

# A CULTURAL SOCIOLOGICAL READING OF LIFESTYLE MIGRATION

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COBISS 1.01

## ABSTRACT

### **A Cultural Sociological Reading of Lifestyle Migration**

One of the fundamental issues in lifestyle migration is that the ideals behind it, a quest for a better way of life, are not homogenous across groups and contexts. Unlike other conceptual frameworks within migration, lifestyle migration is embedded in a cultural framing where participants draw from a variety of cultural structures to make sense of their experiences. In this paper, I examine narratives from participants in lifestyle migration in Australia. Buried in these narratives are three broad themes: anti-consumerism, nostalgia and boundary maintenance. Using a cultural sociological lens, I propose that this demonstrates the flexibility of the concept of lifestyle migration but also reflects the usefulness of cultural sociology in unpacking this phenomenon further.

**KEY WORDS:** cultural sociology, lifestyle migration, time, nostalgia, cultural boundaries

## IZVLEČEK

### **Sociološkokulturni pogled na življenjsko-stilske migracije**

Temeljna premisa življenjsko-stilskih migracij je, da ideali, ki jih motivirajo, torej iskanje boljšega življenja, niso homogeni za vse skupine in kontekste. V nasprotju z drugimi raziskovanji migracij, so življenjsko-stilske migracije proučevane skozi kontekst kulture; udeleženci izhajajo pri osmišljanju svoje izkušnje iz različnih kulturnih struktur. Članek proučuje pripovedi udeležencev življenjsko-stilskih migracij v Avstraliji. Pripovedi zajemajo tri širše teme: kritiko potrošništva, nostalgijo in vzdrževanje meja. Gledano skozi sociološko lečo to izkazuje fleksibilnost koncepta življenjsko-stilskih migracij in uporabnost sociologije kulture pri nadaljnji razlagi tega pojava.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** sociologija kulture, življenjsko-stilske migracije, čas, nostalgija, kulturne meje

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the major difficulties in conceptualising a term such as lifestyle migration lies in the problem of interpreting lifestyle as a generic quest for a better way of life. While ethnographic and qualitative accounts provide us with rich narratives from participants about their migration stories, their unpacking requires deeper theoretical knowledge about how lifestyles are consumed in modernity. The first illustrations of this emerge from both Karen O'Reilly (2000; Oliver, O'Reilly 2010) and Michaela Benson's (2011) work that tracks the pre and post migration experience through class lines using Bourdieusian analysis. Others have traced the development of the lifestyle migrant identity to structural shifts that privilege agency and the postmodern need to develop one's path to happiness in everyday life (Korpela 2013). However, in this paper I seek to explore lifestyle migration further by examining the meanings provided by migrants about their experiences from a cultural sociological viewpoint. In doing so, I do not seek to enter into debates about which style of theoretically unpacking lifestyle migration is best. Rather, this approach invites us to consider a raft of cultural repertoires that people draw upon to make sense of their story in both pre and post migration settings.

O'Reilly and Benson (2009: 2, *italics added*) indicate clearly that the term lifestyle migration itself is certainly open for debate and not a closed system inviting only one form of theoretical reflection. They write that lifestyle migration is

[a] *conceptual framework*, through which to examine both the similarities and differences within this growing trend as well as to begin to draw attention to its location in wider structural and historical forces and its local and global impacts...which remains *open to amendment* in the light of new empirical data, lifestyle migration is the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life. (O'Reilly, Benson 2009: 2)

In some ways, this approach appears similar to another concept, amenity migration, which has been part of literature since Edward Ullman (1954) coined the phrase in order to empirically identify migration for climate reasons. It is certainly possible to read amenity and lifestyle migration as comparable concepts. However, by using a cultural sociological approach we can begin to tease out some of the fundamental differences between amenity migration and lifestyle migration. Using empirical data and exploring this further using cultural sociology, I propose later in this paper that lifestyle migration might be best read as a tool that cannot necessarily be pinned down empirically but which is instead a sensitising concept that holds heuristic value. Underpinning the concept is an understanding that cultural life is messy, complex and particularly difficult to quantify. The value of lifestyle migration as a conceptual type is the ability it has to incorporate and relate to other concepts, such as class and race, while admitting internal differences according to contexts such as place, culture and identity. In other words, lifestyle migration is a flexible framework which allows broad themes to be identified while acknowledging that lifestyle and the ideal of a "better life" is non-homogenous according to different group memberships.

## STRONG CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Before progressing it is worth discussing the style of cultural sociology that I am proposing to use in this paper. Cultural sociology's recent return to the Durkheimian lens, especially in America, provides an opportunity to revisit the focus of the subdiscipline by turning attention to culture as an independent rather than dependent variable in social phenomena. The framing of social change, for instance, through a lens of cultural power is articulated most profoundly in the "Strong Cultural Sociology" paradigm of

Alexander and Smith (2006). Set out initially as a challenge to 'weak' programmes in the sociology of culture (where culture becomes a dependent variable rather than an autonomous actor), the paradigm attempts to provide a 'textual understanding of social life' (Alexander, Smith 2006: 146). It is worth citing Alexander and Smith (2006: 146) at length here:

The appeal of this theory (narrative and genre theory) lies partially in its affinity for a textual understanding of social life. The emphasis on teleology carries with it some of the interpretive power of the classical hermeneutical model. This impulse to reading culture as a text is complemented, in such narrative work, by an interest in developing formal models that can be applied across different comparative and historical cases. In other words, narrative forms such as the morality play or melodrama, tragedy, and comedy can be understood as "types" that carry with them particular implications for social life.

The proposal to place culture at the forefront of analysis draws the theorist and researcher away from individualism towards broader cultural frames that individuals use to make sense of their lives. Reflective of Geertz's (1973) thick description, culture here is deemed deeply rich with meaning which individuals understand through various cultural structures. Unlike Geertz (1973) however, the strong programme advocates for the connection of local stories to broader social theory. As Alexander (1998: 30) advocates, "the world is meaningful" and as such we need to "describe the world's inner life or we will fail to describe it at all".

By advocating for a cultural focus, the relationship of identity (for instance) cannot be tied simply to factors such as class divisions. This is potentially a pitfall for advocating for a Bourdieusian lens, as Oliver and O'Reilly (2010) and Benson and O'Reilly (2009) attempt to do with lifestyle migration (see also Benson 2011). Rather, what Alexander and Smith (2006) advocate is to examine a host of hermeneutical structures that provide impetus for and perhaps define how people live their lives post-migration. In some ways, lifestyle migration literature is beginning to identify this through race and ethnicity (Benson 2014; Croucher 2009, Hayes 2014). However, at a deeper level, understanding cultural narratives that are developed within groups that people negotiate, for instance national identities, are important to conceptualising the cultural codes that are imprinted on people's motivations for and which remain as watermarks in their lived experiences of lifestyle migration.

Of course, this approach has its limitations. Importantly, there is a potential naivety that is associated with taking culture as an "autonomous agent" that has influence on rather than is influenced by heavy structural elements. Gartman (2007: 383) for instance argues that

[the] problem of Alexander's demand for 'analytical autonomy' is that it assumes what it hopes to demonstrate. By initially bracketing out the influence of economic and utilitarian relation in its formal analysis of culture, it assumes that cultural forms are not themselves affected by these constitutionally, from the inside. The only relation between culture and economy that this method allows is an external, fortuitous intersection of preformed forces.

Culture has been shown not only through Bourdieu (1984) but several others to be "inextricably and internally constituted by the economic organization of society" (Gartman 2007: 383-384). In other words, culture does not exist in a vacuum but is developed by and constituted through class, race and other strong structural boundaries (cf. Lamont 2006).

This criticism could also extend to the way Alexander and Smith (2006) dismiss other useful concepts such as governmentality, charisma and rationality in cultural study. However, in response to this, Smith (2008: 180) has argued that any analysis of this type can at times be "an analytical possibility rather than an empirical reality", suggesting that the strong approach is merely one way of understanding phenomenon and not necessarily the only way. In lifestyle migration there are perhaps "bottomless

layers of meaning" (Smith 2008: 180) requiring several different types of approaches to provide what O'Reilly (2012: 37) describes not as "irresponsible eclecticism" but as a diversity in understanding.

## METHODS AND PROJECT DESIGN

The paper aims to illustrate the effectiveness of a cultural sociological approach in unpacking the different narratives and themes people draw on to make sense of their lives by re-examining data gathered in 2006. The fieldwork reported on here was conducted with an emphasis on exploring risks in shifting to rural places. Reopening this data set, however, presents an opportunity to reflect on the cultural dimensions of lifestyle migration in the Australian setting. The participants in the study were divided into two groups. The first (n=10) were those who had already migrated into their new locations across Australia. The second group (n=5) were a group of individuals who were urban residents who had considered migrating to smaller lifestyle communities.

Participants went through semi-structured interviews, sometimes in person in their homes or over the phone due to geographical distance. Migrants were questioned about motivations for leaving, experiences of their lives in their new communities, about urban lifestyles and risks associated with living in regional/rural societies (most had shifted to these locations). Urban residents conversely were asked about their desires to leave the city (if they had them), what they thought of counter-urban life, what risks they saw living in the city and how they imagined life outside of it. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using Strauss' (1999) open coding strategies for interrogating qualitative research.

While the initial study examined the participant's relationship to risk, the present paper re-examines the data using the literary theory and methods of Northrop Frye (1976). In particular the concept of "themes of descent" is used as a conceptual framework. Denoted by narratives of "growing confusion of identity and of restrictions in action" followed by "descent into a lower world", "isolation and immobility" and where humans are "made more mechanical in behaviour", this approach allows us to see how migrants reflect on their previous lives and how cultural narratives guided their desire to escape (Osbaldiston (2012: 17-27). Conversely, Frye's (1976: 129) "themes of ascent", denoted by narratives of "escape, remembrance, or discovery of one's real identity, growing freedom and the breaking of enchantment" is used to demonstrate how people understand their life after migrating away from the city. Often, as illustrated below in the discussion section, participants use these binaries between good and evil as imaginative templates on which to organise and make meaning of their lifestyles (Osbaldiston 2012; Smith 2008). This enables us to place cultural narrative at the forefront of analysis and produce reflection on how people determine, negotiate and understand contemporary life through different cultural narratives.

## THE CULTURAL THEMES EMBEDDED IN LIFESTYLE MIGRATION STORIES

### Theme one: From consumerism to freedom

I begin the exploration of the themes from this study with a broader push towards critically engaging with consumerism. In recent times there has been a broad cultural reflection on the manner in which we consume and a gentle push back against unfettered consumption (Parkins, Craig 2006). Slow Food for instance has emerged as a counter-discourse to the fast-food industry not just for environmental reasons but for existential concerns over how we spend our time. Embedded in these discourses is a wider cultural concern with authenticity which is, as demonstrated eloquently by Lindholm and

Zúquete (2010), not confined to how we cook our food. Rather, authenticity remains integral to negotiation of the self, including how we consume right through to what social movements we participate in (Lindholm, Zúquete 2010).

The claim here is that there is a broader cultural narrative and concern with inauthenticity that perhaps has linear connections back to earlier discourses in history on how to be true to thy self. Within this study, the evidence of this discourse is seen scattered throughout discussions from participants in relation to consumption. For Jennifer and Chris (names of participants changed), a younger couple about to shift to a rural township in Queensland, the problems of materialism within the city were a major concern. When asked about what sparked their decision to leave, Jennifer strongly asserts that, "I think that [...] the risk of living so close to a lot of other people *is comparing yourself with other people* and you know that whole need to get ahead...and you know to be like the people off the TV and to *be like the people down the street from you*". With a young child at their feet playing, Chris agrees with his partner and pushes the discussion further, arguing that without proper reflective skills, "your mind is focussed on how you are going to pay that off (consumer products), not on you know, saving your money and *having a bit of freedom to do what you want*".

Similar to Chris and Jennifer, Lauren, who had recently moved to a coastal hamlet at the time of the study, viewed her previous place of residence in Sydney as inauthentic. When approached about her motivations for shifting she responds with an air of disdain that, "I got sick of the *fake lifestyle* really, you know no community mindedness, everybody is so, so solitary so, you know *encapsulated in their own sort of space* and just seem to be about just achieving money and not caring about the planet". While in her past she suggests she was 'in danger of not connecting with people' (theme of descent) due to the isolation of Sydney, her new life amongst a smaller community encourages her to be "busy doing stuff [...] fighting with the community to not put high rises up" (theme of ascent) illustrating a triumph over individualism and a re-emergence into spending time achieving meaningful tasks.

What is interesting about these two cases is that the first couple would strongly identify with a middle class background whereas Lauren identifies herself more from the working class, a former sole parent who worked in labour industries and had little money. She reflects on migration as "where the class system comes in" whereby those who "do have the money" are able to purchase large properties ahead of time, attract local labour to manage land and shift later in life with their "pensions and be fine". Whereas for her and her new partner, the migration experience remains difficult in that they have little money and are dependent on welfare for subsistence. Nevertheless, her reflections are countered by a reaffirmation that her new town reminds her of the "good ol' days" where people never "lock up" and care for one another.

This reflection on urban life as narrated by a preoccupation with materialism, individualism and resulting isolation is repeated again through participant narratives such as that of Kristin, a middle aged woman who had shifted from Sydney to a rural farming community. While she initially identifies her belief in the country as a better place to live in her decision to shift, she later reflects on urban life in similar themes as above,

I think there is more of a focus on *self-preoccupation* [...] citizens that are a bit preoccupied and fascinated with their own stuff and that alienates them further really [...] it just seems to me like it's almost, it sounds dramatic to say this, but nearly the *death of the souls of the people or the essence of the people* [...] I sort of hesitate to use the word soul as such but a lot of people are just becoming flaky.

Her identification of this trend in urban culture leads her to make boundaries between how urban people experience the rural versus how others do (see below). In a comparative discourse, Joelene, a single woman who shifted from urban Melbourne to rural Victoria, argues that "[a] lot of people are working for the wrong reasons. They are *working to buy more things to try and make themselves happy* and the reasons that they need to stay in these jobs is that they can earn the money that can buy them

the things, and the things are not buying them happiness". She reflects that through migration, "I have got a lot less things now, but I don't need things anymore".

For both Joelene and Kristin, the shift to rural/regional parts of Australia has enabled a theme of ascent, where life is not just more peaceful and stress-free, but also existentially freer and more meaningful. Joelene for instance defines herself as an "adventurer", making her new way of life more satisfying and enabling a greater sense of self. Kristin on the other hand states that she cannot relate to the city anymore. Not only is materialism and people an issue, but also "traffic jams", "pollution", "anonymity", and "crime", whereas in regional areas there is more of a "sense of tribe" and time is far less constrained. She suggests for instance that

[t]ime was more linear in the city, far more structured and because of what the environment is [...] you couldn't function very well so again you have to adapt to that [...] here it's, yeah *it's almost like cosmos time rather than linear time*, you can blend the two together. It's *a lot freer* cause the people have sort of wound down and it's not the same tempo.

Kristin's comments are important for us to begin to tease out because to date we have found it difficult to consider times as a concept important for lifestyle migration research. By times here we cannot simply consider clock-time but we need to acknowledge, as Barbara Adam (1990) argues, the different timescapes that operate across areas such as age, rhythms of nature, development of infrastructure, politics, and so on. Nevertheless, the conceptual point I am trying to establish in this section is that there is a cultural cringe amongst these participant stories that are not necessarily tied to class (though that needs further investigation) which tracks as a theme of descent into a personalised theme of ascent. Participants experience shifting from places defined by consumerism through to new lives of postmaterialism (see Schor (1998) for discussions of people who experience this through 'downshifting' rather than migration).

## Theme two: Romanticisation of the past in place

Part of the timescape that we need to explore further is the way in which the past negotiates with how people experience the present and how they set up for themselves a dichotomy between authentic and inauthentic experiences of times. Williams (1973) explores this sentiment through how the British middle classes envisage the English countryside as a type of bourgeois relation to the way life used to be. Place here is defined more by its imagined timescape wherein slowness and simplicity abound (cf. Osbaldiston 2012). However, there is something more to this relationship to time that is embedded in the collective and experienced at an individual level.

One way to conceptualise this is again through a dichotomy between themes of descent and themes of ascent which appear throughout participant narratives. In particular, the present (as highlighted in the previous section) is thought of as producing lifestyles that are meaningless. Simmel (1997 [1903]) describes this further as the massification of objective culture that is actually neither meaningless nor meaningful. Rather, the enormity and diversity of things and institutions that surround people require engaging with. The difficulty for Simmel is that there is no capacity for us to be able to accumulate, understand and process everything individually so that they are meaningful to us. But at the same time, rational modernity determines that we cannot ignore them all, whether it be art, law, economics, politics or consumerism.

Simmel's thoughts also resonate with what the participants in this study feel. Chris and Jennifer for instance talk eloquently about how today's modern attitude takes the form of individualism because "everyone has only got so much time and so much RAM in their head to be able to do stuff". In other words, our lives are so busy and cluttered that there is not enough time to be able to process all that we need to. This concern leads Chris in particular to hope that his new life in regional Queensland will offer him opportunities to "*slow down*" and do things such as play sport, take music lessons and enjoy

other arts. This imagined new life emerges partially as a response to the way in which his own brother experienced his shift to regional Australia.

This response from Chris and Jennifer however is painted by an imagination of the way life could be. Other participants who were already in place in their migration experience recurrently reflect on time in other interesting ways. Firstly, there is a tendency to seek out a lifestyle that was lost to urbanisation. For some, including middle-aged migrant Pamela who had shifted from Sydney down to the Huon Valley in the small island state of Tasmania, migration was not simply a reflection of her attitude towards materialism and urban life. Rather it was founded on a deeply personal relationship to place within place itself. She reflects on her decision to move in this way:

[Our move] wasn't entirely based on how hectic our lifestyle is, we probably took that into consideration but it wasn't a major reason [...] we've lived in the one place for 33 years and it's become a *very busy area* as in population, you know, just everyday living I guess. So we were looking to, *I guess go back to what we had thirty years ago*, peace and quiet.

The theme of descent here is not as culturally significant as perhaps the rejection of consumerism noted in the earlier discussions with others. Rather, Pamela on the surface appears to be motivated by a personally experienced loss of place through overpopulation and a transition of her area into a fast place. While she had originally shifted to what used to be a small beachside location just on the northern beaches of Sydney, it had transitioned over three decades into a bustling and crowded community, which for her was a negative.

Her family's decision to shift to the Huon Valley was embedded in the dichotomy of fast places versus slow places. She continues on her move further that it is like "taking a step back in time if you like, 'cause it is [...] just so much quieter [...] we were looking for something really a lot quieter and *I guess a step back into how life used to be*". As a consequence, the decision to move was guided less by a need to connect to community and more by a desire to avoid a place that would be "commercialised" in the near future; a place that was not only beautiful and pristine but also less likely to attract attention from future developers. Thus in an interesting contradiction to other lifestyle migrants, Pamela exhibits a tendency to seek some isolation and even comments later that she and her husband can survive with their "own company", which she thinks distinguishes them a little from other people.

However, what we might also suggest is that what Pamela seeks is what she believes is a more authentic place. Arguably, her personal story reflects a theme of descent where her peaceful Sydney beach residence had been taken from her through overpopulation. Her response to this is to find somewhere to step back, largely determined by a nostalgia for the way "life used to be". This sort of sentiment is reflected further in other lifestyle migrants. For Tim and Hannah, who moved to Tasmania from Brisbane, the experience of life in a slower community was made valuable to them through their childhood experiences. Hannah in particular, who was initially a transnational migrant from New Zealand as a child, says that

[o]ne of the big things I've noticed is the pace down here [...] it seems to move a bit slower just that little bit [...] it reminds me a bit of growing up in New Zealand, still progressing like the rest of the country, but you're still confident to let your kids walk, and you still go the corner shops [...] there are just things around that are *reminiscent of our childhood and you have a slice of that for your kids*.

Tim on the other hand sees more of a contrast between the way that Brisbane was heading and the way they live their lives now when he suggests that it "looked to me that everything was getting bigger and faster" which pushed him to consider further "how you want to conduct your life". While dissimilar to others in this study in that they sought for refuge in what is essentially suburbia, the coding of their decision making remains well-embedded in a timescape. While Hannah looks back at the way life used



to be with a certain level of romanticisation, Tim looks forward at the future of the bigger city with a degree of fear, arguing that in order to have a more authentic life where he can focus his energy on things that matter such as rearing their children, they needed to migrate.

For these participants, life is now enriched through place which is informed by a particular temporal feel. For others, however, nostalgia for past experiences leads them to question whether they would want to migrate away for lifestyle reasons. This is true of Robert, who was at the time of this project completing his university degree and nearing his thirties. Originally from the country, Robert admits to feeling a certain pull to the country as it provides “soul enriching” experiences such as “sunsets” and glorious “night skies”. However, he contends that part of his motivation to go to university is to escape having to return back to the bush to take over the family business. Nevertheless, his dream is in some ways to have the best of both worlds:

I often think that if I get to where I want to go, I would have a consultancy where I would have some little village in central France, where I can have international clients that *I would travel to and work out of my little cottage*, yeah I love the idea of having some kind of *rural base which you can go back to which you don't have in the city*.

Unlike some of the participants above, Robert's past experiences and familial circumstances lead him to have an ambivalent relationship to the idea of migrating back to the country. His narrative here is one which is reflective of his own personal circumstances where he is beginning his career, is single and has already experienced life outside the city. Nevertheless as the above quotation suggests, he still romanticises and perhaps accentuates some of the positive dimensions of rural life that lead him to dream and imagine a life where he can regularly escape city life.

### Theme three: Boundary maintenance

One of the features of lifestyle migration research has been the exploration of boundaries and the exploration of how migrants experience place after moving and how communities respond to them (Waldren 1996; Benson 2011, 2014; O'Reilly 2003, 2012). For Benson (2011: 131) in particular, views of migrants towards others exhibits an attitude of distinction where they seek to “distance themselves” from stereotypes “used to describe tourists and other Britons living abroad”. The theoretical link for this proceeds through Bourdieu (1984) amongst others where the battle over what is authentic remains embedded especially amongst the middle classes. Benson and O'Reilly (2009) for instance thread these narratives through the concept of habitus, focussing on the idea that the middle class is more likely in a late/postmodern culture to be self-reflexive and critical of everyday lifestyles.

Throughout the study, a thread is described that runs similar to what Benson (2011), amongst others, discovers in her work. However, as already mentioned some of the participants from this study do not readily identify as middle class. Yet, these participants were quick to establish boundaries and seek for distinction away from others. A good illustration of this is Kirsten, who after critiquing the urban attitude (see above) turns her attention to incoming migrants from the city. She argues:

There are a lot of urban people coming out into regional areas and their bringing that philosophy, that urban conditioning with them and they are actually trying to apply it to regional areas so that they might buy one hundred acres [...] and say ok I'm going to have this lifestyle but they don't adapt [...] They're so fearful [...] they just can't adapt to the idea that it's ok to be spontaneous and interact with people and say g'day to people [...] *they're horrified by that*.

In contrast to this, Kirsten argues that she is well embedded in the community, working with locals, sharing food and working in an atmosphere of “reciprocation”. Kirsten's establishment of these binaries



is similar to that of others. However, in this instance it is other urban escapees who are unable to escape from what she identifies as their habitus (though not in her words). Theoretically, it is interesting to view this, and the manner in which she pushes others into categories in order to protect her own, as an act of identification of a particular group. While Bourdieu (1984) offers us an angle which would relate to class positioning of the habitus and associated capitals, I would argue here that because class is less visible as a contributing factor we ought, as Lamont (2006: 172) argues, to open a nuanced discussion of the structures and “cultural repertoires” through which people like Kirsten construct “group boundaries”. Not only do we therefore examine shared collective imaginations amongst nations but also we need to be able to explore the smaller ones which lie fractured amongst social lines of division (such as class, race, gender, urban/rural backgrounds, etc). The point here is to be able to pick apart “patterns of boundary work not as essentialised individual or national characteristics, but as cultural structures, that is, institutionalised cultural repertoires or publicly available categorization systems” (Lamont 2006: 176).

Kirsten’s attitude towards urban people is not isolated in history or context. Rural researchers from the 60s and 70s demonstrate fully the manner in which rural people feel threatened by middle class escapees and thus lay blame on them for issues of economic inequality and gentrification (cf. Newby 1977). Other lay researchers in migration in Australia have also noted through their interviews that rural people are hostile towards outsiders and strangers (Dowling 2004). It is therefore not surprising to hear that in order to attach herself to the community, Kirsten attempts to provide such a dichotomy between the newcomers and herself. One of the most important factors to consider in boundary work, as Lamont (2006: 182) suggests, is context. In regional Australia in places of high cultural and environmental value, there is a growing unease amongst community members about issues of overdevelopment, loss of place and environmental damage (Osbaldiston 2012). Such a broad cultural narrative speaks to the potential tragic irony of lifestyle migration for people like Kirsten. The very same values people speak of which attract them to the non-metropolitan setting are the same they could be destroying through migration.

As noted earlier, some of these themes are replicated in other stories in which urban culture is almost demonised as individualistic, alienating and anonymous. This sort of boundary-making enables participants to reaffirm their authentic status amongst places and communities that are real and lifestyles the way they ‘ought to be’. However, not all described boundaries in this manner. Returning back to the couple we began this discussion with, Chris and Jennifer, their group identification reveals some stereotyping of rural people. When asked if they felt worried about their impending move to regional Queensland, Jennifer reflects on her distance from the family, while Chris worries about

[f]eeling superior to the rednecks, and I’m deadly serious. I worry about that myself cause I can be *quite elitist* and going out to the country, if I’m bloomin’ walking into a pub and there is some guy called Earl with three teeth and six inches of butt crack, I’m automatically going to go *I’m so much more intelligent than you*, and I’m so that I’m not that skilful that it doesn’t come across [...] and I’m going to end up getting my ass kicked.

Here Chris reflects the counter to the rural/urban disdain proffered by Kirsten. Here he demonstrates an air of confidence in his intellect derived from university education and a stereotyping of rural people. The group membership to which he attaches himself here to be perhaps the high intellectual classes but which also draws heavily on stereotypes to solidify his position. It would be interesting to do a follow up interview with Chris to ascertain how he now feels about his group membership and whether there is room for renegotiation of boundaries or whether he maintains strong allegiances to former social groupings. The point here, however, is that amongst these narratives there is a strong categorisation of groups that are not always strung along authentic/inauthentic lines. As Dowling (2004) demonstrates in her work, political alignment can sometimes create friction for migrants in post-migration experiences if they maintain allegiances to pre-migration group identification.

## CONCLUSION

The point of this paper was to investigate and explore the manner in which cultural sociology provides an alternative approach to understanding lifestyle migration that expands the idea of lifestyle. Using the Strong Cultural Sociology approach in particular positions the researcher in a way that seeks to identify different cultural repertoires that lifestyle migrants use to make sense of and reflect on their migration experience. Through the study revisited above, I was able to trace three specific themes: anti-consumerism, nostalgia for the past and boundary maintenance. In each of these themes, migrants were able to make sense of what they were experiencing and how they understood their lives previously through a variety of cultural repertoires. Some reflected a broad narrative of counter-urbanisation whereas others were more specific and related to capturing moments previously lost in their own lifetime. In each theme, however, the term lifestyle was unpacked through various narratives indicating that lifestyle migration as a concept is flexible and no homogenous meaning can be attributed across groups.

As a final departing remark, I would argue that this point is one where we can begin to distinguish between amenity migration and lifestyle migration. At a broad generalised level, amenity migration as a concept appears to be more driven to empirical relevance. In other words, the clarifying term “amenity” focuses the researcher on place and causes reflection on attractions within place and quantifying the movement (Gosnell, Abrams 2011; Moss 2006; Nelson, Nelson 2010). Amenity is a fixed term that, while informed by different place identities, warrants comparison of one place to another. What this paper suggests, using a cultural sociological lens, is that lifestyle migration is far vaguer and requires exploration of what people think is a quest for a better way of life. Indeed, we have seen that the concept of lifestyle read through culture is fractured amongst the above groups. Though the themes can be drawn together tentatively, the manner in which each participant understood their relationship to for instance the past is dependent on their cultural toolkits and how these structured their experiences. From this perspective, lifestyle migration suggests a quite different approach to amenity migration in that it requires a deeper ethnographic account along with rich theoretical exploration (Benson, Osbaldiston 2014). Cultural sociology enables us to dip our toes into these different theoretical explanations to piece together an understanding of migrant stories and perhaps align them with broader themes and theories found in our culture.

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## POVZETEK

### SOCIOLOŠKOKULTURNI POGLED NA ŽIVLJENJSKO-STILSKE MIGRACIJE

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V pričujočem članku avtor v raziskavo koncepta življenjsko-stilskih migracij vpelje sociologijo kulture oziroma za razumevanje pripovedi življenjsko-stilskih migrantov v Avstralijo uporabi Alexandrovo in Smithovo paradigmo (2006). Medtem ko drugi poskusi razumevanja pojava izhajajo iz Bourdieuevske optike (na primer Benson in O'Reilly 2009), ta pristop za pojasnjevanje lastnih migrantskih izkušenj poskuša predstaviti različne kulturne okvire. Kot v svojem delu o raziskovanju kulturnega življenja pokažeta Alexander in Smith (2006), je to mogoče doseči z analizo, v kateri kultura ni obravnavana kot odvisna, ampak kot neodvisna spremenljivka. S te perspektive je mogoče še zlasti kulturo brati kot besedilo, in tako, sledeč Smithovemu (1999) delu, pričujoči članek na podlagi Fryevih (1976) tematskih okvirov »teme vzponov/spustov« razloži, kako življenjsko-stilski migranti svojo migracijsko izkušnjo tipično predstavijo tako, da poudarijo binarno razliko med življenjem pred selitvijo in po njej. V članku obravnavane tri glavne teme ilustrirajo teorija in empirični podatki iz pripovedi samih migrantov; glavne teme so kritika potrošništva, nostalgija in vzdrževanje meja. V vseh primerih so udeleženci za pripovedovanje svojih migracijskih zgodb uporabili svoj lastni kulturni repertoar in svoja minula življenja v mestu uokvirili s »temo propada«: kot individualizirana, nevarna in nezadovoljujoča. Po drugi strani pa so njihova nova življenja v izbranem kraju uokvirjena s »temami vzpona«: družabna, svobodna in zadovoljujoča. Tak pristop omogoči premagovanje nekaterih omejitev kulturnih analiz po Bourdieuju, predvsem tistih, povezanih z razredno določenostjo. Čeprav je tak pogled kulturne sociologije morda naiven in ignorira strukture kapitala, nam vendar omogoča, da odpremo celo vrsto kulturnih repertoarjev, iz katerih izhajajo ljudje, kakor trdi Lamont (2006). Poleg tega takšen pogled omogoča razumevanje konceptualnih razlik med življenjsko-stilskimi in drugimi migracijami. Ali natančneje, priseljevanje lahko zaradi 'privlačnosti območja' (*amenity migration*), ki je po empiričnih lastnostih podoben življenjsko-stilski migraciji, beremo kot koncept, ki se nanaša na razliko med kraji. Življenjsko-stilska migracija pa je lahko in mora biti razumljena kot sociološki termin, ki se zanaša na razkrivanje kulturnih naracij, ki jih ljudje uporabljajo, da bi pojasnili svojo izkušnjo. Uporaba kulturnih naracij je lahko razdrobljena med skupine, ljudi in posameznike ter zahteva poglobljeno etnografsko raziskavo življenjskih slogov in njihovo razlago s pomočjo sociološke teorije. Na tak pristop naletimo v raziskavah življenjsko-stilskih migracij, sociologija kulture pa nam omogoča, da razvijemo popolnejše razumevanje kulture kot strukture z mnogimi vidiki, ne le razrednimi.