

# Residence vs. Ancestry in Acquisition of Spanish Citizenship: A *Netnography* Approach

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## ABSTRACT

Access to a nationality from a European Union (EU) country has become a key migration strategy for people from outside the EU and their families. This paper explores access to Spanish citizenship, through an innovative methodology, “netnography”. We analyzed an Internet discussion group (41 000 posts and 2 860 individuals), where migrants share their concerns about the cumbersome Spanish naturalization process. We identify a series of strategies to access Spanish citizenship that seek to maximize the possibilities given by residence experience in Spain or Spanish ancestry (a sort of family endowment that we call “ethnic capital” here). These factors create an unequal pattern in the “geography of naturalization”, marked by the history of Spanish emigration and immigration policies, woven together in the complex web of the personal experiences of migrants, who are constantly faced with the question: residence or ancestry?

*Keywords:* 1. nationality, 2. migration, 3. netnography, 4. ethnic capital, 5. Spain.

## Residencia frente a ancestros en el acceso a la nacionalidad española: Un acercamiento *netnográfico*

### RESUMEN

El acceso a la nacionalidad de un país de la Unión Europea se ha configurado en una estrategia migratoria clave para personas no europeas y sus familias. Este trabajo aborda el caso del acceso a la nacionalidad española desde la novedosa metodología de la *netnografía*. Del análisis de un foro virtual en Internet (41 000 mensajes y 2 860 personas), donde migrantes comparten inquietudes acerca del complicado proceso de solicitud de la nacionalidad española, se desprende una gama de estrategias de acceso a la nacionalidad que buscan maximizar las posibilidades que ofrecen tanto la experiencia de residencia en España como los ancestros (una suerte de dotación familiar que aquí denominamos *capital étnico*). Estos factores generan una desigual *geografía de naturalización* marcada por la historia de la emigración española y las políticas migratorias y de ciudadanía tejidas a través de vivencias personales que navegan por una constante tesitura: ¿residencia o ancestros?

*Palabras clave:* 1. nacionalidad, 2. migración, 3. netnografía, 4. capital étnico, 5. España.

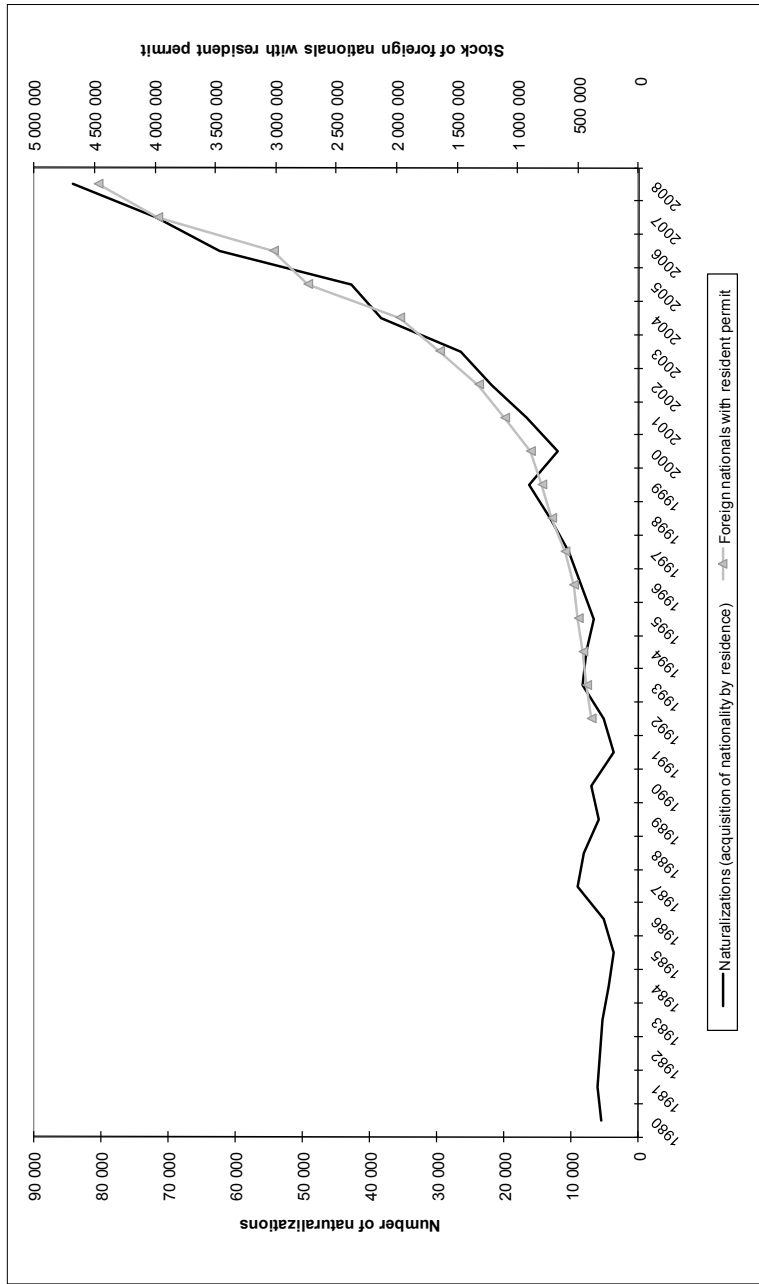
## *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

Spain has received the largest number of immigrants in Europe over the past decade. A total of approximately 5.6 million immigrants, legal or undocumented (12 % of the total population), were estimated to be living in Spain in 2009<sup>2</sup> compared to just 650 000 in 1999 (2 % of the population), the vast majority of which came from Latin America (62 %). This increase in immigration became especially significant in the late 1990s (see figure 1) due to a set of factors related to political openness and economic growth. Spain's economy grew steadily over the past two decades as part of its integration into the European and world markets (annual Gross Domestic Product growth averaged 3.7 % from 1995 to 2007). This growth was responsible for significant changes in the division of labor, facilitated social mobility, and opened up different areas of the labor market to foreign immigrant workers. In parallel to this economic growth, Spain's population experienced a rapid aging process, combining low fertility rates (average total fertility rate for 1990-2007 of 1.4 children per woman) with increases in life expectancy (from 73.5 to 78 for males between 1990 and 2010 and from 80.7 to 84.4 for females—the highest among European women). This rapid demographic transition also created a sudden need for increased labor supply through immigration flows. Finally, the various processes of regularization of undocumented migrants that took place in 1991, 1996, 2000, 2001 and 2005 perhaps sustained the hope of finding an opportunity for regularization for future migrants.

Latin American immigrants comprise the most significant subgroup within the total stock of foreign residents in Spain, both in absolute terms and rate of growth since the mid 1990s. These

<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Isabel Villaseñor (UNAM, Mexico) for her excellent manual coding of the forum's messages, and to Muhammad Adnan (UCL, United Kingdom) for the development of the computer software that made it possible to download the forum's messages.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the source of all general migration and population statistics cited is Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE, 2009) through the statistics published in its webpage.



Source: Acquisition of Spanish nationality compiled from Clarke, Van Dam, and Gooster (1998), and Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración (MTI, 2009).

Figure 1. Number of Naturalizations per Year (Left Axis) and Stock of Foreign Nationals with Resident Permit (Right Axis), 1980-2008

significant migration flows have made Spain the second most important destination for Latin American migrants after the United States (Agrela, 2002). The salience of Latin American migration to Spain, beyond these political and socio-economic factors, is explained by the close historic and cultural ties between Spain and Latin America. Such ties are not only derived from their inter-linked colonial history, linguistic and cultural proximity as well as recent economic investments, but also, and of special relevance to this paper, from the massive Spanish emigration flows to Latin America that took place from the 1850s to the 1950s, long after independence. This migration episode is relatively recent and, as will be discussed in this paper, becomes a key factor in explaining a substantial part of the new migration flows to Spain. Because of these historic and cultural factors, Latin American immigrants have a greater and wider number of options to enter, remain and integrate in Spanish society, in sharp contrast with immigration from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa or Eastern Europe. In fact there are various migration and integration policies that favor Latin Americans. This is especially the case in facilitating access to Spanish citizenship or nationality,<sup>3</sup> either through ancestry-based provisions that favor trans-generational migration (children and grandchildren of Spanish emigrants), or a naturalization-based route with a shortened period of two years' legal residence required for Latin Americans<sup>4</sup> (while for the rest of the world is ten years). Two separate paths that lead to the same goal; European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) citizenship, which requires migrants to adopt very different strategies, facing a lengthy and complicated bureaucratic procedure in either of them. Both processes require maximum use of a migrant's social capital, as well as what we term, "ethnic capital", ancestors, gene-

<sup>3</sup> Although *citizenship* is a broader concept than *nationality* (the membership element) both terms are used interchangeably in this paper following common practice in the European literature (e.g. Bauböck, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Spanish nationality law defines Ibero-Americans as those born in Spanish and Portuguese speaking Latin American and African countries, in addition to Philippines as well as Sephardic Jews, all considered of "Hispanic or Ibero-American heritage".

alogy, phenotype, surnames, and socialization in a community of “expatriates” abroad. In contrast with other sources of capital (social, human and economic) that can be acquired over time (Portes, 1998), “ethnic capital” is inherited; it forms part of a person’s individuality from birth and in most cases is not acquired. Furthermore, “ethnic capital” shares with other forms of capital the fact that it is transferable across generations and can be used to improve a person’s social, human and economic capitals.

In this utilization of ethnic capital, migrants require support and advice. In most cases it is informal advice only available over the Internet through discussion groups and participants’ fora. We will use one of these Internet resources, a discussion forum about Spanish nationality called “Civil Registry” (“Registro Civil”), to analyze the most common strategies used by migrants to obtain Spanish nationality (full details are provided in section “Netnography”). The need for this advice is clear in the following quote from this forum, which will be used in this paper to illustrate how the principles described operate in practice:<sup>5</sup>

I need to locate my great-grandparent’s birth certificate. He was born in 1877 in ... Granada, Spain, as well as the certificate of marriage to my great-grandmother ... I need them to carry on building my genealogical tree, very important when applying for Spanish nationality for my mother and her siblings, and then for ourselves, their children ... I would like to know where else I can request them from because all this process is very difficult from Argentina. Another question, when my mother obtains Spanish nationality, can she pass it then to us, her daughters? ... I apologize for sending all my concerns, but I have spent a long time looking for someone to send them to, because all Spanish consulates in Argentina are full and do not provide that much information ... To tell you the truth, I feel so lonely here not knowing what to do. I have already managed to put together most of the required paperwork but there is always

<sup>5</sup> The quotes from the forum users have been translated from Spanish with only slight modifications to facilitate its reading and preserve anonymity (including people’s names and references to place names or dates). All names are fictitious reflecting the person’s gender, and year of post is included.

something missing ... Thank you, thank you very much! (Ana, Argentinean, does not live in Spain, 2004).

Through the use of “netnography” (Kozinets, 2010), an innovative methodology for carrying out ethnographic research on-line, we aim to introduce an alternative approach to studies of acquisition of citizenship, typically dominated by a “destination view” (*i.e.* the host societies) where approaches that focus on the migrants themselves and their origin societies are scarce (Hollifield, 2000).

### *Theoretical Review of Nationality and Citizenship Acquisition*

Most countries conceive citizenship (symbolized by a nationality) as the main legal and political link between a citizen and the State (Cano, 2004). Hammar (1990) has proposed the term *denizens* (as opposed to citizens) to describe the large contingents of foreign migrants who are permanent residents but do not hold the nationality of the country where they live, and hence lack full political and legal rights. The most tangible consequences of this status are the lack of voting rights and differential treatment by legal systems that make a clear distinction between nationals and foreigners (non-nationals).

Globalization and increased migration flows over recent decades have started to erode the concept of the nation state as the basic building block of the international political order. As a result, the traditional assumption of membership of a single nation providing the central dimension of a person’s identity has been called into question. Some authors see the promotion of dual and multiple citizenships as a key step in the formalization of political communities beyond the sovereign nation state, and consider that the recognition of the *de facto* cosmopolitanism has been facilitated by economic globalization (Bauböck, 2002). Levitt, and Glick-Schiller (2004) have proposed the idea of “simultaneity” in migrants’ attachments to different places, exhibiting “dual loyalties”, or “cultural citizenship”.

Beyond the most obvious political and legal implications of dual nationality, amongst its most tangible benefits for transnational citizens is its associated freedom of movement between two or more societies with which they are closely linked through residence, friendship, and kinship ties (Bauböck, 2002). Transnational citizens, increasingly with dual nationality, move within a spatio-temporal continuum of unfinished migration flows (Levitt, and Glick-Schiller, 2004), as opposed to the traditional conception of unidirectional and definitive flows (immigration or return) (Ley, and Kobayashi, 2005). Such fluid mobility has its parallels in terms of identity and belonging, with various attachments to multiple societies and in stark contrast with the deeply rooted concept of assimilation, for example in the American (Portes, Fernández, and Haller, 2006) or French literature (Sayad, 1991). However, such fluid transnational mobility is mediated by the legal and bureaucratic hurdles that migrants increasingly face. Migrants attempt to maximize their chances of accessing dual nationality in a way that also allows its intergenerational transmission, an option not always available. This is reflected in the following quote from our Internet forum:

Does anyone know of an administrative agency in Alicante? I need to obtain my grandfather's birth certificate ... I have been a resident in Spain for five years ... but I am in Argentina. I would like to obtain Spanish nationality to pass it on to my children (Cristina, Argentinean, five years of residence in Spain, 2003).

Beyond the obvious mobility advantages, dual nationality facilitates access to various state benefits constituting a sort of welfare insurance for migrants and their families (Ley, and Kobayashi, 2005). Such a possibility is clearly a concern for participants in the Internet forum:

Hello ... my mother is Peruvian by birth, she is 62 and wants to apply for Spanish nationality. She has been living in Spain for nine years and has made National Insurance contributions for four years. I would like to know whether she will receive a pension if she gets

Spanish nationality? I would appreciate your response (Rosario, Peruvian, over 10 years living in Spain, 2006).

### *European Citizenship*

In the European Union (EU), the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 introduced the concept of the European citizenship, which confers a series of political and civil rights on nationals of any EU member state. Even when a European passport does not actually exist, the complete interchangeability of the 31 nationalities that form the European Economic Area plus Switzerland (EEA hereinafter) has created a *de facto* European citizenship. One symptom of the practical implications of European citizenship is the decline observed since 1992 in the number of naturalizations amongst EEA nationals residing in other member states (Clarke, Van Dam, and Gooster, 1998). However, for non-EEA nationals who are permanent residents in one EEA country, this kind of integration has had the opposite effect. Since such expanding rights are only accessible through formal citizenship, there is a strong incentive to naturalize. As we will show later, the substantial differences between citizenship and mere legal residence (*denizenship*) generate significant incentives for non-EEA nationals to acquire a nationality of an EEA member state, using the shortest possible route. Sometimes, this can involve a convoluted but eventually the most effective route, as illustrated by the following quote from the Internet forum:

My grandfather was Spanish and never lost his nationality. My father was born in Argentina in 1949 ... and died in 1984 ... After a lot of comings and goings we have just managed to get my father's nationality registered in the Spanish consulate in Buenos Aires, a sort of post-mortem recognition. We now have his birth certificate and we are only waiting for his death certificate ... That same day my siblings and I have an appointment to submit all the paperwork and initiate our application ... This nationality thing is very urgent to me, so that I can pass it on to my partner. My siblings live in Argentina but I have been living in Spain for three years but as a



student and this time doesn't count at all. This year I managed to get a residence and work permit ... I don't want to ask in the consulate because with my father they told me for three years that it was not possible [to recover his nationality], but here in Spain I found out that it was possible (Ernesto, Argentinean, three years living in Spain, 2004).

### *Hierarchy of Preferences in Access to Nationality*

Most developed nations have enabled mechanisms to facilitate access to citizenship for long-term foreign residents, as part of generous social integration policies for migrants or ethnic minorities (Elósegui, 2008). This process, typically known as naturalization, follows a similar pattern. After an extended period as a permanent resident during which the migrant has to prove he has culturally adapted to the "host country", the migrant is granted the nationality of a country as a sort of "reward" for integration (Bauböck, 2006). Furthermore, a number of countries maintain the requirement that the new national renounce his or her previous nationality, a remnant of an era when only one nationality per person was allowed. The prevalence of this naturalization model in most developed countries indicates that assimilation policies, as opposed to cosmopolitan ones, are the norm rather than the exception. In such a world view, naturalization is seen as a "one-way process" with no possibility of return.

Nationality law in most countries is driven by one of two legal traditions that used to be well differentiated: *ius sanguinis*, or "right of blood", under which nationality is inter-generationally transmitted from father/mother to children, either biologically or through adoption; and *ius soli*, or "right of soil", through which nationality is obtained by birth in a country, or sometimes through prolonged residence in it (sometimes referred to as *ius domicile*, or "right of residence"). In most developed countries, legislation regarding access to nationality typically provides a system of preferences to certain collectives according to ancestry (blood-related), geographic or historic and cultural relationships.

Such a system of preferences is generally organized around a kind of *hierarchy of ethno-cultural distances* with respect to nationals of other countries. At the highest level of this hierarchy, we find a blood-based or biological criterion, also termed “ethnic criterion”. According to this criterion, nationality is automatically acquired at birth by descent from a native emigrant, regardless of geography (place of birth or residence), cultural attachments (language ability and acculturation), and sometimes generational distance from the native emigrant. This is the case of some countries that promote the “re-ethnicization of citizenship” (Joppke, 2003) or the so-called “ethnic returns” (Domingo, 2005), such as Germany, Italy, Finland, Greece or Japan, especially since the end of the Cold War. This ethnic preference criterion in access to nationality has in fact come to replace former racial criteria that used to discriminate citizens from specific world regions in immigration policies. This was the case, for example, in the United States and Canada until the civil rights movement reforms in the 1960s and 1970s (Simon, 1995).

At the second level of this kind of preferential hierarchy, we find individuals born abroad who are direct descendants of nationals, or persons married to nationals. These “family members” of nationals enjoy preferential treatment regarding access to nationality according to a set of specified criteria that typically involve generation (children or grandchildren), place of birth, age at certain life events, and length of residence in the country whose nationality is requested. The descendants of Spanish citizens born abroad are thus located in this level of the hierarchy. At the third level of the hierarchy, we find the citizens of ex-colonies or countries within a similar historical and cultural sphere, without blood or ancestor ties. Preferential mechanisms in access to nationality have been established for these citizens, typically through a shortened minimum period of residence (Clarke, Van Dam, and Gooster, 1998). For example, the Quebec region in Canada has a preferential system for entry and naturalization of migrants from francophone countries, while the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain favor nationals from their former colonies in

naturalization law (Bauböck, 2006). In Spain, Latin American migrants are considered “preferred by Spanish society ... almost acclaimed and desired” (Izquierdo, López de Lera, and Martínez, 2002:3) because of their greater cultural proximity compared to other immigrant groups, especially non-Europeans such as those originating from African and Muslim countries.

Lastly, at the fourth level of such hierarchy we find citizens from the rest of the world, without any blood, ancestral, historical or cultural links, for whom the possibility of accessing the nationality of the “host country” is much more restricted. This hierarchy of preferences in access to citizenship resembles the concept of *cultural distance* using the scale proposed by Bogardus (1926). This is therefore a hierarchy of different levels of difficulty in accessing a country’s nationality established by each country with respect to the nationals of all other countries. Such hierarchy, aggregated by groups of countries in a system of overlapping hierarchies, forms the legal reference framework within which foreign nationals take decisions, choosing the most suitable strategy for obtaining nationality that maximizes their “ethnic capital”. One example of how migrants take decisions within this hierarchy is the following message from Sephardic Jews, who benefit from a shortened period of residence of two years in Spanish naturalization:

My husband has already obtained Spanish nationality (through residence—Sephardic Jew). We are in the process of applying for the nationality for our children ... all of whom were born outside Spain. How long can it take to get it approved for children? ... and the last question is, what process is quicker for acquiring Spanish nationality, if I request it through my own right (residence—Sephardic Jew) or through my husband? ... Thank you very much and apologies for my poor Spanish (badly written) (Ruth, unknown nationality, seven years of residence in Spain, 2007).

Furthermore, those potential migrants at the lowest level of this preferential hierarchy try to hold onto any traces of “ethnic capital” available to them, such as their surname, genealogy, ethnic origin or even genes, with which to sustain unrealistic expectations to

access Spanish nationality through one of the preferential routes, as it can be seen from the following quotes:

I am the grandchild of a Spaniard, but my grandfather did not recognize my mother. Can one ask for a DNA paternity test on my grandfather to prove that my mother is his daughter, so that I can apply for Spanish nationality? (María, unknown nationality, does not reside in Spain, 2005).

Hi, I would like clarification from someone. I am Peruvian and my surname is Aranguren, which I know is Basque. What I would like to know is if I can apply for Spanish nationality and until which generation can it be requested. Please if anyone can help me please send me an e-mail. Thanks (Ignacio, Peruvian, has never lived in Spain, 2008).

### *Acquisition of Spanish Nationality*

Acquisition of Spanish nationality is regulated by the Civil Code (Código Civil) (Cano, 2004). There are two distinct legal precepts for accessing Spanish nationality, by *attribution*, which automatically confers the status of “Spanish by origin” by birth, and by *acquisition*, which, following a voluntary application, results in the status of “Spanish by option”. Spanish nationality legislation has therefore traditionally favored biological filiation (*ius sanguinis*) over birthright (*ius soli*). This is a pattern typically found in countries that have traditionally experienced mass emigration (Cano, 2004).

The second precept in access to Spanish nationality, through *acquisition* (*i.e.* voluntary or “after birth”), is regulated by a series of criteria setting a minimum length of residence in Spain and demonstrating a sufficient level of cultural integration (language ability and “integration into Spanish customs and way of life”). In general terms, the minimum length of residence required is 10 years, reduced to five for refugees, and, since 1990, to only two years for nationals from Latin-American countries, Equatorial Guinea, the Philippines and Sephardic Jews (Álvarez, 2008).

This residence requirement is further reduced to only one year for grandchildren of native Spaniards (only since 2003) and those married to Spanish nationals. It is important to note that in all these cases the period of residence must be completed as a legal migrant and with a full residence permit. This excludes other types of temporary permits known as visitors' or "stay permits", such as for tourists, visitors, students or accompanying spouses, usually those without a work permit. This difference between "full residence" and "stay" permits is key to understanding some of the strategies adopted to acquire Spanish nationality. For example, migrants seek alternative routes in order to switch migrant status and start the effective period of residence as early as possible. This is especially important for Latin American migrants since two years of residence suffice to apply for nationality, as expressed in the following quote from the Internet forum:

In November it will be a year since I have been legally living in Spain (as a student). I have a friend who is self-employed and is willing to give me a work contract so that I can obtain a full residence permit. I understand that the period I have been here as a student does not count when applying for Spanish nationality (Francisco, Mexican who migrated from the United States, one year of residence in Spain, 2002).

The case of this Mexican student is highly representative of the aforementioned strategies to access nationality. After several messages posted in the forum over several years, he finally announced that his whole family in the United States obtained Spanish nationality through their ancestors (grandfather), which proved to be a much easier route than through residence in Spain. In fact, the decision to choose between the ancestors and residence routes is key to understanding such strategies, although the bureaucratic maze has its own ways of channelling requests, as demonstrated in the following quote.

My mother is Spanish, I have been living in Spain for 12 years and I am a [legal] resident. Four years ago I applied for Spanish nationality

as a daughter of a Spanish national but they rejected my application for choosing this option. They told me I should have requested it through residence ... Why was my application unsuccessful based on my mother's nationality? Why do they grant nationality to other people with Spanish grandparents? Thank you very much (Luisa, U.S. citizen, 12 year of residence in Spain, 2006).

As discussed later in the paper, the difference between these two routes; ancestry versus residence, is key to interpreting the geographical distribution of countries of origin as well as the typologies of personal circumstances found in the Internet forum. Moreover, different collective groups of descendants of Spaniards living abroad have lobbied the Spanish government to facilitate the inter-generational transmission of nationality, especially to the grandchildren of Spaniards born abroad. Grandchildren of Spaniards are required to reside legally in Spain for one year, with a full residence permit, in order to apply for nationality. The Spanish government has partly recognized these requests through a "Historic Memory" Act (Gobierno de España, 2008) that grants nationality to grandchildren of Spaniards who emigrated during and after the Civil War in the 1930s and 1940s either for political or economic reasons, without requiring residence in Spain.

Figure 2 shows the main countries of birth of foreign-born residents in Spain in 2008, broken down into nationality groups (relative distribution). Countries of birth are listed from left to right in descending order of percentage of Spanish nationality. This figure clearly reflects the history of Spanish emigration over the last 150 years, not only to Latin America, Equatorial Guinea and the Philippines but also to Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is surprising to find a high number of residents born in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile who hold a European nationality other than Spanish. This reflects a stronger ancestral connection to European countries with a *ius sanguinis* tradition, mainly Italy and Germany (data not shown).

Official statistics on access to Spanish nationality only include the *acquisition* route, *i.e.* those who "naturalize" through residence



after birth. This is because the other possible route, *attribution* by birth, is practically automatic and since it grants the status of “Spanish by origin” these individuals cannot be legally distinguished from other nationals in official statistics, regardless of age at nationality attribution. In the period between 1980 and 2008, 523 106 individuals were naturalized via acquisition (70 % between 2000–2008), the majority of whom had a previous nationality in Latin America (81 %) (MTI, 2009). The spectacular increase in the number of naturalizations over the past few years has paralleled the evolution of the stock of foreign migrants, as demonstrated in figure 1. However, a large proportion of all cases of access to Spanish nationality actually take place through the *attribution* route (through ancestors), and hence fall outside these official statistics on naturalization. As Izquierdo, López de Lera and Martínez (2002:21), put it: “They arrive with a nationality already in their pockets and thus they are neither reported as foreigners nor as naturalized”. The total figure of people with Spanish nationality who have been born abroad and live anywhere in the world is probably close to two million nationals in 2009. This figure comes from adding up the 837 941 people with Spanish nationality born abroad who live abroad and made the effort to register with a Spanish consulate,<sup>6</sup> plus the majority of those 1 126 125 residents in Spain with Spanish nationality but born abroad (INE, 2009). This collective of approximately two million people (comprising 3 to 4 % of the total population in Spain in 2009) who have acquired Spanish nationality holding or having held a different nationality could be termed here, in the absence of a better name, “new Spaniards”.

Because of the reasons that discussed in this paper, this collective of new Spaniards is expected to show steady growth over the coming years, comprising an important collective of Spanish and EU citizens. Such a collective, on the one hand extends the reach of attachments with Spain to many countries in the world, and

<sup>6</sup> According to the population register of Spanish citizens resident abroad—Padrón de Españoles Residentes en el Extranjero (PERE)—on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 (INE, 2009).



on the other, establishes various interlinked identities and transnational practices comprising complex intergenerational family mobility strategies. These are important research challenges in migration, identity and citizenship whose debate we propose to expand through this paper.

*“Netnography” of an Internet Forum on Nationality*

Academic research on people’s views published in Internet forums, blogs and the social web (also termed “web 2.0”) and analyzed through an ethnographic perspective has recently been termed “netnography” (Kozinets, 2010). The “netnographic” method could be defined as the empirical analysis of social groups through their real life experiences as represented in virtual environments. This fertile, new research methodology can be very useful for obtaining new insights into the study of migration. In this paper we have already used some examples of quotations from migrants or potential migrants from this type of media to illustrate the theoretical discussion. We will now take this work further by carrying out an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis of an Internet discussion forum. The main advantage of this methodology, still in its infancy, is its low cost and ease of access to a vast amount of participants’ material compared with alternative traditional survey methods. The most obvious disadvantages are the lack of control over the sampling framework of the population under study, as well as the absence of a questionnaire, interview schedule, observation plan or any research structure or strategy that could be devised prior to data collection. These disadvantages could obviously introduce a source of bias into the results, which could be especially critical when attempting to generalize from the results to the entire population. However, we think that the considerable advantages of this method clearly exceed its drawbacks, allowing researchers to collect an extremely large amount of opinions from a wide range of participants without any “researcher observation effect” and at a fraction of the cost of alternative methods.

The Internet forum analyzed here was called *registro civil* (Civil Registry) (<http://groups.msn.com/registrocivil>). Created in May 2001, it was active until February 2009 when Microsoft deactivated the discussion groups platform on which it was run. The original aim of this Internet forum was to facilitate the exchange of information for foreigners interested in services related to the Spanish Central Civil Registry, which deals with civil registration records of Spanish nationals living abroad as well as naturalization registrations. However, in a short time it became the main forum for obtaining key advice on legal aspects related to immigration and nationality procedures in Spain. The vast majority of messages with queries and their replies were posted by the forum users themselves (*i.e.* not experts in migration), which developed a very efficient migrant self-help system. These users shared their experiences and key information related to all sorts of migration administrative procedures in Spain, mainly the process of migrating to Spain, requesting or renewing residence permits and acquiring Spanish nationality. The content of the messages was publically available on the open Internet, what made them visible to Google searches on migration or nationality issues, which in turn contributed to increasing participation and the dissemination of its contents. In order to send messages, users were required to obtain a Microsoft passport account, although this was not required to read other users' messages. This forum constitutes an ideal resource for research purposes because of various factors: 1) the sustained length of time during which the forum was active (2001-2009), 2) the fact that this activity coincided with the highest period of immigration in Spanish history, and 3) the fact that the confidentiality of participants is ensured since the forum content had been removed in early 2009 after the closure of this service by Microsoft.

A simple computer program was developed in Java to repeatedly access the Internet forum and copy the content of each message. The program followed a specified sequence: 1) it opened the first message ever sent to the forum identified by the number at the end of the URL address on the message board, 2) it read the

message content in HTML format, 3) it copied its content as an HTML file, 4) it extracted the relevant fields (message ID, sender ID, date, title, text, etc.), 5) it stored these fields into an Oracle database, and 6) it repeated steps 1-5 for all the messages in the forum until reaching the last message. In this way the entire content of the forum spanning seven years from May 2001 to May 2008 (the time when the contents were downloaded), were stored in a local database, comprising a total of 54 920 messages. These messages were organized in a database according to certain basic characteristics.

### *Database Structure*

The entire database comprised a total of 54 920 messages posted by 6 813 persons (or more precisely, unique user ID names). Each message was posted to one of five possible discussion boards according to the main topic of the message (figures refer to percentages of messages per discussion board): general discussions (36.9%), immigration permits (30.6%), nationality (30.7%), current affairs (1.8%), and government employees (0.02%). The analysis presented here focuses solely on nationality issues and therefore only on the characteristics of people who posted one or more message to the “Nationality” message board were analyzed. This sub-collective comprised 2 860 persons, representing 42% of the total number of the forum’s users, and, unless otherwise specified, constitute the base population to which all the figures in the paper refer.

The first stage in the analysis consisted in capturing a set of basic reference indicators per user in order to classify them according to general characteristics. Having a classified database of 2 860 users makes it much easier to analyze the content of their tremendously large volume of messages (41 904). The results presented in this paper focus mainly on the quantitative evidence collected by classifying user profiles and describing the main types of experiences reported in the forum, while qualitative quotes are used to illustrate the main points.

*Table 1.* Description of Variables Captured for Each Forum's User in the Research Database

<i>No.</i>	<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Pre-set responses</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	ID	Person ID number	ID number internally assigned to each user
2	Role in the group	Participant/leader	Main role of the user in the forum: participant, who only enquires about his/her own case, or leader, who responds to others' enquiries
3	Country of origin	Country name/n. a.*	User's country of origin or former country of nationality
4	Spanish ancestors?	y/n/n. a.*	The user (has/does not have/we do not know) Spanish ancestors
5	Seeks nationality	y/n/n. a.*	Is the user explicitly interested in applying for Spanish nationality?
6	Year of nationality application	Year/n. a.*	(If answered y to question 5) Year of initial application of nationality
7	Nationality approved?	y/n	(If answered y to question 5) Has the nationality application been successful?
8	Year nationality acquired	Year/n. a.*	(If answered y to question 7) Year of nationality acquisition
9	Method of access to nationality	Residence/spouse/parents/grandparents/off-spring	Main method to access Spanish nationality according to the legislation at the time of participation in the forum.
10	Resides in Spain?	y/n/n. a.*	Does the user live or has lived in Spain in the past as a resident?
11	Year of arrival to Spain	Year/n. a.*	Year of first arrival to Spain
12	Length of residence in Spain	One year/one-two years/three-five years/five years/n. a.*	Length of residence in Spain (either derived from question 11 or taken from the text)
13	Signs of irregular experience?	y/n/probably	Does the user present any signs of irregularity in his/her migration legal status (either present or past status/es)
14	Undocumented/irregular migrant?	y/n/n. a.*	Does the user explicitly report to have been in irregular migration status?
15	Returned to country of origin?	y/n/"intermitently"/intends to return	Has the user returned or intends to return to his/her country of origin? ("intermitently" means any type of circular movement)
16	Other observations	Free text	Any other observation that the research assistant deems to be useful for the investigation, such as flagging up relevant quotes for qualitative analysis

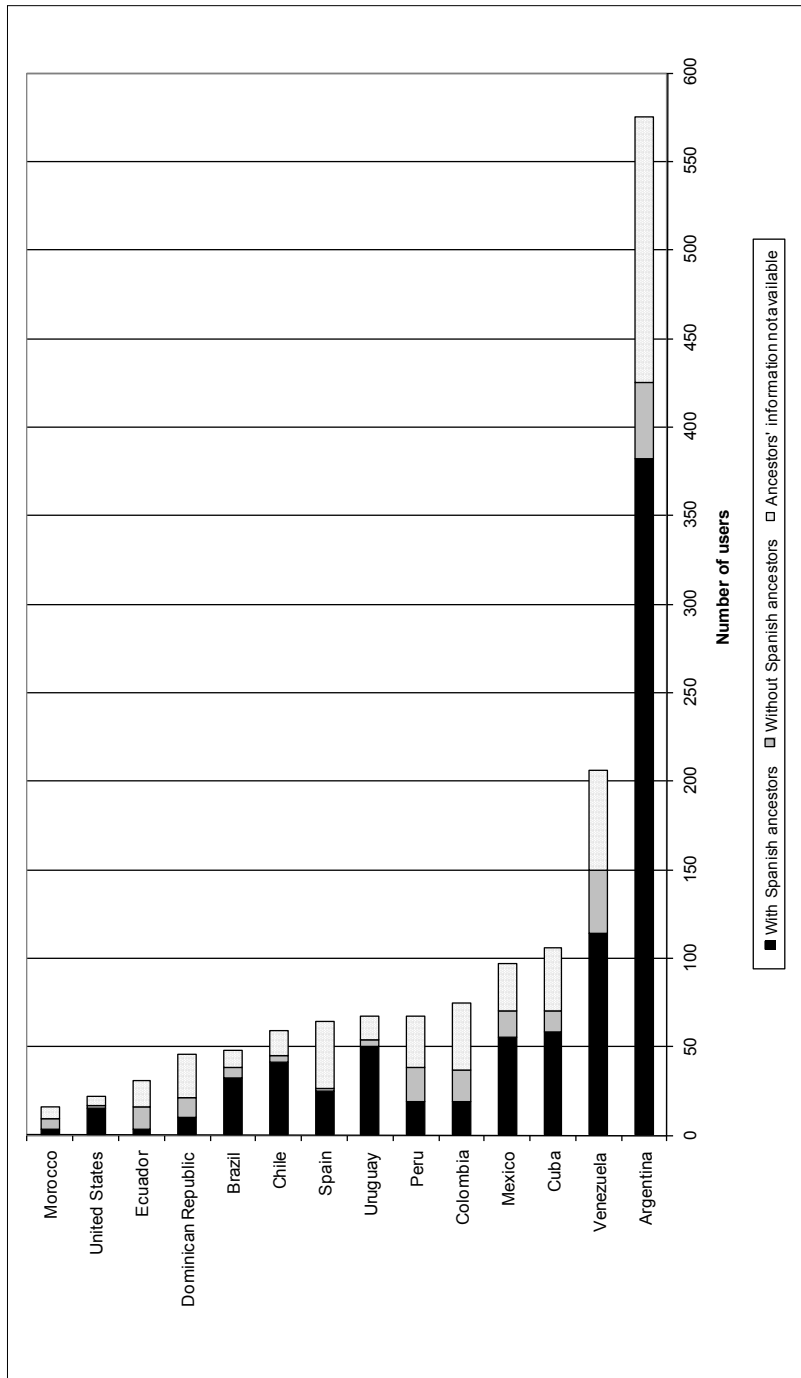
\*Not available.

*Source:* Author's database compiled from Registro Civil Internet forum.

A total of 16 variables for each person were captured by hand (see their description in table 1) related to the following aspects: *a*) country of origin, *b*) presence of Spanish ancestors, and *c*) migration status and experience (details about the migratory process, residence in Spain and access to nationality). Some users offer all sorts of details about their life histories, migratory experiences and the process of accessing nationality and that of their relatives, while the great majority only report the minimum pieces of information required to interpret their question. Therefore, the classification of users using these 16 variables relates to the “lowest common denominator” aiming to maximize coverage rather than gaining in-depth information about a few users’ experiences. The data capture of these 16 variables for the 2 860 users was performed in a *Microsoft Access* database using a bespoke menu that facilitated browsing through each user’s messages and implementing the manual data entry process. The system made it possible to view all the messages posted by each user, which were grouped by message board (with the nationality given first) and then arranged in ascending order by the message’s date. The analysis was performed manually by a research assistant, who read the message/s in Spanish until all 16 variables were completed or the message content was exhausted, repeating this process for all users. This was an intensive, arduous process that enabled the classification of 2 860 people through reading the content of all or part of the 41 904 messages they posted, with special attention paid to those 16 856 messages sent to the nationality board.

### *Analysis and Results*

Of the 2 860 persons analyzed, the user’s country of origin was identified for 1 596 persons (55.8 %), amongst which Latin American countries clearly predominate (1 416 persons or 88.7 % out of those with a known country), especially Argentina (36 %), Venezuela (13 %), Cuba (7 %) and Mexico (6 %) (see figure 3). The variable of presence of Spanish ancestors was compiled for 1 366 persons (47.8 % of the total), of which 81.2 percent declared



Source: Author's database compiled from Registro Civil Internet forum.

Figure 3. Frequency of Users by Country of Origin and Presence of Spanish Ancestors (Top 14 Countries)

Spanish ancestry while the rest made it clear that they did not have any Spanish ancestors. The rest of the users do not declare any ancestry information (52.2 %) but we would expect that the great majority do not have Spanish ancestors, since this situation would clearly influence their possibilities of acquiring nationality and would be worth mentioning in any request submitted to the forum.

Figure 3 shows a histogram of the number of users per country of origin classified by the proportion of people with Spanish ancestors. This figure is useful for understanding the wider geography of interest in Spanish nationality, as reflected by this forum. The top four countries (Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba and Mexico), not only have the largest number of total users, but also the largest proportion of people with Spanish ancestors, clearly dominated by Argentina. These four countries were the largest recipients of Spanish emigrants during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore, where one would expect to find a larger number of recent descendants of Spanish nationals interested in acquiring Spanish nationality via ancestry provisions. Figure 3 also shows a large proportion of Spanish ancestors within users originating in Uruguay, Chile, Brazil and the United States, while the proportion is much lower amongst those originating from (in descending order): Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Morocco. This “nationality gradient”, from the historic destination countries of Spanish emigration towards the origin countries that have most recently sent migrants to Spain, is identical to that shown in figure 2, which comes from official statistics (population register broken down by country of birth and nationality), further validating our sample obtained through the Internet forum.

On the basis of this evidence we can conclude that in general terms the countries of origin heavily represented in our database are those with a larger presence of descendants of Spanish emigrants during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is not surprising since we have only taken users that posted messages on the nationality board. The exceptions (Morocco and Ecuador) simply reflect countries with a large volume of contemporary immigrants in

Spain, but not historic Spanish ancestors. It is worth highlighting the absence of Bolivia, a country of origin of a large number of immigrants over the last decade, yet whose representation in the Internet forum is extremely low. The absence of Bolivians and the low number of users from Ecuador may reflect a much lower penetration of Internet usage among these migrants, both in the origin and destination countries, a situation that is also related to social class differences between national migrant groups in the flows to Spain. In fact, these two countries have the lowest Internet penetration rates in Latin America, 2.1 % in Bolivia and 11.7 % in Ecuador compared to a regional average of 23.6 % (The World Bank Group, 2009).

#### *Nationality Application and Acquisition Process*

The vast majority of forum users (2 202 or 77 %) have obtained, applied for, or are in the process of applying for Spanish nationality, 22 percent of whom report already having acquired Spanish nationality. However, we should expect that the majority of those whose application was successful will not come back and report their outcome in the forum, and therefore the overall application success rate is probably very high. Moreover, 176 people or eight percent of those who applied for nationality mention the year of initial application as well as the final resolution year, so that their average process waiting time can be calculated, namely one year and nine months. The data has the following distribution: three percent less than a year, 25 percent one year, 64 percent two years, and eight percent three years. The geographic distribution is not significant because of small numbers in this sub-sample.

Furthermore, 28 of these users also declare their year of arrival in Spain as well as the year of nationality application. The difference between the two dates thus represents the average waiting time that these users lived in Spain before applying for nationality, which is three years and three months, while the mode is three years. In 22 of these cases the year of acquisition of nationality is also known, meaning that the total time between arrival



in Spain and acquiring nationality is four years and three months. However, these figures must be interpreted with caution, not only because of the obvious dangers of generalizing from this small self-selected sample of our population, but also because the dates were reported and captured as single year units, not in months or days and hence all averages should be read within confidence intervals of about 6-12 months.

Bearing in mind these caveats, the typical pattern followed by migrants is that after arrival to Spain they wait between two and three years before applying for nationality, a process that takes another two years to resolve resulting in an average period from arrival to becoming a Spanish national of four to six years. On top of this time, analysis of the messages shows that in many cases, after nationality is obtained many users have to wait between one and two years before their new nationality can be registered in the civil registry and a passport issued. In many cases this long wait creates a legal limbo with respect to their migratory status, as we discuss in the section on “irregularity”.

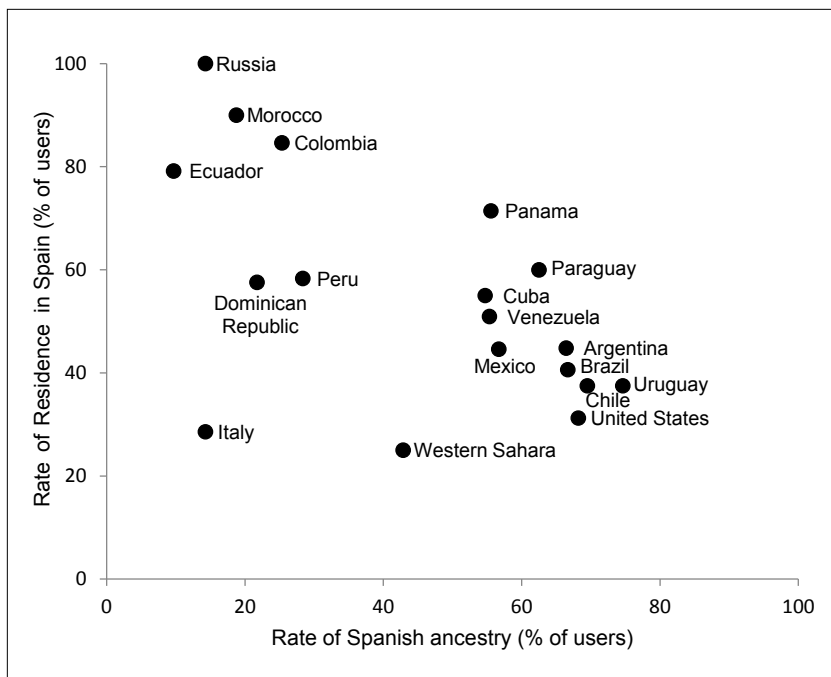
### *Residence in Spain*

Information about residence history in Spain is available for 61 percent of the 2 202 users that have applied or obtained Spanish nationality, while the rest (39 %) declare having always lived in their country of origin or elsewhere outside Spain. Moreover, combined information on country of origin and residence history is available for 1 125 of these users, meaning that we can therefore calculate the percentage of persons per country that live or have lived in Spain. In descending order, this “rate of residence” per country is: Morocco (90 %), Colombia (85 %), Ecuador (79 %), Peru (58 %), Dominican Republic (58 %), Cuba (55 %), Venezuela (51 %), Argentina (45 %), Mexico (45 %), Brazil (41 %), Uruguay (38 %), Chile (38 %), and the United States (31 %). This list of countries is the inverse of that shown in figure 3, where some of the countries that have the largest number of messages and Spanish ancestors (Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico)

have lower “rates of residence” than countries such as Morocco, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, or Dominican Republic. Morocco is a symptomatic example of this relationship. It appears in the first position on the above list, with a rate of residence in Spain of 90 % while in figure 3 it appears in the last position with only 18 % of persons with Spanish ancestors.

This relationship between ancestors and residence is clearly established in figure 4, a scatter plot comparing the rate of residence in Spain with the percentage of users with Spanish ancestors (rate of ancestry) for each country of origin. Two distinctive groups can be identified; one in the top left section, with a high rate of residence in Spain and low percentage of Spanish ancestors, and another in the bottom right section, with the opposite characteristics. The arrangement of countries in this graph clearly reveals the relationship between these two variables. Such a relationship is probably the result of preferential treatment in the nationality legislation towards people with Spanish ancestors who are not required to reside in Spain in order to acquire Spanish nationality. These users post messages in the forum from their countries of origin, with the aim of applying for nationality through the ancestry route, while the rest of the users write after having become residents in Spain. This omnipresent dichotomy, ancestry vs. residence, explains the asymmetric geography of access to Spanish nationality discussed in the previous section, which will become even clearer when analyzing the type of application for nationality in the next section.

As regards to declared intention to return to the country of origin, this information is only available for 96 users. Of this group, 58 percent intend to stay in Spain, 19 percent have already returned to their country of origin, eight percent intend to return soon, and 15 percent come and go in circular migration movements. No significant differences are observed by length of residence or year of arrival. However, it is surprising to find several users who fear losing their newly acquired Spanish nationality if they decide to return permanently to their country of origin, and



Note: Rate of Spanish residence is the percentage of users by country of origin who declare that they have ever resided in Spain, while the rate of Spanish ancestry is the percentage of users by country of origin who declare that they have Spanish ancestors. Only countries with at least seven users for both types of rates are shown.

Source: Author's database compiled from Registro Civil Internet forum.

Figure 4. Scatter Plot of Rate of Spanish Residence vs. Rate of Spanish Ancestry by Country of Origin

others who assume automatic links between nationality, residence and access to welfare benefits:

Hi, I am Colombian and I have Spanish nationality with a DNI [national identity card] and everything. I now live in Colombia and my question is, can I lose my [Spanish] nationality because of living in Colombia rather than in Spain? If so, what do I need to do to avoid losing it? If I return to Spain, will I have problems because of not having paid National Insurance contributions, or does being a Spaniard mean that I won't have any problems? (Claudio, Colombian, return migrant living in Colombia, 2007) (see also Rosario's quote previously cited in pages 15-16).

### *Typology of Routes to Nationality*

The legal route to apply for nationality is known for 73 percent of the 2 202 persons who applied for it. Eight different possible routes to nationality are captured in the database, four of which clearly predominate amongst users (93.3 %): *a*) ancestors-grandparent/s (15.4 %); *b*) ancestors-parents (20.9 %); *c*) spouse and children (23.1 %); and *d*) residence in Spain (33.9 %). If the two ancestors categories are grouped together—*a*) and *b*)—, it is possible to distinguish three broad types of routes to nationality: ancestors, spouse/children and residence, which form the basic typology of access to nationality discussed here.

The analysis of the different routes to nationality broken down by country of origin reveals further interesting patterns, especially between the two types of family related routes; ancestors and spouse/children. Table 2 shows a list of 19 countries with five or more people for which the route to nationality is known. Each row reports, the percentage of users that applied for nationality through the ancestors or spouse/children routes for each country, as well as the difference between the two percentages expressed as a quotient from -1 to +1 according to equation 1:

$$\text{Difference quotient} = \frac{s - a}{s + a} \quad (1)$$

where *s* is the percentage of users per country that chose the spouse and children route, while *a* is that of the ancestors' route. This quotient makes it possible to classify the 19 countries into three clearly differentiated segments; countries where the most predominant method is the spouse and children route (top segment), those where the ancestry route predominates (lower segment), and those where the mix between routes is more balanced (middle segment). Once more, these three groups of countries follow the same aforementioned patterns when comparing rates of residence in Spain with percentage of Spanish ancestors, as summarized in figures 3 and 4. However, a new dimension can be seen here, since in the segment where the spouse route predominates we can observe

Table 2. Countries of Origin by Predominant Type of “Family Route” to Access to Nationality

<i>Country of origin (1)</i>	<i>Total people (2)</i>	<i>Percentage ancestry (3)</i>	<i>Percentage spouse and children (4)</i>	<i>Difference quotient (5)</i>	<i>Predominant method (6)</i>
Ukraine	5	0	80	1	
Russia	6	0	33	1	
Morocco	10	10	60	0.71	
Dominican Republic	37	16	65	0.6	<i>Spouse and children</i>
Peru	53	17	49	0.49	
Colombia	61	16	38	0.39	
Ecuador	23	22	43	0.33	
Panama	8	25	38	0.2	
Paraguay	8	25	38	0.2	
Portugal	5	20	20	0	<i>Neutral</i>
Mexico	80	39	25	-0.22	
Venezuela	165	53	28	-0.3	
United States	16	50	25	-0.33	
Cuba	78	45	18	-0.43	
Argentina	469	39	15	-0.44	
Brazil	36	47	14	-0.55	<i>Ancestry</i>
Uruguay	63	43	11	-0.59	
Chile	41	49	12	-0.6	
Western Sahara	6	33	0	-1	

Note: Countries of origin included (column 1) are those with at least five users with a valid response in variable 9 (method of access to nationality), comprising the total number of users per country (column 2) to which the rest of percentages refer. The next two columns report the percentage of users that apply for nationality through: ancestors (column 3) and spouse or children (column 4). Column 5 shows a difference quotient between the previous two columns (see text, equation 1), while column 6 classifies the 19 countries into three predominant types of family route to access nationality.

Source: Author's database compiled from Registro Civil Internet forum.

Eastern European countries, Morocco and four Latin American countries without a recent history of Spanish emigration: Dominican Republic, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador. These are all countries with higher rates of intermarriage with Spanish nationals, a pattern that could be explained in the four Latin American

countries by the feminization of the migration flows to Spain, given that in general terms women have a higher propensity to marry men from the destination country than vice-versa (Durand, 1998). In the segment dominated by the ancestors' route, we find the countries with a history of Spanish emigration mentioned before, plus Western Sahara, which, despite the small number of cases, reflects the importance of the recent Spanish colonial past in this type of route to nationality.

### *Irregularity*

The analysis of irregular migration status amongst users is rather restricted, since only 58 persons declare having been in an irregular situation at some point. On first sight, it is surprising to see that 49 of them have actually applied for Spanish nationality or intend to do so, while four of them report having already obtained Spanish nationality. However, upon close inspection of their messages it is clear that these are persons that have switched between migratory statuses, either from irregularity to nationality via marriage or one of the regularization programs (amnesties), or from regularity to irregularity while they are waiting to obtain the new Spanish passport and their residence permit has expired. In most cases the legal situation of the families concerned becomes very complicated, because some family members have already acquired Spanish nationality while others are in the process and sometimes become irregular because of the lengthy waiting times. This is the case of Marisa, which clearly shows the fine line between being an irregular migrant and a national, something not always discussed in the citizenship literature:

My case is as follows, I got Spanish nationality (great!). After this I applied for it for my two daughters but after a year and four months I have had no news at all ... One of them is now 18 and her residence permit has expired for several months ... I am desperate and feel powerless because my phone calls and enquiries are going nowhere and I cannot find a solution. My daughters have been living in Spain

for seven years and one of them needs to work but can't because she has no work permit. Spanish nationality will be the solution but we don't know anything about how the process is going or how much longer we have to wait. If any one can answer my questions please help (Marisa, Ecuadorian, 2007).

In some of these cases a complete history of family regularization and naturalization can be traced longitudinally by the following messages posted in the forum over time. For example, one Cuban woman writes in June 2007:

I am Cuban and I have irregular status in Spain. My mother is in Cuba and has just obtained Spanish nationality because her father was Spanish and born in Spain, that is, she was a Spaniard "by birth". I have requested the residence permit for being the daughter of a Spaniard but they have rejected it, what can I do? (Gladys, Cuban, resident in Spain, 2007).

A year later, after having acquired Spanish nationality she is interested in passing it on to her husband: "Hello: I am Cuban and I have Spanish nationality. My husband is in an irregular situation. I would like to know if he has the right to regularize his situation in Spain if we have been married (in Cuba) for eight years. Regards" (Gladys, Cuban, resident in Spain, 2008).

This is an illustrative case of how access to nationality through ancestors makes it possible to regularize the migration status of persons from several generations (the daughter of a Spanish emigrant, a granddaughter and her husband) living in several countries (Cuba and Spain) and regardless of irregularity in migration status.

### *Marriage as a Migration and Naturalization Strategy*

Some messages also reveal how marriage to a Spanish spouse is used as a strategy to migrate to or remain in Spain (regularization), while some persons carefully weigh the cost that a divorce could

have in the process of obtaining Spanish nationality, as reflected in the following quotes:

I am Ecuadorian and I have been living in Spain irregularly for over four years. My boyfriend is Spanish and we are getting married on the 17<sup>th</sup> ... I would like to know if I can go on a trip abroad for my honeymoon the day after the wedding ... What documents do I need to exit and enter Spain? Thanks (Doris, Ecuadorian, resident over four years, 2005).

Hello ... if you are going to get divorced I tell you the following, because it happened to me: 1) After the divorce they don't go chasing you to take away your residence permit, that is, the police. 2) You need to start the process [applying for nationality] before you start the divorce and then play around with the timings, I mean, hold on a bit longer. 3) I first applied for nationality and after a year I started the divorce process, and by the time of the interview with the police [required for the nationality application] I had already started the divorce process. 4) My timings are as follows: Nov. 2004 I start the process, mid 2005 interview with the police, divorce Jan. 2006, nationality Dec. 2006, I hope that this is useful to you, good luck (Andrés, Colombian, nine years of residence, 2007).

### *Conclusion*

The importance of Spanish ancestors in shaping the patterns of access to Spanish nationality is a key finding of this analysis. This seems to be a fundamental factor in explaining the asymmetric relationship between, on the one hand, the frequencies of those forum users interested in acquiring nationality by country of origin, and on the other, the actual distribution in the official statistics of total immigrant population by country of origin, led by Romania, Morocco, Ecuador, United Kingdom, Colombia, and Bolivia (INE, 2009). Moreover, another explanatory factor in this asymmetry is the unequal level of access to the Internet and general lack of "web literacy" of persons from some of these countries,



both in the origin country and in Spain, an aspect that is also related to the class differences between migrant groups. This could be decisive in explaining the low volume of Internet forum activity observed for people from Ecuador and Bolivia.

From this analysis we can also conclude that there are three broad mechanisms that facilitate access to a European nationality: *a)* transgenerational migration through the *ius sanguinis* provisions of some countries, key for destinations of historic European emigration; *b)* preference given to countries in the former colonial sphere of influence and *c)* the history of recent immigration flows that generate family re-unification movements, mixed marriages and the transmission of the newly acquired nationalities to descendants regardless of the geography of residence.

Furthermore, beyond Spanish nationality this analysis has also shown the long-term consequences of historic emigration flows from other European nations to Latin America. Today, these flows have facilitated what is known as “three-way migration” (Durand and Massey, 2010), in the study presented here primarily represented by Argentineans and Uruguayans with Italian or German origins who “recover” the nationality of their ancestors but prefer to live in Spain, because of linguistic and cultural proximity (Tintori, 2009). Furthermore, there are other cases of Latin Americans who, after acquiring Spanish nationality through residence, decide to live in other EU countries, such as Colombians in the United Kingdom (Guarnizo, 2008). “Nowadays it is common to see Madrid full of Latin Americans who are grandchildren of Italians, living legally thanks to their nationality being recognized, while the grandchildren of Spaniards are in many cases living illegally here” (Arturo, nationality unknown, 2004).

Another important aspect stemming from the analysis of this Internet forum is that migrants devise strategies to obtain an EU nationality according to the most effective route for themselves and their families. Such strategies seek to maximize their ethnic capital within a system of hierarchical preferences in access to

nationality established by each immigration country with respect to the rest of the world, as described in the earlier sections. Therefore, migrants attempt to maximize their chances according to the most favorable combination of their personal circumstances with respect to three aspects: ancestors, marriage, and places and timing of residence. Within their personal combinations of these factors they develop a migration and nationality strategy through the country and legal mechanism (ancestors or residence) that provide the most favorable route in each case and point in time. In the context of a highly integrated European Economic Area (EEA), which of the 31 member countries is finally chosen is not that relevant. Instead, what migrants weigh is the number of bureaucratic hurdles and migratory requirements that must be overcome in order to become an EU/EEA citizen together with the shortest route for each individual's circumstances.

Furthermore, the data presented here and the individual cases highlighted in the text support the hypothesis of a continuous weakening of the single or sole nationality as the fundamental model of belonging to a nation state. Moreover, in the Spanish case, migrants who become naturalized also have to integrate into very different regional cultural and identity contexts, having to learn additional languages and customs, such as Galician, Basque or Catalan. Therefore multiple affiliations and spheres of identity are likely to be created and maintained, which involve the countries of origin and destination, "three-way countries" as well as regional identities.

These findings also corroborate the general perception in the citizenship literature of the increased value placed by migrants on having multiple citizenships. The individual cases reported here show that even for U.S. citizens, the possibility of possessing an EU passport is very attractive, in terms of work and residence possibilities across Europe, but also to enable access to welfare benefits that might not be available to them in the U.S.

In Latin America, many of these combinations of pathways leading to multiple citizenships have been made possible by the historic confluence of migratory flows from a large range of

different world regions. Having an ancestor from another country forms part of an “ethnic capital” that is independent of or complements, an individual’s social capital, and becomes key to facilitating migratory flows. A person’s surname, ethnic origin, phenotype and genealogy have recently become key components of migratory strategies at a global level. Regardless of whether one actually migrates or not, having the possibility of drawing upon one’s “ethnic capital” could be conceived as a life insurance policy, or a “blank check” that is readily available when most required.

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