, develop into more personal connections. For example, in Chapter 7, we mentioned Rose’s close relationship with her *gestora*, Pilar, whom was a key resource for Rose when she was widowed but was also a source of moral support during her grieving process (70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). The two met up regularly for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine to catch each other up on their lives (Rose, 70, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019). Gwen and Eliot also had a close relationship with their *gestor*, who also acted as their real estate agent throughout the years (75 & 79, Costa Brava: Interview, 2020). Other common professional-turned-personal relationships were between Spanish restaurateurs and British expatriate retirees. Many British retirees established close ties with restaurant owners they often visited, to the point that some were invited to family gatherings as significant as birthday parties, first communions, or even weddings (Nigel & Monica, 80’s, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019; Kelly & John, 75 & 78, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019).

These sorts of relationships between expatriate retirees and locals were more frequent because all British expatriate retirees had to contact locals for services, increasing the possibilities of establishing these sorts of connections. It is through these services that most expatriate retirees in this research made connections with Spaniards. This is rather telling of the retirement migration phenomena from the UK to Spain as a whole, exhibiting the unequal power relationship that is established between both countries and its people.

“We come here [local restaurant] about four or five times a week and we went to [the owner’s] wedding! So, we are basically like family with these people. We know the entire family and go to some of the children’s birthday parties... It’s important to keep these sorts of relationships alive, you see. I get to practice my Spanish, we bring people to the restaurant, and talk wonders about them, and they take good care of us. [...] It’s pleasant, we don’t have many Spanish friends.”

- Nigel, 80’s Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

Nigel’s description of his relationship with a local restaurateur, and his family, adequately captures the importance of these relationships for British expatriate retirees and the unequal power relationships between Spain’s locals and the UK’s retirement migrants.

Firstly, Nigel narrates the proximity between himself and the restaurateur through their frequent visits to the restaurant and invitations to family events. This leads Nigel to describe their relationship in terms of close kinship, highlighting the importance this relationship represents for him as one of his only Spanish acquaintances. However, when he describes the exchanges that characterize this friendship, most of them are restaurant centered. Despite the unequal and service-centered nature of this relationship, Nigel frequently spoke about this Spanish family that invited him and his wife to weddings and birthday parties to others, emphasizing the importance of this relationship for his identity construction in Spain as someone who knew Spanish and tried to establish
friendships with locals. This gave him and his wife social capital, securing a respected positioning within the British expatriate retiree community in Costa del Sol.

Consequently, relationships with locals – be them through service providers or hobbies - are another factor that organized British expatriate retiree communities. Establishing these friendships, and controlling the one’s forged by others, was a way of constructing social, cultural, and economic capital in terms of permanence, dedication to shared ‘ageing better’ life projects, and rejecting the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010). Hence, friendships with locals can be considered comparable to other identity construction triggering actions, such as actively avoiding tourist areas or having or not one’s paperwork in order (Hall, 1996).

Additionally, as various academics studying integration policies have noted, making bonds with locals as a migrant is also dependent of the receiving country (Pajares, 2005). Local Spaniards generally read Britons in Spain as transient migrants, normally associating them to the ‘tourist’ figure (Monnet, 2001). Actions like the consumption of services, which are associated to holidaymaking, were more easily recognizable as the norm for British abroad behaviors than sharing hobbies. Thus, explaining why those British retirees who participated in consumption of services – like Nigel - got more engagement from Spaniards, as this form of “integration” falls within the norm of expectations for the British abroad. Consequently, creating and maintaining relationships with local Spaniards is a complex process that does not solely depend on the ‘effort’ British retirees exert, but also on the willingness of locals to accept them into the folds of their lives. This explains the mostly British dominated support networks expatriate retirees have in Spain, with friendships with locals being complimentary. This emphasizes the complexity behind crafting feelings of belonging to British communities in Spain and Spain itself; as the retirement destination finds itself as the backdrop against which identities are (re)constructed in the face of other British expatriate retirees (Benson, 2016). In turn, feelings of belonging to Spain are a gateway to accumulating social and cultural capital in expatriate retiree communities (Bourdieu, 1986).

Between the Costa del Sol and the Costa Brava, there were noticeable differences when it came to the importance given to attempting to build meaningful relationships with local Spaniards and, thus, “integrate”. Even though there were British retirees in the Costa del Sol that shared these feelings of frustration, making local friends and general belonging to Spain appeared as a more pressing expectation in the Costa Brava, where these feelings of frustration were more evident. As explained in Chapter 4, the Costa Brava has a smaller, less noticeable British expatriate community than Costa del Sol, where British presence is more apparent. That was one of the reasons informants cited for choosing to retire to Costa Brava, saying they were avoiding tourist and expat-filled areas. In other words, Costa Brava British expatriate retirees had constructed life projects plans that were based upon the avoidance of British spaces, places, and activities. Distancing themselves from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure and crafting their identities abroad as adventurous with a high cultural capital, while belonging to Spanish local communities, not British communities there.
In the following Field Diary excerpt, this pressure to avoid the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure, and instead attempt to “integrate” into Spanish society, can be observed when Martha recounts her realization regarding the complicated nature of forging friendships with locals. Something which went against her expectations:

“Martha told me about her first months in Spain and how at first, they were exciting but then dreary. Not understanding Catalan or Spanish made it very difficult for her to make friends with locals. She said she tried hard with no result. So, when she heard someone speak in English in a mercadillo78 one Saturday morning, she says she felt relieved. Martha made clear to me that it wasn’t her intention to make friends with ‘expats’, but at the end it was the easiest way for her to get a social life. She spoke about how disappointed she felt when she realized most her friends were British, but this was palliated when she and her husband made friends with local mountain bike aficionados like them.”

- Costa Brava: Field Diary, 4/03/2020

Martha’s experience was common between British retirees living in the Costa Brava. She had crafted a later life project plan that was based on “integrating” but found that lifestyle differences between Spaniards and British expatriate retirees blocked the creation of meaningful connections. When British support networks took on more importance in the couple’s lives than anticipated, acute feelings of frustration, failure, or guilt ensued. Later in their retirement journeys, Martha and Mick found a group of Catalans to go biking with that palliated those feelings, meanwhile other informants in the Costa Brava did not. Meaning that many Costa Brava informants had to live with these feelings and negotiate with them as their retirement in Spain unfolded.

One the other hand, the life project plans constructed by informants on the Costa del Sol didn’t rely so heavily on their capacity to “integrate” with locals as much as the life projects of those on the Costa Brava. Accordingly, British expatriate retirees on the Southern coast appeared more comfortable with the idea of belonging to British expatriate communities in Spain and not Spain itself. For example, John, 79, comments on his feelings of belonging to Spain, exposing an acceptance of his lack of local friendships:

“I suppose that after 12 years, we feel a certain degree of integration into the system, […] For example, we know some Spanish people from restaurants… but we aren’t fully Spanish yet, and we couldn’t take the Spanish nationality test with what we know of Spain. But that’s okay.”

- John, 79, Costa del Sol: Interview, 2019

John’s remarks show an acceptance of his and his wife’s positioning in Spain and the belonging that supposes. British expatriate retirees like John knew that the Costa del Sol

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78 A mercadillo is a makeshift itinerant market normally set up at the Town Square or main streets of a town once a week, where you can buy a variety of products from fresh produce to clothes, depending on the town.
was a space British retirees frequented. Unlike informants retiring to Costa Brava, for John and his wife this was a pull factor. Having or not Spanish connections was something that added to one’s identity (re)construction abroad, meaning feelings of frustration and failure linked to lacking “integration” were lower in Costa del Sol. Those in the Costa del Sol arguably felt more belonging to Spain thanks to their consumption of services and embrace of service relationships. Meanwhile informants in Costa Brava had unrealistic expectations regarding their Spanish “integration” leading to more of them expressing feelings of alienation than their Costa del Sol counterparts. This difference between coasts illustrates the power of consumption to elicit feelings of belonging, especially when unrealistic expectations of “integration” are put aside (Giddens, 1991).

When inspecting the relationships British expatriate retirees create with Spaniards, the limits of their later life projects become evident. These illustrate how hard it is to “integrate” and ‘age better’ according to the standards set by British expatriate retirees themselves. As retirees, they do not have jobs or young children that encourage connection to other locals or that create shared spaces. Simultaneously, locals blend British expatriate retirees with the wider group of ‘tourists’, further complicating the formers intention to “integrate” in Spain. Consequently, relationships between locals and British retirees are hard to forge and stand the test of time. This reveals how the expectation to craft these relationships, just as other expectations like avoiding British spaces, places, or activities, is unrealistic when considering the pragmatics of being a retirement migrant. These expectations are counterproductive, generating feelings of frustration and failure that tinge the ageing experience abroad. Said feelings of frustration can also be found in other facets of British expatriate retiree experiences, like when they are faced with unexpected instances of vulnerability. Furthermore, said relationships depict the complexity of crafting feelings of belonging abroad, while also being intertwined with how communities are organized abroad through social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

British expatriate retirees have limits to their lifestyles that are evidenced when the goals they set in their later life project plans aren’t met. Making friends with locals is one of various factors that emphasize these limits, drawn by the privilege these groups enjoy. Their privilege allows them to be removed from Spanish society, allows them to move between labels, and allows them to identify with label-lessness without it being, initially, detrimental to their capacity to thrive abroad79 (Pease, 2010). Still, that very privilege is what muddles their relationships with locals and belonging to overall Spanish communities, as these share few social spaces and have differing lifestyles; all because of their condition as British retirees with enough socioeconomic resources to pursue retirement migration in Spain (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; Benson, 2016). In other words, informants’ privileged positioning as white British retirees is what keeps them

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79 I say “initially” because when old age intersects this experience it can easily and quickly tip a privileged experience into a vulnerable one, as seen in Chapter 6.
within the confines of a particular experience abroad, frustrating their unrealistic ‘ageing better’ expectations, tied to “integrating” expectations, generating a gap between lived experience and life project plans (Degnen, 2007; 2012; Saldanha, 2007).

The latter is also observed in the viscosity of the label ‘expat’, which sticks to British spaces, places, and identities, despite growing discomfort with British nationalism due to geopolitical shifts occurring in the UK and Europe (Saldanha, 2007; Kunz, 2020). British expatriate retirees attempt to transgress the limits of the ‘expat’ label, by slipping into other identity categories like ‘cosmopolitan’. However, that very action simply ties them more to whiteness and privilege (Saldanha, 2007). Thus, engendering reluctant ‘expats’ with complex identity negotiations that navigate the prejudiced ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure the label ‘expat’ is closely associated with (Zanna & Olson, 1994; King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000).

By observing the limits of the privileged lifestyles of British expatriate retirees an ongoing paradox that has appeared throughout this thesis is revealed once again: the gap between experience and discourse when it comes to retirement migration. British expatriate retirees’ not only experience an overall pressure to age successfully discussed in Chapter 6; they also experience the pressure to separate themselves from the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure, which conflates its avoidance of British places, spaces, and activities with ‘ageing better’, while also accumulating social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Lamb, 2014). This generates a complex interwoven web of identity (re)construction processes, where ‘ageing better’ and “integrating” are set as the heavily subjective and context-dependent markers that govern feelings of belonging and organize British communities abroad in a coded manner that sidesteps explicitly classed language (Brah, 1996; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). This is where labels such as ‘expat’, ‘tourist’, or ‘cosmopolitan’ come in. These are used to detect certain habitus that are deemed undesirable within the community, depending on the context (Brah, 1996). These are employed in day-to-day practice, showing how identities are constantly (re)constructed between the push and pull between the self and society (Bauman, 2004; Lawler, 2014).

Overall, this chapter illustrates how different labels, grounded in both British and Spanish social imaginaries, participate in later life identity (re)construction, elicit feelings of belonging, and organize these communities through the accumulation and conversion of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). These labels are accompanied by the emic concept of “integration”. Through acts of “integration”, labels are repelled and adjudicated through monitoring practices, creating a push and pull between the self and society that triggers identification, elicits belonging, and organizes British expatriate retiree communities in a coded manner (Hall, 1996; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010; Lawler, 2014). These labeling practices and belonging processes emphasize the privileged positioning of British expatriate retirees in Spain, illustrating the limits a privileged life project can have.
9.1. Ethnographic flashforward

From May 13th to 15th, 2022, I visited Lisa and Richard\textsuperscript{80} in their hometown in North Yorkshire. I had met the couple in Malaga back in 2019 and formed a strong friendship with them during my months in Costa del Sol. Now, they were permanently living in the UK, leaving their days as seasonal migrants behind. We hadn’t seen each other since 2019, but we had kept in touch throughout the years. The couple had insisted I come visit them in their hometown in Northern England when they found out that I was spending some months in the UK for my International Mention.

During my first dinner with them, it was as if no time had passed, but by the conversations we had, it was inevitable to notice how much had changed since we had last seen each other. The couple, who had moved seamlessly between the UK and Spain back in 2019, hadn’t been to Spain since June 2020. During first stages of the COVID-19 lockdown, they found themselves stuck in their small, rented apartment not being able to go to the UK where their children lived. After almost 4 months of failed attempts to return, they were able to get on a ferry to the UK in the summer of 2020. All the way through 2021, they didn’t dare go back, worried that they would get stuck again. Now, they claimed that the fear of undesired immobility had dissipated, but they had lost touch with many of their friends there, while some had even passed away during those 2 years. Between them was the 102-year-old woman, Jacqueline, who they were very close to after spending so many winters at the Costa del Sol. They hadn’t been able to attend the funeral.

Dampening their wishes to go back, was the fact that the Costa del Sol Club was rumored to be on the brink of closure. This wasn’t shocking. All the way through 2021, I had heard from other informants who shared this fear, saying that COVID-19 and Brexit had created the perfect combination of events to exacerbate the Club’s pre-existing issues: lacking younger members and a burnt-out Administrative Board. Like many other British social entities in Spain throughout the years following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Club had lost many of its’ members and the turnout to its classic events, like petanque and dinner dance parties, was reduced incredibly.

All of this has made Lisa and Richard reconsider their retirement project plans abroad. Lately, their day to day lives consisted of similar activities to those they did in Spain, but in the UK: Richard golfs and fixes a secondhand river boat they recently purchased, and Lisa goes to the boat club and takes care of house affairs and renovations. Even though they love their small town, they are considering moving elsewhere closer to amenities and hospitals because of their dwindling health.

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\textsuperscript{80} Lisa and Richard appear in Chapter 8 when speaking about the aversion to the ‘tourist’ label. They are seasonal migrants.
Despite the latter, the couple was starting to toy with the idea of travel again, thinking of visiting remaining friends in Spain or going as far as Australia to see extended family. However, there was still a bit of a fear that didn’t exist before. This fear can be linked to COVID-19, but it can also be connected to their ageing condition.

This reunion with Richard and Lisa in the UK illustrates how much the field and its’ conditions had changed since I started fieldwork in 2019. Even though Richard and Lisa had never considered living in Spain fulltime, being seasonal migrants for over 15 years, they now were settled in the UK; something they wouldn’t have expected when I met them for the first time during a petanque match at the Club.

I wanted to start the concluding chapter in this way to put this thesis, and the material in it, into perspective. Throughout the process of this doctoral research, there have been two pivotal events in Europe that deeply changed how British expatriate retirees approached their life projects in Spain. This thesis captures those moments, its’ changes, and nuances, posing questions as to how this migration and mobility trend will continue, which forms will it take, and whether Spain could potentially be left behind as one of the Briton’s go-to retirement destinations. To fully understand the previous statement, it is essential to consider the theoretical reflections and contributions this work accomplishes.

9.2. Revisiting objectives and intentions: the intricacies of the quotidian and nuancing privilege

One of the main objectives of this research has been to contribute to the empirical and conceptual debates regarding migration, ageing, and identity, emphasizing how these intersect, creating and perpetuating conditions of privilege and inequality. Throughout this thesis, the lives of British expatriate retirees have served as the empirical framework upon which these concepts were analyzed and discussed. Utilizing their seemingly privileged retirement migration experiences where ageing, migration, and mobility intersect to explore the intricacies between privilege, vulnerability, dependence, and precarity. In the process, the lives of British expatriate retirees were illustrated, depicting their day to day, how they made plans, how they interacted with other British expatriate retirees and Spaniards, and how they constructed their own feelings of belonging and identities through these plans and relationships. The minutiae of the quotidian is what allowed for traditional migration categories to be questioned, differences between old age discourses and ageing experiences to be pinpointed, and complex identity processes to be exposed.

A central aim of this research has been to nuance the privileged lives of British expatriate retirees, illustrating the importance of instances of vulnerability, some nearing precarity, without minimizing the substantial privileges they enjoy due to their whiteness, disposable income, and nationality. By creating situated and grounded knowledge through ethnography, differing contexts on the field and an interplay of various factors that construct heterogenous experiences and identities are acknowledged (Haraway, 1988). This has allowed for emic concepts and experiences to emerge from the
field, like age defying performances detailed in Chapter 6, tactic-like strategies regarding life project planning and bureaucracy in Chapter 7, or the use of the word “integration” in relation to labelling practices in Chapter 8, to name a few.

British expatriate retirees’ position between privilege and precarity due to their ageing and migration intersecting experiences, is what has allowed this research to explore its three axes. The latter characteristics added with shifting geopolitical and sociosanitary contexts of Brexit and COVID-19 is what has made this research significant and relevant to current Anthropological debates. Thus, there has been an express intention to anchor data in a particular moment in time, giving historicity importance (Brah, 1996). This can be observed throughout the thesis: when the labels available to British expatriate retirees are dissected in Chapter 3 and Chapter 8, or when the unequal relationship marked by tourism between the UK and Spain is described in Chapter 5. By highlighting the specific, the general is also brought to the forefront, commenting on how the three axes that construct this thesis are evolving within Anthropological debates and their ties to wider sociocultural circumstances.

9.3. Meaningful contributions and thesis highlights: gaps, slippery identities, and persistent privilege

The three main axes of this thesis have determined the Anthropological contributions this research presents. Firstly, in the realm of identity and old age in the Global North, this thesis has worked towards discussing these intersectionally and in a nuanced manner. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these two concepts have sparked much academic debate, as one has a lynchpin positioning between the self and society that has historically been contentious and the other is charged with conflicting discourses that invisibilize or problematically uplift ageing experiences (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Lawler, 2014; Degnen, 2018; Jubany, 2020a). This thesis approaches identities as multiple, ever-changing, and processual entities. Meaning they must be acted upon continuously, both individually and collectively, through everyday action and discourse that also construct feelings of belonging (Goffman, 1956; Bourdieu, 1989; Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996; Bauman, 2004). As such, identities are sites where intersections of difference, oppression, and privilege are embodied, mapping out power relations within them. When investigating privileged experiences, like that of British expatriate retirees in Spain, identities appear as the adequate vessels through which these can be properly approached and analyzed with nuance and care.

This intersectional analysis of identities pushes this thesis to contextualize identity construction in the parameters of the Global North. The latter is generally characterized by a liquid reflexive modernity that is uncertain and risky, underpinned by individualist discourses that eat away at feelings of class belonging and are substituted by increasingly individual reflexive lifestyles; which in turn are influenced by neoliberal socioeconomic political agendas (Bourdieu, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Bauman, 2004). It is within said context that old age and ageing are explored in this thesis, including a variety of perspectives ranging from Gerontology to Anthropology as well as
an intersectional approach. This deepens ageing debates beyond individual experiences too, analyzing its relationships with wider structures and sociocultural imaginaries (Phillipson, 2013; Calasanti & Giles, 2018). Through said analysis, this thesis has highlighted issues regarding Western discourses on ageing; uncovering how discourses like the decline narrative or the successful ageing paradigm are founded upon the avoidance of old age and its’ repercussions on the body, mind, and social life (Lamb, 2014). This reveals a gap between the epistemology and the pragmatics of ageing that is central to this research’s’ discussion, illustrated in ethnographic chapters that have captured how said gap affects ageing experiences abroad resulting in complex identity (re)construction processes (Degnen, 2007).

Building on this, the theoretical analysis of this thesis shifts to migration, placing privileged migration trends in dialogue with those traditionally catalogued as ‘other’ (in Chapter 3). This unveils the relativity of traditional migration categories and the growing complexity of global mobility trends, which emphasize how mobility regimes are changing while also perpetuating power structures contextually (Croucher, 2012; Green, 2015; Kunz, 2016). This approach is central to this research, as it sets the foundations as to why paying attention to labels related to migration and mobility can shed deeper understanding about how privilege and inequality is reproduced on the ground; using concepts like ‘viscosity’ to further illustrate this relationship between labels, privilege, and inequality (Saldanha, 2007; Mata-Codesal, 2015; Hayes, 2018; Mancinelli, 2021). Through the figure of the ‘expatriate’ and the ‘cosmopolitan’, the interconnection of migration categories and their situated ambiguity is made evident. Illustrating how privileged migrants construct their identities in direct relationship to ‘othered’ migrant categories – most notably the ‘immigrant’. Accordingly, this thesis participates in the breaking of long existing dualisms and dichotomies in how migration studies are approached, nuancing between what is privileged and what is not.

The theoretical positioning described above can be found in how this investigation approaches retirement and later life migration and mobility. This migration and mobility trend - part of the overarching lifestyle migration umbrella - is no longer only accessible to the uber wealthy; trickling down across class lines to include a variety of groups that are searching for the ‘good life’ abroad (Salazar, 2014; Torkington, David & Sardinha, 2015). This search to ‘better’ one’s lifestyle through migration and mobility illustrates how lifestyle choices are commodified within Global North societies, revealing ways in which Western white people attempt to transcend class structures by moving elsewhere (Giddens, 1991; Korpela, 2014). Retirement and later life migration partakes in this textured reality of intersecting privileges and inequalities, embodied in North-South flows of migration and mobility. Unlike other forms of lifestyle migration, retirement and later life migration and mobility include the factor of old age and ageing. It affects how privilege is experienced and how life course transitions are given meaning on a social, cultural, and economic level (Amit, 2007; Bourdieu, 2007; Salazar, 2014).

Subsequently, the theoretical foundation detailed above was paired with a methodological approach based on ethnographic methods that include participant observation, in depth interviews, and focus groups (detailed in Chapter 4). This
ethnographic framework follows the intersectional approach that drives analysis throughout the thesis. In this manner devising methods that aided the reveal of power relations, while grounding them within everyday practices and discourses collected from the field.

To contextualize the lives of British expatriate retirees in Spain further, the thesis exposed the unequal relationship between the UK and Spain; a relationship historically marked by tourism and retirement migration flows (in Chapter 5). The influence this geopolitical and historical condition had on retiree migrants was detected in informants’ migration discourses and escape narratives (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Betty, 2017). Within these, Britain is constructed as place to escape from through the configuration of a shared ‘Bad Britain’ discourse between British migrants in Spain (O’Reilly, 2000; 2002). Meanwhile, Spain is presented as an antithesis to the UK, where ‘better’ ageing experiences are readily available; not only because of warm weather and lower prices, but also because of social values that benefit successful ageing life projects. Thus, resulting in a laid-back holiday-like rendering of Spain that revealed implicit hierarchies of power within the EU. These constructions of place are revealed throughout the thesis, informing how British expatriate retirees chose a coast to retire to, setting expectations that triggered identity (re)constructions from the very beginning of informants’ migration journeys. These expectations shifted when experiencing life in Spain, leading some informants to express an entitlement towards Spain that made the unequal relationship between both countries even more explicit.

Said unrealistic expectations take a different shape when analytically approaching old age and ageing. In Chapter 6, the thesis contributes to Degnen’s work on the existence of a gap between old age discourses and ageing experiences as well as Lamb’s assertion that meaningful decline in the Global North is complicated to attain (Lamb, 2014; Degnen, 2018). This was achieved through ethnography by unraveling day-to-day life experiences and the unrealistic later life expectations to age ‘well’ that influenced them. These old age expectations ignore gender and socioeconomic differences, as well as general access to resources. Hence, avoiding the fact that categories of difference are exacerbated when taken into later life (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). Nevertheless, these unrealistic ageing expectations create feelings of frustration and uncertainty when they aren’t met (Lamb, 2019). This led to unexpected instances of vulnerability, where British expatriate retirees experienced ageing in a manner that was far removed from the old age discourses they adhered to (successful ageing paradigm) or were running away from (decline narrative). This was further demonstrated during initial stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, when many informants were unprepared for ageing-related issues that arose as the sociosanitary crisis unfolded (Hall, 2021). Thus, this thesis establishes that when old age and privilege intersect, it doesn’t necessarily result in ‘better’ ageing experiences, highlighting the paradoxical proximity between privilege and precarity (Grenier, Lloyd, & Phillipson, 2017). This gap between discourses on old age and the pragmatics of ageing, as well as the privilege-precarity paradox, are two of the key contributions this thesis brings to the debate on old age and ageing in Anthropology.
Furthermore, in Chapter 7, this thesis ethnographically illustrates the intricacies of the privilege-precarity paradox through informants' relationships with bureaucracy and paperwork. This approach to the paradox was an answer to contextual changes on a legal, bureaucratic, geopolitical, and sociosanitary level that were affecting British expatriate retiree experiences. One of the most notable changes is the shift regarding Britons' legal invisibility in Spain, which - pre-Brexit and COVID-19 – gave the group privileges over other migrants. Now, this legal invisibility is void due to a myriad of factors. These shifts affected the foundations upon which their later life project plans were crafted, laying bare disparities between British expatriates that before were harder to pinpoint. This led to the differentiation between those who could devise a strategy regarding their bureaucratic positioning in Spain and those who had to resort to strategy-like tactics (De Certeau, 1984). This distinction nuances privileged experiences, showing how access to socioeconomic resources is crucial in later life project planning and when experiencing ageing abroad.

As a means of pinpointing where experiences started to veer into the realm of precarity, this research exposes a gradient of feelings related to bureaucracy and paperwork that emerged from the field. These include entitlement, security, uncertainty, and anxiety. Those informants who felt the two latter in their experiences with paperwork were more prone to instances of unexpected vulnerability and overall precarious experiences; often having migrated on their own to Spain with limited socioeconomic resources. In this way, this thesis illustrates the widening inequality between British expatriate retirees in Spain, marking a unique and unprecedented moment in time when many were experiencing undesired (im)mobility or uncertainty and risk related to their legal status (Salazar, 2021).

Nevertheless, British expatriate retirees craft their identities, belonging, and overall community hierarchies in a relatively privileged context. The thesis emphasizes that in Chapter 8, where the interchangeable use of labels like ‘tourist’, ‘expat’, or ‘cosmopolitan’ highlight the viscosity of privileged identity categories and evidence the privilege these groups hold (Saldanha, 2007). Said privilege is grounded into the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ ideal Weberian type: an amalgamate of stereotypes and prejudices about British behavior abroad that layer’s various social imaginaries of implied socioeconomic class, anchored in a British and European context. This figure was one to be avoided, triggering identity (re)construction processes where informants used the privilege of being able to choose or reject labels to construct their identities away from stereotypes and prejudices they had to navigate. Through these slippery labelling practices, this thesis contributes to identity literature from a privileged vantagepoint. This way illustrating the dialectic relationship that exists between the self and society, mutually (re)constructing each other in a grounded and contextualized manner (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Saldanha, 2007; Lawler, 2014). However, the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ figure also highlights the pervasiveness of the shared ‘ageing better’ project that bonds the British retiree community in Spain. The habitus of the ‘wrong sort of Brit’ includes ignorance of local history, cuisine, and language, while also frequently occupying British spaces in Spain, behaviors that are seen as going against said ‘ageing better’ project (Bourdieu, 2007).
Thus, this figure adds a layer of complexity to the importance of old age in these communities, as it evidences how ‘ageing better’ can also be used to covertly convey socioeconomic class, organizing British expatriate retiree communities accordingly (Oliver, 2006; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010).

Ultimately, the work conducted demonstrates that labels not only construct one’s identity and belonging, but also construct and organize communities abroad in a manner where the intersections of class, age, gender, and privilege all come to a head. Between British expatriate retirees, labels provide ways to accumulate social and cultural capital, moving beyond terminologies of class by switching from one label to another (as seen in Chapter 8) (Bourdieu, 1989; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). This leads to the monitoring and judging of unspoken socioeconomic class traits related to Britishness through markers like taste or ‘integration’. These materialize in practices like consumption of Spanish goods or occupying Spanish places, avoiding (to a certain degree) British activities and places, and attempting to establish friendships with local Spaniards. These actions are monitored and judged in a manner that is tied to how old age is controlled within these communities, as these habitus are heavily linked with the conceptions of ‘ageing better’ each British expatriate retiree creates for himself (Oliver, 2006; Degnen, 2012). The ways in which these labelling and belonging processes take place, as well as how communities are organized, is subjective to personal experience. Establishing one’s identity and belonging within these communities is a continuous work in progress. Informants had to mediate with conflicting labels, constructing new feelings of belonging, and devising individual and communal appreciations of what it meant to ‘age better’ in Spain; reflecting the generalized current state of uncertainty in which identities must be constantly constructed and reconstructed in the Global North (Bauman, 2007).

Throughout the thesis, what becomes evident is how important old age is within later life projects and experiences in British expatriate retiree communities in Spain. Old age, it’s associated discourses, and the way it is experienced, pierces the entirety of this thesis in unexpected ways, affecting the most minute of quotidian decisions, shaping identity (re)construction, and informing how communities are organized. Consequently, this research contributes towards the understanding of ageing experiences, exploring how emic understandings of what ageing is – influenced by old age discourses – shape later life and (re)construct identities. All in a context specific manner, depending on factors such as class and gender, as well as personal experience and past work lives. What is also indispensable is the application of an intersectional approach to the data collected.

This intersectional analysis, and approach, is achieved in this thesis by exploring the use of concepts such as ‘ageing better’ between British expatriate retirees or by detecting the gap between old age discourses and ageing experiences on the field. Through said ethnographic attention to detail, this thesis illuminates the intersections and nuances of constructing identities and belonging abroad during later life, while also illustrating how shared social imaginaries are crafted in the interplay of the self and society (Hockey & James, 1993; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Lamb, 2014; Lawler, 2014). It is through this analysis that the privilege-precarity paradox is unveiled, nuancing the homogenous ways British expatriate retirees tend to be depicted in British and Spanish
shared social imaginaries (Hall & Hardill, 2016). Moreover, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity for further nuance because these brought structural and foundational changes to the ways in which British expatriate retirees constructed their later life migration projects in Spain (Hall, 2021). These changes made this paradox more pronounced, resulting in widening inequalities that this thesis documents.

Despite the previously explored nuances, British expatriate retirees still experienced relative and significant privilege in their day to day lives, which this thesis does not aim to minimize or leave behind. Said privilege can be traced back to the unequal relationship between the UK and Spain that affected how they shaped their later life project plans. Throughout this thesis, the unequal relationship between Spain as a retirement destination and the UK as sender of retirees was made tangible in feelings of entitlement that arose in the field. These surfaced when analyzing how and why Spain is conceived as a holiday-like destination in Chapter 5, or when approaching informants’ relationships with bureaucracy and paperwork in Chapter 7, or in Chapter 8 when speaking of the label ‘expat’ and its’ close ties with entitlement and coloniality. By ethnographically exploring expressions of entitlement on the field, this thesis successfully grounds British expatriate retiree realities within an unequal geopolitical relationship that is key to the UK-Spain retirement migration phenomenon. Meanwhile it also highlights the importance of problematizing and analyzing privilege in ageing experiences abroad.

When exploring later life experiences post-migration, privilege must be considered in its many forms, be it structural, materially, geopolitical, or racially, to name a few. This is especially important when considering the longstanding associations between privilege and retirement migration. This thesis underlines the importance of analytically approaching privilege as well as precarity, giving both weight in later life experiences and leading to better depictions of what ageing abroad is like.

9.4. Where are they now and directions for future research

Before definitively concluding, I wanted to revisit the field as a means of gauging how it has changed now that this research has concluded. This is an interesting exercise not only because of all the contingent transformations that have occurred since the last ethnographic vignette; but also, because it frames final reflections and future contributions, indicating the direction in which theoretical debates regarding identity, ageing, and migration may be headed.

On July 1st, 2022, I received a Facebook message from Lisa and Richard saying the following: “We are sorry to hear the Club in Spain is closing for good. Not enough members to make it a viable proportion, shame. The end of an era.” As soon as I heard the news, I contacted members of the Club who were still living in Costa del Sol. These made similar comments, lamenting the Club’s end. Despite the latter, they all pointed at other elements in their lives that were keeping them engaged. Some spoke about spending more time with family, particularly grandchildren that had come to spend the entirety of the summer holidays in Spain. Others spoke about pursuing their passion for painting or
language learning, saying that they now had the time to do so. Meanwhile, others had joined local Spanish petanque groups or were spending more time sailing and joining boat clubs. Two couples did say that they felt lonelier than they had before, but they said it wasn’t only due to the Club. It was also due to their ageing condition that was impeding them from doing activities they used to do before, like long walks on the beach or driving out to new places every weekend.

The Club was one of the first ethnographic spaces I got in contact with. It was the heart of my fieldwork in Costa del Sol; leading me to other entities, like the Charity, and even orienting me towards what areas of the Costa Brava other Britons were residing in and what entities to search for there. It was a space that was marked by socioeconomic class but was also central to providing a place for British expatriate retirees to meet, exchange advice, and create support networks built upon seeing each other at least once a week for petanque matches, dinner dances, or Sunday lunches. The disappearance of this space will affect those who had lifestyles that were very entwined with it, finding that certain friendships fizzle while information and advice about life in Spain becomes harder to come across. Members comment that this closing was a process 2 years in the making, with the COVID-19 pandemic giving the Club it’s final blow. Accordingly, the closure of the Club wasn’t experienced as sudden, but as a slow fade. Thus, the instances of unexpected vulnerability that arise from the absence of this space must be associated with other factors as well.

When contacting informants at Costa del Sol, many mentioned they had noticed new British expatriate retirees arriving to the area. Despite the Club’s demise, there are still other socializing spaces for them to go to on the southern coast. There is the Charity, which is still afloat after some critical months during COVID-19’s onset. Or the Costa Brava’s Organization’s sister branch at Costa del Sol, that has grown in the last years as they started offering online courses, advice, and information during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, in Costa Brava the Organization continues despite having to rise its’ prices in 2021 to remain active. Sadly, the Choir didn’t survive COVID-19 restrictions and is now on “hiatus” according to one of the Choir organizers, who hopes that it might pick up some time in the future. The Anglican Church and the Costa Brava Club continue to thrive, with activities picking up pace in mid-2022. In fact, a new space appeared in the Costa Brava British social sphere: a hospice. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 6, Madeline, 74, had devised a project to create a hospice for Britons nearing death. Her project has succeeded, with the help of volunteers from the Anglican Church who helped create and support it. They found that COVID-19 helped many in the British community in Costa Brava recognize the importance of supporting those experiencing vulnerability and debility, nearing death. Now this hospice, besides providing its’ own services, is also a center for volunteers to meet, engage in grief trainings, and host fundraisers.

Despite this new, and thriving, British space on Costa Brava, many informants in Costa Brava said they hadn’t met many newcomers. They associate this to Brexit and rising prices in Spain. Whether this impression of migration decline is factual will be made tangible in statistics to come regarding 2022 and 2023. What is true is that many informants in Costa Brava suffered various personal losses during the last months before
this thesis concluded. These include Tim’s loss of his wife Andrea, who had severe mobility and cognitive impediments, and Niall’s sudden loss of his wife Sophie after pulmonary complications from a cold. These losses led to a variety of reactions from those who suffered them, with some who decided to travel the world and visit their friends and family members; to those who returned to the UK; to those who remained adamant to stay in Spain, searching for new activities to fill one’s time with. These varied reactions to loss show how different life project plans adapt to change, leading to different ways of approaching later life, especially regarding death.

When contacting informants from both coasts towards the end of research, what was most notable overall was the recognition that they were travelling again. Many spoke about travelling to see family and friends for the first time in two years, going to the UK and other places around the globe, like the United States or Australia. This is significant because, during the pandemic, mobility of any type was put in question, especially when considering its intersection with Brexit, leaving many informants disheartened. 2022 brought back a degree of freedom of mobility some informants thought they had lost, revealing the prevailing privileges the group has.

The latter transformations suggest that the British retirement and later life migration and mobility phenomena in Spain is changing when compared to its past 30 years of stable patterns. Part of the group’s privilege lingers in different degrees, but said privilege depends on the migrant’s lived experience and intersection categories of difference. These changes represent a current state of growing uncertainty and risk that affect British retirees in Spain in a variety of ways. Demonstrating how global mobility hierarchies continue growing in complexity.

Thus, the totality of this thesis captures a change of paradigm, where inequalities that already existed between British expatriate retirees have been amplified post-Brexit and COVID-19, affecting future British retirees who want to retire to Spain. These will need more resources and will have to engage in more bureaucracy than their predecessors. Consequently, the material conditions will determine who can access this type of mobility in later life, severely affecting the chances of those who used to migrate on their own with less resources.

Simultaneously, these events (particularly Brexit) are reframing the traditional image of the British expatriate within British retiree social imaginaries. This was depicted in the struggle informants were having with the label ‘expat’, resulting in them searching for other ways to label themselves amidst these geopolitical and sociosanitary changes. This struggle highlights how colonial remnants of British history are increasingly condemned, while still making evident that this group is privileged as they continue to opt for labels that denote difference from the migrant ‘other’. This symbolic shift in the perception of what a British expatriate is, added to the material changes regarding retirement migration from the UK to Spain, which might result in a change of spaces available to British expatriate retirees; something that the demise of the Costa del Sol Club already suggests.

The most pressing questions this research leaves is how this trend will continue and what presence will British expatriate retirees have in Spain in coming years. For
further study, an eye must be kept on these groups to see how these changes evolve, tracking how such massive geopolitical and sociosanitary shifts may result in differences in how old age and migration are experienced in British expatriate retiree communities in Spain. Thus, when it comes to future research, this thesis suggests a focus on the rising complex relationships between North-South migration flows, problematizing them as well as questioning its’ adjacent privilege in its’ many forms: material, racial, gender, socioeconomic and more. In this manner global migration hierarchies can be successfully interrogated throughout the research process (Mancinelli, 2021). When specifically approaching privilege in retirement migration, the privilege-precarity paradox must be taken into consideration, as it gives weight and meaning to experiences in which ageing and migration intersect. Nevertheless, as this thesis has illustrated, many other categories of difference like gender, class, and race deeply shape this phenomenon, intersecting with migration and ageing as well. Thus, an intersectional approach is pivotal when considering any future research regarding retirement migration. The latter is also true for studies regarding identity formation in later life, as studies on old age experiences tend to focus on the category of ageing and not on its’ intersections with others and its’ effects on ageing experiences (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). Furthermore, other future avenues of study can be drawn from the very data this thesis has collected, analyzing them from other perspectives. Particularly, there is much more to be said about gender and ageing experiences. This thesis only scratches on the surface of this intersection, with much more to be uncovered about how gender interests with ageing, affecting how it is experienced in an embodied manner.

This thesis’ relevance lays in its capturing of a specific moment in time in which British expatriate retiree migration and mobility to Spain changed in a significant manner. Through this moment, a critique on identity formation in later life and traditional migration categories is made. Later life identities are complex and layered, illustrated by informants’ negotiations with Western discourses and its’ effects on the quotidian, making ageing meaningfully into decline hard to achieve (Lamb, 2014). Meanwhile, traditional migration categories are rendered obsolete by the migration and mobility practices British retirees exercise, as well as their identity (re)construction processes (Mancinelli, 2021). Elucidating the nuances that these tend to cast a shadow on. Through this critique, a complex rendering of how identities are (re)constructed in later life abroad comes to life through ethnographic vignettes and interview quotes. These give voices to the vulnerability, dependence, and even precarity experienced in later life migration without leaving behind the privilege these groups still wield. This delicate balance between privilege and precarity is palpable throughout this thesis and is what makes it able to comment on and participate in overarching debates regarding identity, ageing, and migration.

To end, I want to reflect on the importance of accepting dependence and vulnerability in later life. I entered the field when I was a 25-year-old woman who asked British retirees how they felt about ageing in a country that wasn’t their own. Through fieldwork, I met many informants who told me about their life project plans and what
they hoped their later life would be like. I can undoubtedly say that those who were more content were those who accepted the inevitability of ageing as a part of life.

Being dependent on others is something unavoidable. Form when you are born to when you grow old, also when you fall ill, you need the support of others, be they family members, partners, or friends. This is something that Western discourses on old age dissuade us from accepting, praising individualism and independence almost to a fault. However, unlike other structurally imposed inequalities, ageing and old age is invisibilized and underrecognized as such, becoming a metaphorical trapdoor for those who experiment it. Feminism, for instance, has been able to transmit to the mainstream hegemonic consciousness some of the issues patriarchal structures present, pointing its micro faults and connecting them to macro discourses. Conversely, this has yet to happen when it comes to old age discourses and ageing experiences in the Global North.

Anyone and everyone will grow old, if lucky enough. As a person who hopes to live a long life, I would like to believe that this thesis can be my little grain of sand that nudges society towards accepting meaningful decline. Because ageing in a society where being old is taboo, is a society where identity (re)construction in later life becomes an increasingly complex chore; even for those with enough privilege to pursue retirement and later life migration and mobility practices. That is a hostile society to age in. Ultimately, accepting that decline, dependence, and vulnerability are a part of the life course, is something that can strengthen relationships of care, emphasizing how indispensable these relationships are and, hopefully, collectively pushing us towards the acceptance of meaningful decline in later life.
9.1. Apuntes etnográficos de un pasado reciente

Entre el 13 y 15 de mayo de 2022, visité a Lisa y Richard\textsuperscript{81} en North Yorkshire, su pueblo de residencia. Desde que tuve el primer contacto con la pareja en 2019, en Málaga, formamos una sólida amistad. Durante las fechas de mi visita, ellos ya habían dejado atrás su etapa como migrantes estacionales en la Costa del Sol y se habían instalado permanentemente en el Reino Unido. No habíamos tenido la oportunidad de vernos desde 2019, aunque habíamos mantenido el contacto. En cuanto supieron que yo estaba realizando mi periodo de estancia internacional en el Reino Unido, insistieron en invitarme para pasar unos días con ellos, en North Yorkshire.

Durante mi primera cena con ellos, el ambiente de afecto que se respiraba invitaba a pensar en que no había pasado tanto tiempo desde nuestro último encuentro. Por el contrario, los temas de conversación, inevitablemente, señalaban cuanto había cambiado todo en esos últimos 3 años. La pareja, que durante 2019 viajaba frecuentemente entre España y el Reino Unido, explicaban no haber vuelto la península desde junio de 2020. Durante la primera fase del confinamiento, se vieron atrapados en su pequeño apartamento, sintiendo desasosiego por no poder ir al Reino Unido a ver a sus hijos. Después de 4 intentos fallidos de retorno, consiguieron viajar hasta el Reino Unido en ferry, en verano del 2020. En 2021, a causa del miedo de volver a quedar atrapados, no osaron regresar a España. Mientras cenábamos, me explicaban que el temor respecto de una inmovilidad indeseada se había disipado. Si bien, en el transcurso de los 2 años de pandemia, habían perdido el contacto con muchos de sus amigos de Málaga, habiendo fallecido algunos de ellos. Por ejemplo, su íntima compañera Jacqueline, de 102 años, con la que Richard y Lisa compartían muchos inviernos en la Costa del Sol, murió, precisamente, durante ese periodo. La pareja no tuvo la oportunidad de asistir a su funeral.

Los rumores de que el Club de la Costa del Sol estaba al borde del cierre desalentaba aún más a la pareja respecto de la idea de volver a España. El posible cierre no era un hecho sorprendente. Durante 2021, otros informantes habían compartido conmigo este temor, afirmando que el COVID-19 y el Brexit habían resultado ser una combinación de eventos que agudizaba notablemente problemáticas preexistentes en el Club: la falta de miembros jóvenes y la fatiga acumulada por parte de la junta administrativa. Como muchas otras entidades sociales británicas en España a lo largo de los años posteriores al brote de COVID-19, el Club había perdido a muchos de sus miembros y la asistencia a sus eventos clásicos, como la petanca y las cenas con baile, se había reducido sustancialmente.

\textsuperscript{81} Lisa y Ricard aparecen en el capítulo 8, cuando se reflexiona acerca del rechazo respecto de la etiqueta “turista”. Ellos son migrantes estacionales.
Todo lo comentado provocó que Lisa y Richard reconsideraran sus planes de proyecto de jubilación en el extranjero. Mientras pasaba el fin de semana con ellos, comprobé que, pese a residir en el Reino Unido, su día a día consiste en actividades similares a las que desarrollaban en Málaga: Richard jugaba al golf y mantenía su embarcación de segunda mano que, recientemente, había adquirido. Lisa iba al club de navegación y se encargaba de la limpieza y las reformas de la casa. Aunque vivían en un pequeño pueblo, estaban barajando la idea de trasladarse a algún otro lugar, más cercano a algún centro hospitalario, debido al empeoramiento de su salud.

El que la pareja sopesara la posibilidad de que su estado de salud se volviera más delicado, no les impidió barajar la idea de viajar nuevamente, pensando en visitar a los amigos que aún quedaban en España o ir, incluso, hasta Australia para visitar a su familia lejana. Sin embargo, sus palabras denotaban una cierta reticencia e incluso miedo. Dicho miedo podía estar vinculado al COVID-19, pero en él también podía subyacer si condición de envejecimiento.

Esta reunión con Richard y Lisa en el Reino Unido ilustra cuánto ha cambiado el campo y sus condiciones desde que comencé el trabajo etnográfico en 2019. Aunque Richard y Lisa nunca habían considerado vivir en España a tiempo completo, siendo migrantes estacionales durante más de 15 años, en ese momento se habían asentado en el Reino Unido; cosa que no se esperaban cuando los conocí por primera vez durante un partido de petanca en el Club.

La finalidad de empezar el capítulo de conclusiones de esta manera es la de aportar perspectiva a todo el contenido de la tesis. A lo largo del proceso de esta investigación doctoral, se produjeron dos acontecimientos fundamentales en Europa que cambiaron profundamente la forma en que los jubilados expatriados británicos concebían y ejercían sus proyectos de vida en España. La presente tesis captura esos momentos, sus cambios y matices, planteando preguntas sobre cómo continuará esta tendencia de migración y movilidad, qué formas tomará y si España podría quedarse atrás en tanto que uno de los destinos de jubilación de los británicos. Para realmente comprender el enunciado anterior, es imprescindible tener en cuenta las reflexiones teóricas y los aportes que realiza este trabajo.

9.2. Revisitando objetivos e intenciones: Las complejidades de lo cotidiano y matizando el privilegio

Uno de los principales objetivos de esta investigación ha sido contribuir a los debates empíricos y conceptuales en torno a la migración, el envejecimiento y la identidad; enfatizando cómo estos se entrecruzan, creando y perpetuando condiciones de privilegio y desigualdad. A lo largo de esta tesis, las vidas de los jubilados expatriados británicos han servido como marco empírico sobre el cual se analizaron y discutieron estos conceptos. Utilizando sus experiencias de gerontomigración aparentemente privilegiadas donde el envejecimiento, la migración y la movilidad se entrecruzan, se exploran las complejidades entre el privilegio, la vulnerabilidad, la dependencia y la precariedad. Entretanto, se ilustran las vidas de jubilados expatriados británicos,
mostrando su día a día: cómo hacían planes, cómo interactuaban con otros jubilados expatriados británicos y españoles, y cómo construían sus propios sentimientos de pertenencia e identidades a través de estos. Las minucias de lo cotidiano es lo que permite a esta investigación cuestionar las categorías migratorias tradicionales, señalar las diferencias entre los discursos de vejez y las experiencias de envejecimiento, y exponer procesos identitarios complejos.

Un objetivo central de esta investigación ha sido matizar las vidas privilegiadas de los jubilados expatriados británicos, ilustrando la importancia de los casos de vulnerabilidad, algunos cercanos a la precariedad, sin minimizar los privilegios sustanciales que disfrutan debido a su piel blanca, ingresos disponibles y nacionalidad. Al crear conocimiento situado y fundamentado a través de la etnografía, se reconocen diferentes contextos en el campo y una interacción de varios factores que construyen experiencias e identidades heterogéneas (Haraway, 1988). Esto ha permitido que del mismo campo surjan conceptos y experiencias émicas como las performatividades que desafían la edad (detalladas en el Capítulo 6); las estrategias al borde de la táctica con respecto a la planificación de proyectos de vida y la burocracia (en el Capítulo 7); o el uso de la palabra "integración" con relación a prácticas de etiquetaje (mencionado en el capítulo 8); por nombrar algunas de ellas.

La posición de los jubilados expatriados británicos entre el privilegio y la precariedad, y sus experiencias donde el envejecimiento y la migración interseccionan, es lo que ha permitido explorar los tres ejes de esta investigación. Estas últimas características, sumadas a los cambiantes contextos geopolíticos y sociosanitarios del Brexit y la COVID-19, es lo que hace que esta investigación gané relevancia y sea significante para debates antropológicos actuales. Consecuentemente, ha habido una intención expresa de anclar los datos etnográficos en un momento temporal particular, dándole importancia a la historicidad (Brah, 1996). Esto se puede observar a lo largo de la tesis: cuando se diseccionan las etiquetas disponibles para los jubilados expatriados británicos en el Capítulo 3 y el Capítulo 8, o cuando se describe la relación desigual marcada por el turismo entre el Reino Unido y España en el Capítulo 5. Al resaltar lo específico, también se pone en primer plano lo general, ilustrando cómo los tres ejes que construyen esta tesis están evolucionando con relación a debates antropológicos y sus vínculos con circunstancias socioculturales más amplias.

9.3. Contribuciones significativas y puntos destacados de la tesis: brechas, identidades resbaladizas y privilegio persistente

Los tres ejes principales de esta tesis determinaron las contribuciones antropológicas que esta investigación presenta. En primer lugar, en el ámbito de la identidad y la vejez en el Norte Global, esta tesis ha trabajado para discutirlos de manera interseccional y matizada. Como se mencionó en el Capítulo 2, estos dos conceptos han provocado mucho debate académico, ya que el primero tiene un posicionamiento central entre el yo y la sociedad que, históricamente, ha sido polémico; y el segundo está cargado de discursos en conflicto que invisibilizan o elevan problemáticamente las experiencias de
envejecimiento (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Lawler, 2014; Degnen, 2018; Jubany, 2020a). Esta tesis aborda la identidad en términos de multiplicidad, estableciendo que es siempre cambiante y procesual. Esto significa que se debe actuar continuamente sobre la identidad, tanto individual como colectivamente, a través de la acción y el discurso cotidianos que también construyen sentimientos de pertenencia (Goffman, 1956; Bourdieu, 1989; Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996; Bauman, 2004). Como tales, las identidades son sitios donde se encarnan las intersecciones de diferencia, opresión y privilegio, trazando relaciones de poder dentro de ellas. Al indagar en las cotidianidades de británicos jubilados expatriados en España, las identidades aparecen como los dispositivos que encauzan sus experiencias privilegiadas y, a través de las cuales, se puede adecuadamente realizar un análisis que incluya un análisis rico en matices.

Este análisis interseccional de las identidades impulsa esta tesis a contextualizar la construcción identitaria en los parámetros del Norte Global. Este se caracteriza, generalmente, por una modernidad reflexiva líquida, incierta con riesgo, sustentada en discursos individualistas que carcomen los sentimientos de pertenencia de clase y son sustituidas por estilos de vida reflexivos cada vez más individuales; que a su vez están influenciados por agendas políticas socioeconómicas neoliberales (Bourdieu, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1994; Bauman, 2004). Es dentro de dicho contexto que la vejez y el envejecimiento son explorados en esta tesis, incluyendo una variedad de perspectivas que van desde la Gerontología hasta la Antropología, así como un enfoque interseccional. Esto profundiza en los debates sobre el envejecimiento más allá de las experiencias individuales, analizando sus relaciones con estructuras más amplias e imaginarios socioculturales (Phillipson, 2013; Calasanti & Giles, 2018). A través de dicho análisis, esta tesis ha destacado cuestiones relacionadas con los discursos occidentales sobre el envejecimiento; así destapando que discursos como la narrativa del declive o el paradigma del envejecimiento exitoso se basan en evitar la vejez y sus repercusiones en el cuerpo, la mente y la vida social (Lamb, 2014). Simultáneamente, revelando una brecha entre la epistemología y la pragmática del envejecimiento que es central para la discusión de esta investigación. Esta se ve ilustrada en capítulos etnográficos que han capturado cómo dicha brecha afecta las experiencias de envejecimiento en el exterior, lo que resulta en procesos complejos de (re)construcción de la identidad (Degnen, 2007).

En base a lo anteriormente mencionado, el análisis teórico de esta tesis se desplaza hacia la migración, poniendo en diálogo las prácticas migratorias privilegiadas con aquellas tradicionalmente catalogadas como ‘otras’ (en el Capítulo 3). Esto revela la relatividad de las categorías de migración tradicionales y la creciente complejidad de las tendencias de movilidad globales, que enfatizan cómo los regímenes de movilidad están cambiando al tiempo que perpetúan las estructuras de poder en los contextos en los que se encuentran (Croucher, 2012; Green, 2015; Kunz, 2016). Este enfoque es fundamental para esta investigación, ya que sienta las bases de por qué prestar atención a las etiquetas relacionadas con la migración y la movilidad puede arrojar una comprensión más profunda sobre cómo se reproducen los privilegios y la desigualdad sobre el terreno; usando conceptos como ‘viscosidad’ para ilustrar mejor esta relación entre etiquetas, privilegio y desigualdad (Saldanha, 2007; Mata-Codesal, 2015; Hayes, 2018; Mancinelli,
2021). A través de la figura del ‘expatriado’ y el ‘cosmopolita’, se evidencia la interconexión de las categorías migratorias y su ambigüedad situada. Ilustrando la forma en que los migrantes privilegiados construyen sus identidades en relación con las categorías de migrantes alterizados. En este sentido, esta tesis participa en la ruptura de dualismos y dicotomías existentes desde hace mucho tiempo en la manera de abordar los estudios migratorios, matizando entre lo privilegiado y lo no privilegiado.

El posicionamiento previamente descrito subyace en cómo esta investigación aborda la gerontomigración y las prácticas de movilidad en etapas vitales tardías. Esta tendencia, parte del paraguas general de migración por estilo de vida, ya no solo es accesible para las clases más altas. Ahora, ha cruzado líneas de clase para incluir una variedad de grupos que buscan la ‘buena vida’ en el extranjero (Salazar, 2014; Torkington, David & Sardinha, 2015). Esta búsqueda para ‘mejorar’ el estilo de vida de uno a través de la migración y la movilidad ilustra cómo las opciones de estilo de vida se mercantilizan dentro de las sociedades del Norte Global, revelando formas en que personas blancas y occidentales intentan trascender las estructuras de clase mudándose a otro lugar (Giddens, 1991; Korpela, 2014). La gerontomigración y las prácticas de movilidad en etapas vitales tardías participan en esta realidad texturada de privilegios y desigualdades que se entrecruzan, encarnadas en los flujos de migración y movilidad Norte-Sur. A diferencia de otros tipos de migración por estilo de vida, la gerontomigración y las prácticas de movilidad en etapas vitales tardías incluyen el factor de la vejez y el envejecimiento. Esto afecta cómo se experimenta el privilegio y cómo las transiciones vitales son dotadas de sentido a nivel social, cultural y económico (Amit, 2007; Bourdieu, 2007; Salazar, 2014).

La base teórica detallada anteriormente se combinó con un enfoque metodológico basado en técnicas etnográficas que incluyen la observación participante, las entrevistas en profundidad y los grupos focales (detallados en el Capítulo 4). Este marco etnográfico sigue el enfoque interseccional, que impulsa el análisis a lo largo de la tesis. De esta manera ideando métodos que desvelaron las relaciones de poder, al mismo tiempo que las enraizaron dentro de las prácticas cotidianas y los discursos recogidos en el campo.

Para contextualizar aún más las vidas de los jubilados expatriados británicos en España, la tesis expuso la relación desigual entre el Reino Unido y España; una relación históricamente marcada por el turismo y los flujos gerontomigratorios (en el Capítulo 5). La influencia que tuvo esta condición geopolítica e histórica en los migrantes jubilados se detectó en los discursos migratorios y narrativas de escape de los informantes (King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; O’Reilly, 2000; Hurtado, 2010; Betty, 2017). Dentro de estos, Gran Bretaña se construye como un lugar del que escapar a través de la configuración de un discurso compartido de ‘Bad Britain’ entre los migrantes británicos en España (O’Reilly, 2000; 2002). Mientras tanto, España se presenta como una antítesis del Reino Unido, donde las experiencias de un ‘mejor’ envejecimiento están fácilmente disponibles. Las razones no son solo el clima cálido y los precios más bajos, sino también los valores sociales que benefician los proyectos de vida de envejecimiento exitosos. Por lo tanto, resultó en una interpretación de España como relajada y vacacional, que reveló jerarquías implícitas de poder dentro de la UE. Estas construcciones de lugar se revelan al largo de
la tesis para informar cómo los jubilados expatriados británicos eligieron una costa en la cual jubilarse, estableciendo expectativas que desencadenaron (re)construcciones de identidad desde el comienzo de los viajes migratorios de los informantes. Estas expectativas cambiaron al experimentar la vida en España, llevando a algunos informantes a expresar un derecho hacia España que hacía aún más explícita la relación desigual entre ambos países.

Dichas expectativas poco realistas toman una forma diferente cuando ponemos el foco analítico en la vejez y el envejecimiento. En el Capítulo 6, la tesis contribuye al trabajo de Degnen sobre la existencia de una brecha entre los discursos sobre la vejez y las experiencias de envejecimiento, así como la afirmación de Lamb a cerca la complejidad de alcanzar un declive significativo en el Norte Global (Lamb, 2014; Degnen, 2018). La tesis logra esto a través de la etnografía, herramienta que permite desentrañar las experiencias cotidianas de las expectativas poco realistas que influyen en la creación de proyectos vitales basados en envejecer ‘bien’. Estas expectativas acerca la vejez ignoran las diferencias socioeconómicas y de género, así como el acceso general a los recursos. Es decir, se evade el hecho de que las categorías de diferencia se agravan a lo largo del ciclo vital (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). Sin embargo, estas expectativas de envejecimiento poco realistas crean sentimientos de frustración e incertidumbre cuando estas no se cumplen (Lamb, 2019). Esto condujo a casos inesperados de vulnerabilidad, donde los jubilados expatriados británicos experimentaron el envejecimiento de una manera que estaba muy alejada de los discursos sobre la vejez a los que se adherían (como el ‘successful ageing’) o de los que huían (como el ‘decline narrative’). Dichos casos inesperados de vulnerabilidad crecieron durante las etapas iniciales de la pandemia COVID-19, cuando muchos informantes no estaban preparados para los problemas, relacionados con el envejecimiento, que surgieron a medida que se desarrollaba la crisis sociosanitaria (Hall, 2021). Por lo tanto, esta tesis establece que cuando la vejez y el privilegio se cruzan, no necesariamente resulta en experiencias de envejecimiento ‘mejores’, destacando la proximidad paradójica entre el privilegio y la precariedad (Grenier, Lloyd, & Phillipson, 2017). Esta brecha entre los discursos sobre la vejez y la pragmática del envejecimiento, así como la paradoja entre el privilegio y la precariedad, son dos de las contribuciones clave que esta tesis aporta al debate sobre la vejez y el envejecimiento en la Antropología.

Esta tesis, en el capítulo 7, continúa ilustrando etnográficamente las complejidades de la paradoja privilegio-precariedad a través de las relaciones de los informantes con la burocracia y el papeleo. Este enfoque surgió como respuesta a los cambios contextuales a nivel legal, burocrático, geopolítico y sociosanitario que se estaban produciendo en las vidas de los británicos jubilados expatriados en España; afectando sus experiencias diarias de envejecimiento y migración. Uno de los cambios detectados más notables fue la invisibilidad legal de la cual gozaban los británicos en España, quienes, antes del Brexit y COVID-19, tenían notables privilegios geopolíticos, legales, y burocráticos sobre otros migrantes. Ahora, esta invisibilidad legal es nula debido a una miríada de factores. Estos cambios afectaron los cimientos sobre los que se elaboraban planes de proyectos vitales en la vejez, dejando al descubierto disparidades entre los expatriados británicos que antes eran más difíciles de identificar. Esto llevó a la
diferenciación entre aquellos que podían diseñar una estrategia en función de su posicionamiento burocrático en España y aquellos que tenían que recurrir a estrategias con un elevado componente táctico (De Certeau, 1984). Esta distinción matiza las experiencias privilegiadas, mostrando cómo el acceso a los recursos socioeconómicos es crucial en la planificación de proyectos de vida, especialmente cuando se refiere a envejecer en un país ajeno.

Como un medio para señalar dónde las experiencias comenzaron a desviarse hacia el ámbito de la precariedad, esta investigación expone un gradiente de sentimientos relacionados con la burocracia y el papeleo que surgieron del campo. Estos incluyen: el reivindicarse como sujeto de derecho, la sensación de seguridad, la incertidumbre y la ansiedad. Aquellos informantes que sintieron y se identificaron con los dos últimos en sus experiencias con la burocracia eran más propensos a instancias de vulnerabilidad inesperada y experiencias precarias en general; a menudo, debido al hecho de haber migrado solos y con recursos socioeconómicos limitados. De esta manera, esta tesis ilustra la creciente desigualdad entre los jubilados expatriados británicos en España, señalando un momento único y sin precedentes en el que muchos estaban experimentando una (in)movilidad no deseada o incertidumbre y riesgo relacionados con su estatus legal (Salazar, 2021).

Sin embargo, los jubilados expatriados británicos generalmente construyen sus identidades, pertenencias y jerarquías comunitarias en un contexto relativamente privilegiado. En el Capítulo 8, la tesis enfatiza este hecho al disecionar como se usan indistintamente etiquetas como 'turista', 'expatriado' o 'cosmopolita'; resaltando la viscosidad de las categorías de identidad privilegiada, y evidenciando el privilegio que estos grupos tienen (Saldanha, 2007). Dicho privilegio se basa en el tipo weberiano ideal del ‘wrong sort of Brit’: una mezcla de estereotipos y prejuicios acerca el comportamiento británico en el extranjero que superpone diversos imaginarios sociales de clase socioeconómica implícita; los cuales están anclados en un contexto británico y europeo. En el campo, los informantes trataban de evitar ser equiparados a esa figura, desencadenando procesos de (re)construcción de la identidad donde utilizaban el privilegio de poder elegir o rechazar etiquetas para construir sus identidades lejos de los estereotipos y prejuicios con los que se enfrentaban. A través de estas prácticas resbaladizas de etiquetado, esta tesis contribuye a la literatura de identidad desde el privilegio. Así, ilustra la relación dialéctica que existe entre el yo y la sociedad y como se reconstruyen mutuamente según el contexto (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Saldanha, 2007; Lawler, 2014). Sin embargo, la figura del ‘wrong sort of Brit’ destaca la omnipresencia del proyecto compartido de ‘envejecer mejor’ que une a la comunidad de jubilados británicos en España. El habitus del ‘wrong sort of Brit’ incluye la ignorancia de la historia, la cocina y el idioma local, mientras que también ocupa con frecuencia espacios británicos en España, comportamientos que se consideran contrarios al proyecto de ‘envejecer mejor’ (Bourdieu, 2007). Por lo tanto, esta figura agrega una capa de complejidad a la importancia de la vejez en estas comunidades, ya que evidencia cómo ‘envejecer mejor’ también puede usarse para transmitir y adjudicar, de forma encubierta, la clase
socioeconómica de uno; organizando, en consecuencia, las comunidades de jubilados expatriados británicos en consecuencia (Oliver, 2006; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010).

Por ende, el trabajo realizado demuestra que las etiquetas no solo construyen la identidad y la pertenencia de uno, sino que también construyen y organizan comunidades en el extranjero de una manera en la que las intersecciones de clase, edad, género y privilegio llegan a un punto crítico. Como se vio en el Capítulo 8, entre los jubilados expatriados británicos, las etiquetas brindan formas de acumular capital social y cultural, yendo más allá de las terminologías de clase, al cambiar de una etiqueta a otra (Bourdieu, 1989; Oliver & O’Reilly, 2010). Esto lleva a monitorear y juzgar los implícitos rasgos de clase socioeconómica, los cuales están relacionados con lo británico a través de marcadores como el gusto o la ‘integración’. Estos se materializan en prácticas como el consumo de bienes españoles o la ocupación de lugares españoles, evitando, hasta cierto punto, las actividades y lugares británicos, e intentando entablar amistad con españoles locales. Estas acciones son monitoreadas y juzgadas de una manera que está ligada a cómo se controla la vejez dentro de estas comunidades, ya que estos habitus están fuertemente conectados con las concepciones de ‘envejecer mejor’ que cada jubilado expatriado británico crea para sí mismo (Oliver, 2006; Degnen, 2012). Las formas en que se llevan a cabo estos procesos de etiquetado y pertenencia, así como la forma en que se organizan las comunidades, son subjetivos a la experiencia personal. Establecer la propia identidad y pertenencia dentro de estas comunidades es un trabajo en continuo progreso. Los informantes tuvieron que mediar con etiquetas en conflicto, construyendo nuevos sentimientos de pertenencia y elaborando apreciaciones individuales y comunitarias de lo que significaba “envejecer mejor” en España; reflejando el actual estado generalizado de incertidumbre en el que las identidades deben ser constantemente construidas y reconstruidas en el Norte Global (Bauman, 2007).

A lo largo de la tesis, lo que se pone en manifiesto es la importancia que tiene la vejez dentro de los proyectos y experiencias en etapas vitales tardías dentro de las comunidades de jubilados expatriados británicos en España. La vejez, sus discursos asociados y la forma en que se experimenta atravesan la totalidad de esta tesis en múltiples sentidos, afectando las decisiones cotidianas más mínimas, dando forma a la (re)construcción de la identidad e informando cómo se organizan las comunidades. En consecuencia, esta investigación contribuye a la comprensión de las experiencias de envejecimiento, explorando cómo las comprensiones émicas de lo que es el envejecimiento, influenciadas por los discursos sobre la vejez, dan forma a etapas vitales tardías y (re)construyen identidades. Todo esto debe ser entendido en un contexto específico, dependiendo de factores como la clase y el género, así como la experiencia personal y vidas laborales pasadas. También es imprescindible aplicar un enfoque interseccional aplicado a los datos recopilados.

El mencionado enfoque interseccional se plasma en esta tesis mediante la exploración del uso de conceptos como ‘envejecer mejor’ entre jubilados expatriados británicos o detectando la brecha entre los discursos sobre la vejez y las experiencias de envejecimiento en el campo. A través de dicha atención etnográfica al detalle, esta tesis ilumina las intersecciones y los matices de la construcción de identidades y la pertenencia
al extranjero durante la vida posterior, al mismo tiempo que ilustra cómo se elaboran los imaginarios sociales compartidos en la interacción del yo y la sociedad (Hockey & James, 1993; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Lamb, 2014; Lawler, 2014). Mediante este análisis, se revela la paradoja privilegio-precariedad, matizando las representaciones homogéneas de los jubilados expatriados británicos que tienden a preponderar en los imaginarios sociales compartidos británicos y españoles (Hall & Hardill, 2016). Además, el Brexit y la COVID-19 ofrecieron una oportunidad para matizar aún más estas experiencias. Dichos acontecimientos trajeron cambios estructurales en la forma en que los jubilados expatriados británicos construyeron sus proyectos de migración en etapas vitales tardías de España (Hall, 2021). Por consiguiente, hicieron que esta paradoja fuera más pronunciada, lo que resultó en la ampliación de las desigualdades documentadas a lo largo de la presente investigación.

A pesar de los matices previamente explorados, los jubilados expatriados británicos todavía experimentan un privilegio relativo y significativo en su vida cotidiana, hecho que no se pretende minimizar. Dicho privilegio se remonta a la relación desigual entre el Reino Unido y España que afectó la forma en que moldearon sus planes de proyecto de vida posteriores. A lo largo de esta tesis, la relación desigual entre España como destino de jubilación y el Reino Unido como emisor de jubilados se hizo tangible en los sentimientos de titularidad (o ‘entitlement’) que surgieron en el campo. Estos surgieron al analizar cómo y por qué España se concibe como un destino vacacional en el Capítulo 5; o al abordar las relaciones de los informantes con la burocracia y el papeleo en el Capítulo 7; o en el Capítulo 8 al hablar de la etiqueta 'expatriado' y sus estrechos vínculos con la titularidad y la colonialidad. Al explorar etnográficamente las expresiones de derecho en el campo, esta tesis fundamenta con éxito las realidades de los jubilados expatriados británicos dentro de una relación geopolítica desigual, que es clave para el fenómeno de la migración de jubilados entre el Reino Unido y España. Al mismo tiempo destaca la importancia de problematizar y analizar el privilegio en las experiencias de envejecimiento en el extranjero.

Al profundizar en las experiencias post-migratorias en etapas vitales tardías, se debe considerar el privilegio en sus múltiples formas, ya sea estructural, material, geopolítica o racial, por nombrar algunas. Esto es especialmente importante cuando se consideran las asociaciones históricamente establecidas entre el privilegio y la migración de jubilación. Esta tesis subraya la importancia de abordar analíticamente tanto el privilegio como la precariedad, dando peso a ambos en las experiencias posteriores de la vida y conduciendo a mejores representaciones de cómo es envejecer en el extranjero.

9.4. ¿Dónde están ahora?, y direcciones para futuras investigaciones

Antes de concluir definitivamente, quería volver a visitar el campo para evaluar cómo ha cambiado su estado ahora que esta investigación ha concluido. Este es un ejercicio interesante, no solo por todas las transformaciones contingentes que han ocurrido desde la última viñeta etnográfica; pero también, porque enmarca reflexiones finales y
aportaciones futura, indicando la dirección en la que pueden encaminarse los debates teóricos sobre identidad, envejecimiento y migración.

El 1 de julio de 2022, recibí un mensaje de Facebook de Lisa y Richard que decía lo siguiente: "Lamentamos escuchar que el Club en España cerrará definitivamente. No hay suficientes miembros para que sea una proporción viable, vergüenza. El fin de una era." En cuanto supe la noticia, me puse en contacto con los miembros del Club que aún vivían en la Costa del Sol. Estos hicieron comentarios similares, lamentando el fin del Club. A pesar de ello, todos señalaron otros elementos en sus vidas que los mantenían ocupados. Algunos hablaron sobre pasar más tiempo con la familia; particularmente níos con los que habían pasado todas las vacaciones de verano. Otros hablaron sobre sus pasiones por la pintura o el aprendizaje de idiomas, diciendo que ahora tenían más tiempo para dedicar a estos proyectos. Mientras tanto, otros se habían unido a grupos locales españoles de petanca o pasaban más tiempo navegando y uniéndose a clubes náuticos. Dos parejas dijeron que se sentían más solos que antes, pero apuntaron que no era solo por el fin del Club. Otro motivo que explicitaban era el de su envejecimiento, que les impedía realizar actividades que solían hacer antes, como largas caminatas en la playa o salir en coche a nuevos lugares cada fin de semana.

El Club fue uno de los primeros espacios etnográficos con los que tomé contacto. Fue el corazón de mi trabajo de campo en la Costa del Sol; llevándome a otras entidades, como la Charity, e incluso orientándome hacia las zonas de la Costa Brava en las que residen otros británicos, así como qué entidades buscar allí. Era un espacio que estaba marcado por la clase socioeconómica de sus miembros. No obstante, también era fundamental para proporcionar un lugar para que los jubilados expatriados británicos se reunieran, intercambiaron consejos y crearan redes de apoyo basadas en verse, al menos, una vez a la semana para partidos de petanca, cenas con baile o almuerzos de domingo. La desaparición del espacio afectará a aquellos que tenían estilos de vida que estaban muy entrelazados con él, descubriendo que ciertas amistades se esfuman mientras que la información y los consejos sobre la vida en España se vuelven más difíciles de encontrar. Los miembros me comentaron que este cierre fue un proceso de 2 años, con la pandemia de COVID-19 asistiendo a la estocada final. Así pues, el cierre del Club no se vivió como algo repentino, sino como un lento desvanecimiento. En este sentido, los casos de vulnerabilidad inesperada que surgen de la ausencia de este espacio también deben estar asociados con otros factores.

Al contactar con informantes en la Costa del Sol, muchos mencionaron que notaban la llegada de nuevos jubilados expatriados británicos a la zona. A pesar de la desaparición del Club, todavía hay otros espacios de socialización para ellos y los recién llegados a la costa sur. Está Charity, que todavía está a flote después de algunos meses críticos durante el inicio de COVID-19. O la filial hermana de la Organización de la Costa Brava en la Costa del Sol, que ha crecido en los últimos años al empezar a ofrecer cursos online, asesoramiento e información durante la pandemia.

Mientras tanto, en la Costa Brava, la Organización continúa a pesar de tener que subir sus precios durante el 2021 para seguir activa. Lamentablemente, el Coro no sobrevivió a las restricciones de COVID-19 y ahora está en "pausa" según uno de los
organizadores, quien espera que pueda reanudarse en el futuro. La Iglesia Anglicana y el Club Costa Brava continúan prosperando, y las actividades se aceleraron a mediados de 2022. Un nuevo espacio apareció en el ámbito social británico de la Costa Brava: un hospicio. Como se mencionó brevemente en el Capítulo 6, Madeline, de 74 años, había ideado un proyecto para crear un hospicio para los británicos que se acercaban a la muerte. Su proyecto tuvo éxito, contando con la ayuda de voluntarios de la Iglesia Anglicana que ayudaron a crear y apoyar el proyecto. La COVID-19 ayudó a muchos en la comunidad británica de la Costa Brava a reconocer la importancia de apoyar a quienes experimentan vulnerabilidad y debilidad cerca de la muerte. Ahora, este hospicio, además de brindar sus servicios propios, también es un centro para voluntarios, entrenamiento de duelo y recaudación de fondos.

A pesar de este nuevo y próspero espacio británico en la Costa Brava, muchos informantes explicaban que no habían conocido a muchos nuevos migrantes en sus comunidades. Lo asociaban al Brexit y al alza de precios en España. Si esta impresión de disminución de la migración es precisa, se hará tangible en las próximas estadísticas con respecto a 2022 y 2023. Lo cierto es que muchos informantes en la Costa Brava han sufrido pérdidas durante los últimos meses antes de concluir esta tesis. Por ejemplo, Tim, quien perdió a su esposa Andrea, que tenía graves impedimentos cognitivos y de movilidad; también el fallecimiento repentino de Sophie, la esposa de Niall, por complicaciones pulmonares de un resfriado. Estas pérdidas provocaron una variedad de reacciones en aquellos que las sufrieron, algunos decidiendo viajar por el mundo y visitar a sus amigos y familiares; otros que regresaron al Reino Unido; y también otros que se mantuvieron firmes con la idea de seguir en España, buscando nuevas actividades para llenar su tiempo. Estas reacciones variadas ante la pérdida muestran cómo los diferentes planes de proyectos de vida se adaptan al cambio. A su vez, esto deriva en diferentes procederes sobre cómo abordar etapas vitales tardías, especialmente en relación con la muerte.

Es también destacable que, al contactar a los informantes de ambas costas hacia el final de la investigación, muchos reconocían que volvían a viajar de nuevo. Me hablaban sobre viajar para ver a familiares y amigos por primera vez en dos años, yendo al Reino Unido y otros lugares del mundo como, Estados Unidos o Australia. Esto es significativo porque, durante la pandemia, se puso en entredicho la movilidad de cualquier tipo, especialmente considerando su coincidencia con el Brexit, dejando a muchos informantes desanimados. 2022 trajo de vuelta un aumento del grado de libertad en la movilidad que algunos informantes pensaron que habían perdido, revelando los privilegios predominantes que continúan teniendo.

Las últimas transformaciones sugieren que el fenómeno de la gerontomigración y la migración en etapas tardías de británicos en España está cambiando en comparación con sus últimos 30 años de patrones estables. Existe parte del privilegio del grupo que aún persiste en diferentes grados, pero dicho privilegio tiene un mayor grado de dependencia con respecto de la experiencia vivida por el migrante y las categorías de diferencia de intersección de su identidad. Estos cambios representan un estado actual de creciente incertidumbre y riesgo que afecta a los jubilados británicos en España de
diversas formas, demostrando cómo las jerarquías de movilidad global continúan creciendo en complejidad.

Así, la totalidad de esta tesis ilustra un cambio de paradigma, donde las desigualdades que ya existían entre los jubilados expatriados británicos se han amplificado post-Brexit y COVID-19, afectando a los futuros jubilados británicos que quieren jubilarse en España. Estos necesitarán más recursos y tendrán que involucrarse en más burocracia que sus predecesores. Por ende, las condiciones materiales determinaran quién puede acceder a este tipo de movilidad en el futuro, afectando gravemente las posibilidades de quienes emigraban solos con menos recursos.

Simultáneamente, estos eventos, particularmente el Brexit, están replanteando la tradicional imagen del expatriado británico dentro de los imaginarios sociales de los jubilados británicos. Esto se describió en la lucha interna que los informantes libraban con la etiqueta ‘expatriado’, lo que provocó que buscaran otras formas de etiquetarse a sí mismos en medio de estos cambios geopolíticos y sociosanitarios. Esta lucha destaca cómo los remanentes coloniales de la historia británica son cada vez más condenados. Al mismo tiempo, deja en evidencia que este grupo tiene un privilegio indiscutible, ya que continúa optando por etiquetas que denotan la diferencia con el migrante alterizado. Este cambio simbólico en la percepción de lo que es un expatriado británico, sumado a los cambios materiales con respecto a la gerontomigración del Reino Unido a España, podría resultar en un cambio de espacios disponibles para los jubilados expatriados británicos; algo que ya sugiere la desaparición del Costa del Sol Club.

Las preguntas más apremiantes que deja esta investigación son cómo continuará esta tendencia migratoria y qué presencia tendrán los jubilados expatriados británicos en España en los próximos años. Para futuros estudios, se debe prestar atención a estos grupos para ver cómo evolucionan los mencionados cambios. Rastreando la manera en que tanremarkables acontecimientos geopolíticos y sociosanitarios pueden resultar en diferencias sobre cómo se experimentan la vejez y la migración en las comunidades de jubilados expatriados británicos en España. Por lo tanto, cuando se trata de futuras investigaciones, esta tesis sugiere un enfoque en las crecientes y complejas relaciones entre los flujos migratorios Norte-Sur, problematizándolos y cuestionando su privilegio adyacente en sus múltiples formas: material, racial, de género, socioeconómica y más. De esta forma, las jerarquías de migración global pueden interrogarse con éxito a lo largo del proceso de investigación (Mancinelli, 2021). Cuando se aborda específicamente el privilegio en la migración de jubilados, se debe tener en cuenta la paradoja privilegio-precariedad. Esta da peso y sentido a las experiencias en las que se entrecruzan el envejecimiento y la migración. No obstante, como ha ilustrado esta tesis, muchas otras categorías de diferencia como el género, la clase y la raza moldean profundamente este fenómeno, intersecionando también con la migración y el envejecimiento. Así pues, un enfoque interseccional es fundamental al considerar cualquier investigación futura sobre la gerontomigración. Esto último también es cierto para los estudios sobre la formación de la identidad en la vejez, ya que los análisis sobre las experiencias de la vejez tienden a centrarse en la categoría de envejecimiento y no en sus intersecciones con otros y sus efectos en las experiencias de envejecimiento (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). Asimismo, de
los propios datos recogidos en esta tesis se pueden extraer otras vías futuras de estudio, analizándolas desde otras perspectivas. En particular, hay mucho más que decir sobre el género y las experiencias de envejecimiento. Esta tesis solo raspa la superficie de esta intersección, con mucho más por descubrir sobre cómo el género se relaciona con el envejecimiento, afectando cómo se experimenta de manera encarnada.

La relevancia de esta tesis se encuentra en su capacidad de capturar un momento específico en el que la migración y movilidad de jubilados expatriados británicos a España cambió de manera significativa. A través de este momento, se hace una crítica a la formación de la identidad en la vida posterior y las categorías tradicionales de migración. Las identidades de la vida posterior son complejas y estratificadas, ilustradas por las negociaciones de los informantes con los discursos occidentales y sus efectos en la cotidianidad, lo que hace que sea significativamente difícil lograr envejecer hasta el declive (Lamb, 2014). Mientras tanto, las categorías migratorias tradicionales quedan obsoletas por las prácticas de migración y movilidad que ejercen los jubilados británicos, así como por sus procesos de (re)construcción de identidad (Mancinelli, 2021). A través de esta crítica, una interpretación compleja de cómo se (re)construyen las identidades en la etapa tardía de la vida en el extranjero emerge mediante las viñetas etnográficas y citas de entrevistas. Estas dan voz a la vulnerabilidad, la dependencia e incluso la precariedad experimentada en la migración en etapas vitales tardías, sin dejar atrás el privilegio que aún poseen estos grupos. Este delicado equilibrio entre privilegio y precariedad es palpable a lo largo de esta tesis y es lo que hace que esta pueda participar en debates generales sobre identidad, envejecimiento y migración.

Para terminar, quiero reflexionar sobre la importancia de aceptar la dependencia y la vulnerabilidad en etapas vitales tardías. Llegué al campo siendo una mujer de 25 años que preguntaba a jubilados británicos cómo se sentían acerca de envejecer en un país que no era el suyo. Gracias al trabajo de campo, conocí a muchos informantes que me contaron sus planes de vida y cómo esperaban que su etapa vital final. Sin duda, puedo asegurar que aquellos que estaban más contentos eran los que aceptaban la inevitabilidad del envejecimiento como parte de la vida.

Depender de los demás es algo inevitable. Desde que naces hasta que envejeces, también cuando enfermas, necesitas el apoyo de los demás, ya sean familiares, pareja o amigos. Este es un hecho que los discursos occidentales sobre la vejez nos disuaden de aceptar, mediante un incesante elogio del individualismo y la independencia. Sin embargo, a diferencia de otros ejes de desigualdades impuestos estructuralmente, el del envejecimiento está invisibilizado e infra reconocido, deviniendo en un simil de trampa cuando nos toca experimentarlo. El feminismo, por ejemplo, ha sido capaz de transmitir a la conciencia hegemónica y dominante algunos de los problemas que presentan las estructuras patriarcales, señalando sus micro fallas y conectándolas con macro discursos. Por el contrario, esto aún no ha sucedido en lo que respecta a los discursos sobre la vejez y las experiencias de envejecimiento en el Norte Global.

Todas las personas envejecerán, si tienen suficiente suerte. Como persona que espera poder tener una larga vida, me gustaría creer que esta tesis puede ser mi granito de arena que empuje a la sociedad a aceptar un declive significativo. Porque una sociedad
donde ser viejo es tabú, es una sociedad donde la (re)construcción de la identidad en la vejez se convierte en una tarea cada vez más compleja; incluso para aquellos con privilegios suficientes para buscar prácticas de gerontomigración y movilidad en etapas vitales tardías. Esa es una sociedad hostil en la que envejecer. En definitiva, aceptar que el declive, la dependencia y la vulnerabilidad son parte del curso de la vida, es algo que puede fortalecer las relaciones de cuidado, enfatizando cuán indispensables son estas relaciones y, con suerte, empujándonos colectivamente hacia la aceptación de un declive significativo en la edad adulta.
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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Maps and pictures of Costa del Sol and Costa Brava

Picture 1.1. Costa del Sol’s long stretch of beaches

Picture 1.2. Costa Brava’s nature shrouded coasts
Figure 1.1. Spain, with yellow pins marking Costa Brava (North) and Costa del Sol (South)

Figure 1.2. Costa del Sol, from Nerja to Manilva
Figure 1.3. Costa Brava, from Blanes to Cadaqués
Appendix 2 – Timeline of fieldwork dates, Brexit, and COVID-19

2016
- June, 2016: The UK votes on the EU referendum. The choice to leave the EU wins.

2017
- April, 2017: Brexit negotiations officially start setting a two-year time limit until March, 2019.

2018
- May, 2018: I start my doctoral research.

2019
- February, 2019: Beginning of Costa del Sol fieldwork.

2020
- May, 2020: finish Costa Brava fieldwork by using online ethnographic tools.
- October, 2019: Brexit is postponed until December, 2020.

2021
- March, 2019: Brexit is postponed until the end of October.
- March, 2020: UK starts lockdown
- May, 2019: finish fieldwork at the Costa del Sol.
- March, 23rd, 2020: UK starts lockdown
- December, 2020: First vaccines are administered in Europe and Brexit comes officially into effect.
- June, 2020: Spain starts strict lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak and shuts borders.

2022
- A year of vaccinations, frontiers opening and closing, and lockdowns. Towards the end of 2021, things seem to be stabilising.
Appendix 3 - COVID-19 ethnographic spaces

The following are online ethnographic spaces I participated in during from mid-March 2020 to May 2020 due to initial stages of the Coronavirus pandemic:

- **Whatsapp group chats:** all ethnographic spaces, from the Costa del Sol and the Costa Brava, had these connecting people together during times of limited social contact.
- **Email chains and newsletters:** All described ethnographic spaces had these, especially during initial stages of the pandemic. Some were more active than others and they mostly consisted of COVID-19 information.
- **Weekly services through zoom:** the Anglican Church held services online. Through these services people aired their grievances and stayed connected.
- **YouTube Choir practice:** the Choir joined the YouTube sensation the Great British Home Chorus, led by Gareth Malone. This choirmaster would go live on the site twice a week, and all choir members would join in as well and comment on it later through Whatsapp or Facetime calls. Some of them would even comment during the live sessions through YouTube’s chat board, which was a first-time experience for many of them.
- **The Organization’s website:** during the pandemic the website not only was a bulletin for COVID-19 information, but it was also a creative outlet through which funny limericks about the lockdown they were experiencing. Here are some examples (insert pictures).
- **The Club’s Facebook Group:** through this group Club members shared pictures of their daily lives, had short conversations on the Facebook Wall and posted uplifting and funny content.
- **Weekly pub quizzes through zoom:** groups of friends from different ethnographic entities would organize these as to have a drink together and play some trivia. These would normally take place on Friday or Saturday nights.
- **Private phone calls, facetime calls, or Whatsapp calls:** these are the spaces through which interviews and focus groups were conducted. I designate these as an online space because they were a shared communicative space through which relationships were forged just as in other physical ethnographic spaces.
Appendix 4 – Empadronamiento campaign pamphlet (inside)
Appendix 5 – Costa del Sol Club pamphlet (inside)
Annexes:

Annex 1 – Chart of in-depth interviewees

<table>
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<td>1980's</td>
<td>Middle to lower</td>
<td>Widowed, living alone</td>
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<td>1990's</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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*The factor “socioeconomic class” is assessed according to past work experiences (paid or reproductive) as well as their level of education received/pursued.