Chapter 10
Lifestyle Migration

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In the context of the growing global middle class, and the ageing of the baby boomer generation, an increasing number of migrants with accumulated wealth from advanced economies are relocating to economically less developed or more peripheral countries to improve their quality of life. Migration of the middle-classes and the relatively affluent is embedded in the same globalising processes and social transformations in production and processes of accumulation that have reshaped labour migration (Hayes, 2021; Castles, 2010). Privileged mobilities are part of wider migration systems, however, what distinguishes lifestyle migrants from other migrants, who are also in pursuit of a better quality of life, is the ease with which they can relocate due to relative privilege in terms of citizenship and financial or cultural capital.

Lifestyle migration has developed as a way of conceptualising these practices. It is a growing research field within migration studies focussing on "migrations where aesthetic qualities including quality of life are prioritised over economic factors like job advancement and income" (Knowles & Harper, 2009, p. 11). This form of leisure or tourism-led mobility receives much less attention than labour or refugee migration to advanced economies, which has been the traditional focus of migration research. Some scholars have argued that the overwhelming attention paid to labour, family, and humanitarian migration has construed a limited picture of who migrants actually are. In turn, the expanding literature on migrants who possess higher social, economic, and political capital is important for the contribution it makes to a more complex understanding of migration forms, the way it unsettles assumptions of marginality, and the insights it provides into inequalities in global migration regimes (Croucher, 2012). Indeed, in terms of migration governance, migration into the global North has become increasingly regulated and contested, while out migration

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has remained largely invisible, uncontroversial, and more lightly regulated (Knowles & Harper, 2009; Lundström, 2017). This chapter provides an overview of the debates on lifestyle and privilege in migration and maps the development of global research on lifestyle migration.

10.1 Lifestyle and Privilege in Migration

The almost ubiquitous definition presented by Benson and O'Reilly (2009, p. 609) sees lifestyle migrants as "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life". Lifestyle migration provides a conceptual framework to situate and examine different forms of privileged migration—such as amenity migration, International Retirement Migration, residential tourism, second homes, international counter urbanisation (Huete & Mantecón, 2012). As such, rather than identifying distinct categories of migrants it folds different forms of transnational privileged migration together. It is an analytical tool to understand the subjective meaning underpinning the relocation of relatively privileged migrants who are motivated by the search for the good life rather than by work opportunities or political rights (Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; Knowles & Harper, 2009). As Benson and O'Reilly (2016, p. 25) contend, lifestyle migration is more of "a lens rather than a box".

10.1.1 Lifestyle and Social Identity

Lifestyle, in theoretical terms, is related to societal changes in the late modern social world where processes of social differentiation have become less regimented by fixed social hierarchies and increasingly shaped by consumption practices. According to Giddens (1991, p. 81), lifestyle is a "set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity". Theorists like Giddens, Urry, or Beck, see social identities as self-constructed through—as Gidden puts it—"the reflexive project of the self" formed by practices of consumption rather than production. That is not to say that some have more choice than others in the fashioning of their lifestyle through consumption practices. In his earlier work, Bourdieu (1984) contests the flattening of social hierarchies and renders lifestyle as mediated by social position and consumption practices (for a more in-depth discussion see Cohen et al., 2015 or Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

Building on these theoretical links between lifestyle, identity, and consumption, lifestyle migration is an approach that seeks to understand the social imaginaries and subjective accounts that migrants narrate of their own migration desire and post migration practices. Many of whom do not self-identify as migrants but rather ex-pats or residential tourists. It is conceived as a project—a process—rather than

a decision or an event. Mobility choices are voluntary and motivated by the search for a better quality of life driven by consumption. As such, the freedom of choice inherent in lifestyle migration ties it to identity-making projects (Hoey, 2010). The search for a better way of life and self-realisation is anchored in the idea that mobility itself is transformative, providing a way of life that is more meaningful and the opportunity for reorientation hinged upon social imaginaries (O'Reilly, 2014). As Hoey (2005, p. 615) argues the choice of where to live is equally about how to live. The idealisations of mobility to more meaningful places and the search for a better quality of life can be applied to most migrants; however, its application here is related with the degree of autonomy, freedom, and choice with which it can be exercised.

10.1.2 Migration Regimes and Relative Privilege

Though often narrated as an individualised project, lifestyle migration is situated in wider migration systems (Croucher, 2012; Kunz, 2018) and the historical contexts that structure them. The negotiation of privilege in lifestyle migration is predicated on more than individual status and relates to migrants' citizenship and belonging to powerful nation-states within the international system (Knowles & Harper, 2009; Croucher, 2012; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Janoschka & Haas, 2013). This reflects asymmetries and power geometries in mobility regimes and serves to reproduce structural inequalities (Benson, 2014). As lifestyle migrants are predominantly citizens of wealthy societies in the Western hemisphere their relocation to places at lower latitudes in the division of labour—whether to the European periphery or to the Global South—enables them to capitalise opportunities that different purchasing power and symbolic power relations facilitate (Zaban, 2015; Hayes, 2014). Therefore, their migration is often enabled by their relative wealth in relation to receiving communities, which in turn facilitates certain kinds of material and social practices (Benson, 2014). This process of "geoarbitrage" (Hayes, 2014), or downshifting (Hoey, 2009), as well as the symbolic capital of whiteness, impacts class status among local elites and processes of belonging and identity making (Lundström, 2017; Benson, 2013).

As such, central in this literature is the concept of relative privilege, as Benson (2014) argues privileges are often only manifest through the migration process and develop in specific socio-spatial contexts. In other words, privilege in migration is not synonymous with elite status or absolute economic wealth, nor is the latter the focus of lifestyle migration in analytical terms. As Kunz (2018, p. 110) puts it, privileged migration "includes migrants who are able to transport or translate privileges across contexts or even increase or gain them through migration". Various authors have shown that vulnerabilities and precarity can be part of migration motivations and the post-migration experience questioning the "assumption that lifestyle mobility is solely the property of the privileged" (Botterill, 2017, p. 1).

10.2 Global Research on Lifestyle Migration: Development of the Field

10.2.1 Approaches to Lifestyle Migration Across the Disciplines

The literature on lifestyle migration is multi-disciplinary and various traditions contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon. Scholarship on lifestyle migration has its origins in ethnographic studies or interpretivist accounts of relatively privileged migrations from Northern to Southern Europe facilitated by political and economic integration (King et al., 2000; O'Reilly, 2000; Casado-Díaz, 2006; Oliver, 2008; Benson, 2011) These research approaches in the traditions of sociology and social geography have tended to be qualitative in nature based on migrants' own narratives of the migration process and post migration experiences. This builds on early empirical studies on International Retirement Migration (IRM), that is, Northern European retirees moving to warmer destinations, either as permanent or seasonal migrants (e.g. Rhoades, 1978; Gustafson, 2001; King et al., 2000; Warnes, 1991; Warnes et al., 1999; Williams & Hall, 2000). This research focused on Brits and later on other Northern Europeans, such as Germans or Swedes, who moved to the Mediterranean (King & Patterson, 1998; O'Reilly, 2000; King et al., 2000; Casado-Diaz et al., 2004) and gave rise to a growing literature on transnational ageing (Gustafson, 2001; Oliver, 2008; Sampaio, 2020). While this work is mostly within sociology, social anthropology, and social geography, it developed at the nexus of various literatures across different social science disciplines.

From the tradition of population geography and rural studies there is a body of work that has studied the phenomenon of counter urbanisation—both from an international (e.g. Buller & Hoggart, 1994) and internal perspective (Mitchell, 2004; Berry, 1976; Champion, 1989)—and its impact on identity and population distribution (Müller, 2021). Within tourism research, tourism geographies, and housing studies another related corpus of literature is that on second homes, residential tourism, multi-dwelling, and the nexus between tourism and lifestyle mobilities (Williams & Hall, 2000; Paris, 2009; Hall & Müller, 2004). Understanding geographies of meaning and perceptions and representations attached to places are central questions in lifestyle migration research (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015). Such imaginaries of place are powerful structures involving the media, marketing, and international agents (Torkington, 2012; Benson & O'Reilly, 2016).

More recent work on lifestyle mobilities, in light of the mobilities turn, has interrogated the fluidity between different leisure practices, travel and migration questioning binaries between here and there, production and consumption rationales, and tourism and migration (Cohen et al., 2013). Through another strand of research, this approach to privileged mobility has recently engaged with debates in urban studies on the globalisation of the housing market and the surge in transnational investment since the global financial crisis in 2008, as global elites search for safe investment havens, first, in global cities such as London (DeVerteuil & Manley,

2017) or Vancouver (Ley, 2010), and later to second tier tourist cities such as Barcelona or Lisbon (Montezuma & McGarrigle, 2019).

10.2.2 Colonial Traces: North-South Lifestyle Migration

Building on earlier scholarship on internal lifestyle migration in post-industrial contexts and intra-European flows, the geographical focus of the literature has expanded since the mid-2000s to contemplate lifestyle migration from the Global North to the Global South (Emard & Nelson, 2020). Similar tendencies are noted by scholars of both migration flows; not least the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the migrants—namely white, middle class baby boomers—and similar questions are explored around migration motivations, socio-spatial incorporation, and the negotiation of privilege. However, while there are parallels between north-north and north-south flows, researchers working on the latter have developed two additional aspects. First, questions around how racial as well as class privilege are experienced by migrants and shape relations with locals have added to understandings of whiteness and cultural capital—see Kunz's (2018) work on expatriates in Cairo; Benson (2013, 2015) on North Americans in Panama; Kordel and Pohle (2018) on North Americans in Ecuador; or Scuzzarello (2020) on Western retirees in Thailand. Second, scholars have foregrounded the political economy of this flow. An increasing number of studies have shown that some north-south lifestyle migration is undertaken for economic reasons in response to declining pensions and the crisis of the welfare state under late capitalism (Hayes, 2015; Toyota & Thang, 2017; Bender et al., 2018). Precarity has permeated employment and retirement realities in the aftermath of successive economic crises, leaving many to face rising health and housing costs with a lower-than-expected income. Moving to lower latitudes in the international division of labour is a way to reduce living costs, but it does not necessarily preclude vulnerability (Green, 2014; Botterill, 2017). Oftentimes the destination state also has a role to play in attracting affluent migrants through migration and attractive fiscal policies—see, for example, Benson and O'Reilly's work on Panama and Malaysia (2018) or Ono (2015) on the latter. Within a decolonial frame, understanding these dynamics moves far beyond ideas related to relative privilege to embed north-south lifestyle migration in the *longue durée* of histories bequeathed from the colonial word order and its continuities inherent in economic globalisation (Emard & Nelson, 2020; Hayes, 2021).

10.2.3 Geographical Focus: Rural-Urban Divides

Traditionally the idealisation of specific geographies and the meanings attached to different places have been used to typify different migrants. The oft cited paper of Benson and O'Reilly (2009) identified three types of lifestyle migrant based on their

locational choice: the residential tourist—heliotropic migration based on ideals of living the "Mediterranean lifestyle"; the rural idyll seeker—in search of a simpler lifestyle in connection with the land (Osbaldiston, 2012; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014); and the bourgeois bohemian, motivated by spiritual or artistic ideals in the search for an alternative lifestyle—see Korpela's (2010) work on Westerners in India. However, more recently urban manifestations of lifestyle migration have been given attention as transnationals of all ages are choosing the vibrancy of the city over the rural or costal landscapes. Griffiths and Maile (2014) explore the "city imaginaries" drawing intra-EU middle-class British migrants to Berlin; King (2018) also argues that an urban lifestyle "optic" can be applied to new European youth migrants as they are attracted to vibrant cities. Zaban (2015, 2017) examines the intersections between gentrification and urban lifestyle migration of Jewish immigrants from Western countries in Israel; and Cocola-Gant and Lopez-Gay (2020) the role of young lifestyle migrants in processes of transnational gentrification in the historic centre of Barcelona. Within more critical urban studies scholars are concerned with understanding the impact that this migration is having on local housing markets and the right to the city from a social justice perspective.

10.3 Conclusion

Lifestyle migration is a prism that encapsulates the subjective meaning of migration related to a better life quality—rather than work or political rights and objective privileges—in terms of citizenship, financial, or cultural capital, that allow some migrants to move with ease. Rather than sitting at the margins of migration studies, lifestyle migration is indicative of the underlying inequalities and racialising logics central to mobility regimes. Over time, scholarship has become increasingly concerned with theorising the structural conditions inherent to economic globalisation and longer histories related with colonial legacies. These legacies have conditioned and shaped such flows and experiences of the migrants themselves and destination societies that receive them. In this sense, the growing literature on relatively privileged migrants sheds light on the complexity of migration forms that have unfolded in the context of social transformations under late capitalism.

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