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In 2009, Benson and O’Reilly (2009a and b) noted a burgeoning field of research investigating what they labelled lifestyle migration, the migration of ‘relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life’ (2009a: 621). This is a migration phenomenon distinct from other more-documented and researched forms of migration (such as labour migration and refugee movements) that has some similarities with elite travel and migration (see, e.g., Amit 2007; Birtchnell and Caletrío 2013), and has developed into a healthy field of scholarly enquiry, generating its own corpus of literature. As Knowles and Harper succinctly define it, ‘[These] are migrations where aesthetic qualities including quality of life are prioritized over economic factors like job advancement and income’ (2009: 11). The centrality of such aesthetic qualities both to the decision to migrate and experiences of post-migration life results in explanations privileging the socio-cultural dimensions of the decision to migrate. As we demonstrate in this introduction, these explanations, developing out of the research traditions of sociology and social anthropology, are often underpinned by a strong commitment to social theory.

Understanding Lifestyle Migration builds on this commitment, to develop further conceptual and theoretical models for understanding the phenomenon. The intentions of the volume are twofold: contributions reflect on and question the theoretical underpinnings of current research in this area, while also developing further our understandings
of these social phenomena through the application of social theory. Through a discussion of both, we hope to produce opportunities for reflection not only on the movement itself, but how lifestyle migration inputs into contemporary debates in social theories not only of migration, but also consumption, identity and culture. Following this agenda, the volume follows the agenda for migration research laid out by van Hear, ‘the potential of re-embedding conceptual approaches to migration in wider social science theory’ (2010: 1536). In this respect, the contributions to the volume recognise the value of social science debates to understanding lifestyle migration, in particular, the dialectic between structure and agency.

The introduction sets up the volume by reviewing some of the key theoretical trends and conceptual underpinnings of lifestyle migration research. Through this review, it forecasts the development of this field thematically, theoretically and conceptually by building on the strengths of existing research and introduces the contributions to the volume. It also highlights the importance of this field of research and its possible contributions to understanding migration more generally. In particular, we stress the methodological and epistemological lessons to be learned (and shared) from lifestyle migration research, lessons that teach us to rethink who migrants are and how they live as well as questioning the fundamental notions of social life.

Lifestyle migration

On a kind of personal quest, life-style migrants seek places of refuge that they can call home and that they believe will resonate with idealized visions of self... the ‘potential self.’ Life-style migration concerns individuals and families who choose relocation as a way of redefining themselves in the reordering of work, family, and personal priorities as they seek a kind of personal moral reorientation to questions of the good. (Hoey 2005: 593)

Lifestyle migration is a complex and nuanced phenomenon, varying from one migrant to another, from one location to the next. It holds at its core social transformation and wider processes; it is at once an individualized pursuit and structurally reliant and it is a response to practical, moral and emotional imperatives. (O'Reilly and Benson 2009: 11)

The definition of lifestyle migration as a social phenomenon is intended to capture the movement and (re)settlement of relatively affluent and...
privileged populations in search of a better way of life. Rather than a focus on production and the involuntary nature of many migrations, lifestyle migration appears to be driven by consumption and is optional and voluntary, privileging cultural motifs of destinations and mobilities. In part, this drive to migrate to particular places is framed by social and mediatised constructions of particular destinations as offering an improved way of life (Jackiewicz and Craine 2010; Åkerlund 2012). Such constructions often replicate known cultural tropes that include the rural idyll and authenticity (Buller and Hoggart 1994; Osbaldiston 2011, 2012; Benson 2013a). Beyond this, however, and as the quotations that head up this introduction indicate, the better way of life sought often embeds existential and moral concerns, with the expectation that through migration these will be, in some way, resolved (Hoey 2005, 2006).

The study of lifestyle migration – as opposed to the related studies of counterurbanisation and amenity migration (cf. Moss 2006; Halfacree 2012) – has taken an interest in these latter dimensions of the decision to migrate, questioning how we can understand the quest for a better way of life, approaching the existential and moral concerns embedded in the decision to migrate through a notably sociological lens. The predominant conceptual and theoretical approaches to this field of study focus on the relationship between migrant subjectivities and the quest for a better way of life. This is a quest that does not end with the act of migration, but continues into post-migration life (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a; Knowles and Harper 2009; Benson 2011). Lifestyle migration research thus documents not only the act of migration – where, why and how – but also lived experiences of life following migration. Without a doubt, the ability to privilege lifestyle and realise it through migration is borne out of relative affluence and privilege, and is thus inseparable from the economic circumstances and global contexts of inequality in which it takes place.

To date, the field of lifestyle migration research may be characterised as vibrant, engaging questions about the intersections of migration, lifestyle and identity-transformation (O’Reilly 2000; Oliver 2008; Benson 2011). It reflects the relationship of social and economic transformation to these forms of migration (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a; Hoey 2014); presents migration as more than a one-off event bringing about a change of lifestyle, an ongoing process through which such migrants incrementally improve their quality of life (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a and b; Benson 2011); questions relationships and attachments to place (Osbaldiston 2011, 2012); and recognises the false dichotomy of structure
and agency, revealing how tensions between structure and agency play out in migration and post-migration lives (Oliver and O’Reilly 2010; Benson 2013b).

**Conceptualising and theorising the quest for a better way of life**

This field of research engages social theory at different registers, setting the context and explaining the conditions that nourish lifestyle migration as a social phenomenon, while also being put to work to explain particular articulations of the lifestyle migrant experience. We start here by questioning the theoretical underpinnings of the existing conceptual work on lifestyle migration.

**Conceptualising lifestyle migration through social theory**

Definitions of lifestyle migration, unsurprising, centre on the sociological concept of lifestyle, driven by empirical research that repeatedly stresses that migration equates to a search for a better way of life (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a). The better way of life sought by these migrants is presented as distinct and of its time, a migration trend notable precisely because it is reminiscent of Giddens’s (1991) quest for ontological security, Beck’s (1992) risk-avoidance strategies or Bauman’s (2007, 2008) pursuit of happiness. In this rendering, migration represents a lifestyle choice that should be considered as a stage within the reflexive project of the self (Hoey 2005, 2006; Benson and O’Reilly 2009a). Embedding the phenomenon into this conceptual terrain rests upon the conditions set by late- or liquid modernity. In other words, the social and economic arrangement of everyday life has in recent times somehow shifted allowing and producing lifestyle migration – an assumption built into the design of several contemporary social theories; lifestyle migration becomes a late-/liquid modern phenomenon.

Challenges to this position can be found within social theory, but have not been fully explored within the field of lifestyle migration. We propose here to unsettle the relationship between lifestyle migration and such theories that focus on individual agency, freedom and choice, the central theme of Korpela’s chapter in this volume. As Inglis (2014) so clearly articulates, theories of a late-/liquid-modern society are ahistorical, resting upon notions of presentism. This allows for a situation where the possible forebears of contemporary social phenomena are literally resigned to history.
...although personalized quests for utopia have persisted for centuries, the recent increase in this phenomenon implies it emerges partly as a result of the reflexive assessment of opportunities (whether life will be between here or there) that Giddens (1991) identified as only recently made possible, rather than a direct outcome of relative economic privilege. (O’Reilly and Benson 2009: 3)

Despite the recognition of the historical precedents for lifestyle migration – the Grand Tour and other forms of elite travel, rural escapism and colonialism – it has often been presented as an emergent migration trend made possible by recent social and economic transformation. In particular, lifestyle migration is characterised by the reflexivity unique to post-, late- or liquid modernity, an articulation of the project of the self. The analytical tools offered by Giddens, Bauman and Beck have been readily assumed and put to work within these understandings (see, e.g., Hoey 2005, 2006; Benson and O’Reilly 2009a; McIntyre 2009). The recognition of what Inglis (2014) refers to as ‘presentism’ within the social theory that underwrites these approaches to lifestyle migration, leads to the suggestion that the phenomenon, the motivations and intentions behind it, is distinct from migration trends of the past. This assertion of distinctiveness remains untested although presented as fait accompli.

Extending Inglis’s (2014) critique of contemporary social theory into lifestyle migration research calls into question the extent to which such migration phenomena should be considered as unique to current social conditions and contexts. As Osbaldiston (this volume) argues, this is in part a question about the distinctiveness of reflexivity – the characteristic of lifestyle migration that links it to the conditions of alleged post-, late- or liquid modernity – to a particular sociological epoch and how the assumption of this relationship has shaped the study of lifestyle migration. It is also a question about the project of the self and whether a recounting of the critical history by which personhood has been invented (see, e.g., Rose 1998; Korpela this volume) might open up the scope to explore continuities through different articulations of the search for a better way of life. What seems to be clear however is that the significant lack of evidence to confirm lifestyle migration as a product of a contemporary sociological epoch calls assumptions made about its uniqueness into question.

Hoey’s contribution to this volume presents one challenge to such renderings. As he argues, there is a need to understand current forms of lifestyle migration in the United States, not only as running counter to
previous internal migration flows, but also as a continuation of these. Tracing these historically – with trends including suburbanisation, and the shift back to urban living – reminds us that lifestyle is a longstanding motivation behind household relocation. This ‘fifth migration’ as Hoey labels it, is made further possible by conditions of flexibility – originally identified by Sennett (1998) as a characteristic of working life under new capitalism – whereby relocation results from calculations of collective and personal quality of life. This observation draws attention to the need to question the assumption that lifestyle migration is distinct from previous migration trends and instead recognise the possible continuities that may be present.

Seeking authenticity

As these continuities highlight, there is value to be gained from a more historically sensitive approach to lifestyle migration that examines how the motivations behind lifestyle migration are (historically) constructed or developed. Even if it is the case that these are located specifically within a particular shelf of the middle-class cabinet, how this has become part of the habitus of individuals within this group remains underdeveloped. Although the considerable use of travel (as indicated earlier) and tourism literature in the past has led to a deeper appreciation of the ‘practices’ of lifestyle migration (O’Reilly 2012), we still require a potential interpretation of events that have led to the notion of escape or utopia as a social good to be obtained, not to mention also the conditions under which the realisation of these is a possibility.

The makings are already in place; much research on these phenomena, including that presented in the pages of this volume, is attentive to the historical dimensions of the quest for a better way of life. Such research traces the Thoreau-inspired wanderlust, the rural idyll with its Arcadian influences and the desire for escape from the city, recognising that these cultural tropes and imaginings have long histories that have been folded onto contemporary practices of the self. These imaginings are not only concerned with the physical characteristics of the destination; the desire for pristine environments often goes hand in hand with more cultural longings with lifestyle migrants seeking a sense of community. It therefore becomes clear that ‘escape’ or ‘utopia’ are themes that deserve further unpacking through both historical and cultural analysis. While Bauman has identified the quest for utopia as an individualised construct in today’s ‘liquid’ state, we must always be mindful of historical precedents that have served as cultural goods to be acquired today. History is replete with examples from as diverse as Thoreau’s Walden
experiment through to Georg Simmel’s attempts to find solitude in the Alps (Jazbinsek 2003).

The notion of escapism or adventure is further undoubtedly related to the quest for a better life or self-authenticity as demonstrated in tourism theory (Cohen 1979; Urry 2011). Rather, like Lindholm and Zúquete (2010: 155) found in their consideration of utopian social movements, the process of finding a better way of life may well be a ‘value in itself’, demonstrating the potential to recognise lifestyle migration as an ongoing quest for a better way of life (Benson and O’Reilly 2009a; Benson 2011). Self-authentication, theorised by Vannini and Burgess (2009), reflects a constant interplay between internal values and individual action along with external conditions which, when in harmony, produce and affirm ‘authenticity’.

What becomes clear is that when framed around the search for self-authenticity, the terms of the lifestyle migration quest do not appear to differ significantly from the project of the self.

...self-authenticity is a guiding focus in the escape from the city. Finding oneself and engaging with objective cultures and environments that match core values (constructed, of course) of an individual help to secure a sense of the self that is genuine and whole. (Osbaldiston 2012: 129)

However, what does differ and thus presents a challenge to predominant understandings of lifestyle migration is the history that introducing authenticity into the equation may bring to lifestyle migration research. In particular, the discussion of authenticity emerges from scholars presenting a critique of modernity. Osbaldiston (2010) draws on Simmel’s (1903 [1997]) ‘escape from the city’ to explore lifestyle migration within Australia which is mostly driven to the coastline, while Benson (2011) highlights the similarities between lifestyle migration of Britons to rural France and the tourist’s quest of authenticity as outlined in the seminal work of MacCannell (1976). Common to these conceptual understandings is the belief that alienation in modern life leads to the quest for authenticity, with a better way of life available elsewhere. Such a quest for the ‘true self’ has its origins in Romanticism and perhaps also Transcendentalism (Emerson 1836 [2009]; Thoreau 1965; see also Macnaghten and Urry 1998). In this respect, both accounts give an indication of the historical precedents for and processes at work in lifestyle migration that run counter to the predominant narratives about it being a product of (late-modern) reflexivity. It is from this position
that we can perhaps start to question further historical precedents and continuities in the quest for a better way of life.

Lifestyle (and) mobilities

Another direction of enquiry into lifestyle migration and related phenomenon proposes the mobilities paradigm as a way of understanding the relationships lifestyle, travel, leisure and migration. In these renderings, the focus shifts to exploring ongoing moves and multiple moorings that exist in an always-moving social environment, and subsequently how mobile subjects understand themselves and the processes through which mobilities are made/become meaningful (Cohen et al. 2013). As Vannini and Taggart (this volume) demonstrate, the temporal nature (at times) of lifestyle migration makes mobilities an interesting heuristic through which we can consider people's movement. Not only do migrants occasionally seek ‘greener pastures’ elsewhere, after their move they can also seek out other places while moored in one location, even if temporarily. However, it is important to recognise that various constraints may prevent this further mobility; as Vannini and Taggart demonstrate, with lives implanted in one location, some find it difficult to simply up and leave bound by social and economic structures that restrict their mobility.

Yet despite this, as Osbaldiston (this volume) argues, the development of the mobilities paradigm into a replacement for the social sciences, specifically sociology, ought to be treated with caution. This is particularly because of the narrowing or binding of the analytical gaze around things that move, and how this might obscure insights that can be acquired through the traditional sociological method (see Favell 2001; Osbaldiston this volume). Indeed, migration studies have repeatedly demonstrated the value of freezing places in time for the purposes of comparative analysis (Favell 2001). Within lifestyle migration research, freezing of subjective experience has also allowed for significant insight into the stubbornness of structures including borders that go beyond geographies (O’Reilly 2007; Benson 2011). Interestingly, the shifting of methodological furniture and epistemological assumptions found in the new mobilities paradigm and the application of these to lifestyle migration research may well miss some of the most important issues that impede or facilitate movement.

The conditions and contexts of lifestyle migration

The study of lifestyle migration has focused on the development of distinct lifestyle migrant subjectivities, bringing together phenomenologies
of movement and settlement. Such subjectivities are formed in and through the interplay of structure and agency; as one of us has argued elsewhere (Benson 2012), lifestyle migration represents the coming together of various contingencies – biographies, individual agency, historical and material conditions, internal and external constraints, as well as culturally significant imaginings – at a particular point in time (see also O’Reilly 2012). Such contingencies mediate the experience of lifestyle migration as we outline in this section.

**The cultural significance of place**

It is common to find that explanations of lifestyle migration focus on the attractions of particular destinations, the amenities, the weather, and the physical environment all playing a significant role (see, e.g., King, Warnes and Williams 2000; Casado-Díaz 2006). The social dimensions of these characterisations of place – the sense of community they offer, the possibilities for self-fulfilment – demonstrate how the idealisation of place, the construction of particular destinations as idylls, are mobilised within the quest for a better way of life. As we have both argued elsewhere (Benson 2011; Osbaldiston 2012), spaces of lifestyle migration are often presented as offering authenticity, gaining significance through subjective assessments based on the binary distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. Destinations become repositories for culturally framed imaginings of a better way of life, their characteristics symbolic of these. This inevitably feeds into processes of ‘place-construction’ wherein local governance enables a particular style of authenticity to develop while inhibiting other forms (Osbaldiston 2012).

The individual lifestyle migrant often utilises place as a toolkit to capture authenticity in their accounts of lifestyle migration; post-migration experiences are mobilised in the affirmation of such authentic places. The British in rural France, for instance, draw on long-held imaginings of the countryside as offering peace and tranquillity, a slower pace of life, and close-knit community, presenting this in their explanations of the decision to migrate (Benson 2011). Similarly, Australian lifestyle migrants who shift to the coast demonstrate a desire to be close to the beach which represents, especially in that nation’s context, a slowing down of life, a relaxing aesthetic (the sights and sounds of the ocean for instance) and a soothing balm to the ills of modernity (Osbaldiston 2012). Often these ‘imaginings’ appear as a type of ‘collective nostalgia’ (Davis 1979) constructed through Australian domestic tourism to the beach in the past, lived out in full through mostly retirement and semi-retirement in the present.
Rural and coastal living has long been presented as authentic, a contrast to the alleged superficiality of city living. However it is important momentarily to break from this to mention Griffiths and Maile’s contribution to this volume, which presents a challenge to such representations, focussing on the emplacement of a better way of life onto a city space. Contra London – presented in familiar terms as an urban city space that needed to be escaped – Berlin in this instance is depicted by their respondents, somewhat ambivalently, as the rural, with a clear focus on open green spaces and the possibility for freedom of expression and experience, while also valued for the cultural amenities, amenities that are more characteristic of the urban than the rural. It becomes clear that imaginings and representations of Berlin reflected a desire for self-development and authenticity. The production of Berlin as a city environment that offers opportunities for self-discovery, individuality, freedom and independence is perhaps the product of its unique historical and social development. In some ways, these accounts are reminiscent of Korpela’s work on Varanasi, an Indian city on the banks of Ganges popular with Westerners seeking self-authenticity (2010a). For these ‘bohemian lifestyle migrants’, the perceived authenticity of Indian culture – borne out of the postcolonial context – and the efforts of these Westerners to engage within it, are a source for their own existential experiments in claiming authenticity. Nevertheless, such accounts of finding authenticity in urban locations challenge the predominant accounts of rural environments as offering authenticity, and raise questions about the role of the materiality of environments on affective responses to destinations.

However, for the most part, lifestyle migration research emphasises the rural or the regional as the focal point for escape. Of course this cultural ‘imagining’ of places ‘afar’ and their subsequent attractiveness has had a history within both tourism and rural sociology. In the latter, questions over the development of the rural image plagued the discipline from the 1950s through till the late 1970s (Pahl 1964, 1965; Williams 1973; Newby 1977, 1986; Hillyard 2007). Tied to this reasoning, as Pahl (2005) later confesses, was a particular style of thought and theory that appeared attractive to researchers, namely critical or Marxist thought (see, e.g., Williams 1973). The imagination of the rural place and rendering of it as a site to be lauded for its appeal as slow and behind the times, led to the conclusion mostly from Pahl (1964: 9), that the middle classes were there to enjoy the ‘meaningful community’. Their presence led to the destruction of ‘whatever community was there’ in the first instance as these urban refugees sought for the privileges of rural living without ‘suffering.
the deprivations’ that kept rural communities tightly knit and whole (Pahl 1964: 9). Such thinking Pahl (2005: 636) later revisited considering that the ‘imagination’ or ‘communities-in-the-mind’ produced on the ground action that led to people to establish meaningful connections with their ‘personal communities’.

However, within lifestyle migration the power of the cultural imagination of place that middle classes carry with them have a real on-the-ground impact in areas of high environmental amenity through the process of gentrification. Such research is largely undertaken in the utilitarian discourses of amenity migration where rural imagining has been seen to lead, especially in North America, to a non-hostile take-over of places as diverse as the Hamptons through to the plains of Wyoming (Smith and Krannich 2000; Nelson 2001; Shumway and Otterstrom 2001). Even in Australia there have been studies examining the increased class differentiation that is appearing in once fairly homogenous townships, especially along the coastline (see Curry, Koczberski and Selwood 2001). In a recent housing project conducted on some of the more pristine areas of Australia’s East Coast where lifestyle migrants have flocked to, costs associated with both ownership and rentals had risen dramatically through the rise of interest from the middle and upper classes (Osbaldiston and Picken 2013). While we can acknowledge that those migrating into areas like these may well develop strong links to community, we cannot ignore the structural conditions that follow. This may well seem a natural progression of a market that has just flowered but as Ehrenreich argues in her relatively polemical prose ‘if a place is truly beautiful you cannot afford to be there’ (2008, para. 4). Interestingly, as reported in Osbaldiston (2012: 121), at times older lifestyle migrants complain bitterly at the mind-set of newcomers who build inappropriate houses, and develop their property without local culture or sustainable practices in mind.

**Remembering power in global lifestyle migration**

In lifestyle migration, we cannot therefore be oblivious to the potential structural difficulties that wealthier migrants may well bring into a place unintentionally. How local governments react to the potential economic boosts these ‘cashed up’ urban escapees can bring often leads to real political and social power tussles on the ground (see Osbaldiston 2012: 117–123). However, commonly held imaginings of places and the power/resistance issues that ensue are not simply found within developed nations. The presence and persistence of global imaginings developed through histories of trade, tourism and culture have led to
structural issues within developing nations too. These situations, starkly pronounced in places like Panama (see Benson 2013b), reflect a broad potential dark-side to lifestyle migration wherein it is apparent that the affluent hold significant power on-the-ground.

As O’Reilly (this volume) reminds us, beyond agency remains the question of the role played by structure and in particular power and privilege within lifestyle migration. Indeed, as lifestyle migration flows extend to more and more destinations, with movements between the Global North and Global South more readily recognised, imaginative geographies – the recognition that representations of place should be understood as triangulations of power, knowledge and geography (Said 1977; see also Gregory 1994) – play out through the appropriation of spaces and landscapes for lifestyle migration. Without a doubt, this is a call to build on the discussion of migrant subjectivities that has been the focus of much of the research to date, to develop recognition of how these are made possible by the power relations that shape destinations near and far as imagined and experienced (by both migrants and local populations).

One way of examining this might be to adopt a postcolonial approach, exploring the postcolonial dimensions and dynamics of this privileged migration trend. While the global history of colonialism, and resulting power asymmetries are at times evoked in explaining the contemporary patterns of privilege that facilitate lifestyle migration, there is a need to extend these discussions into the recognition of the ‘postcolonial continuities in relation to people, practices and imaginations’ (Fechter and Walsh 2010: 1197) made manifest through lifestyle migration.

While in other forms of elite migration, particularly those with a known expatriate precedent, (post)colonial (dis)continuities are readily assumed (see, e.g., Fechter 2007 on Indonesia; Coles and Walsh 2010 on Dubai; Leonard 2010 on Hong Kong), this has rarely been the case in lifestyle migration research (for notable exceptions, see Knowles and Harper 2009; Korpela 2009a and b; Benson 2013b). Adopting a postcolonial lens to understand contemporary lifestyle migration trends allows for the recognition of what the continuities and discontinuities may be with the colonial past (Farrer 2010) in ways that have not yet been tested fully.

Two of the contributions to this volume, Benson and Korpela, present contexts that are explicitly postcolonial. As Benson highlights, postcoloniality is central to understanding the persistence of privilege among North Americans in Panama (see also Benson 2013b), while for Korpela,
the postcolonial setting lays the foundations for Westerners imaginings of India as offering a better way of life (see also Korpela 2009, 2010a and b). Such understandings of lifestyle migration demonstrates the continuities with the colonial within imaginings of the destination and the act of migration, while also revealing the traces of the colonial made manifest in life following migration. Recognising the postcolonial dimensions of lifestyle migration is just one way of recognising the role of power within this migration phenomenon. This is an important reminder of the need to remain wary of the power dynamics that shape privileged migrations and are wrought through them on different scales.

The critical re-examination of the conceptual framework for lifestyle migration thus opens up new possibilities. In particular, it allows us to question the conditions and contexts under which lifestyle migration takes place, examining the historical precedents and processes that have contributed to the construction of this social phenomenon. It also reveals that there is a need to locate migrant subjectivities within wider histories, particularly the structural inequalities that are implicit to the quest for a better way of life, and its appropriation in different destinations.

**Intersections of power and privilege**

This lack of emphasis on privilege and the power dynamics central to lifestyle migration, influences interpretations of migrant imaginings – in particular, as we have argued earlier, the neglect of the postcolonial from the analysis of the appropriation and construction of destinations as offering a better way of life – and also the analysis of everyday lives within the destination. What is now necessary is the recognition of privilege as a structural and systemic condition for lifestyle migration (see also Benson 2013b).

The relative privilege of lifestyle migrants is fractured along a range of possible axes, including class, ethnicity and race and manifests differently across the contexts of lifestyle migration. This is not only privilege as derived from a position of economic advantage, but also from the membership of particular nation-states and imbalances within the global power structure (Croucher 2009; Benson 2013b). In other words, the migrants carry with them through migration certain embodied resources that play a significant role in how they are received within the host community, drawing attention to ‘the tensions between different hierarchies and criteria of status and privilege as travellers move from one context to another’ (Amit 2007: 2).
The translation of status and privilege accumulated in one setting may not, however, be straightforward; as Ong (1999) recounts, despite high levels of cultural and economic capital, Chinese elites struggle to translate these into symbolic capital within the United States. What this indicates is that the significance of these resources within the destination results from how they map onto and are interpreted through the lens of the extant social structure. While it is often the case that on the basis of how embodied privilege is read, such lifestyle migrants are positioned within the local social hierarchy (see Benson this volume), it should not be taken for granted that these relatively privileged migrants will occupy a high status within the destination.

What this highlights is the extent to which the structures and constraints of life before migration may continue to influence life following migration; this might be in new and seemingly unprecedented ways, particularly in the case of entry into social settings whose structure is far removed from that previously experienced. To demonstrate one way in which such structures and constraints continue to operate following migration, it is pertinent to think through the persistence of classed habitus and reproduction. As several scholars of British lifestyle migration document, the class structures and practices that characterise life before migration are carried over into post-migration life even if these are transformed in the process (Oliver 2007; O’Reilly 2009; Oliver and O’Reilly 2010; Benson 2011). The discourse regularly cited by lifestyle migrants of a blank slate following migration acts as a façade for the continued processes of social distinction and stratification – perhaps somewhat re-oriented within the new social setting, and with greater choice over the terms of distinctiveness – in which these lifestyle migrants engage. What becomes clear is that from this perspective lifestyle migration is a process through which classed identities and practices are played out, reproduced and transformed. Classed privilege not only facilitates migration, it is a dynamic at work in post-migration life. It is timely for such understandings of privilege to be extended to beyond discussions of class and into the examination of the operations of relative privilege both as experienced by lifestyle migrants and their host communities. This will allow for discussions of lifestyle migration to extend into a consideration of the impacts on local populations, hierarchies and cultures.

Understanding privilege in these terms calls for the consideration of privilege as both structuring of and structured by the migrant experience. As Benson (2013b) has argued elsewhere, privilege should be the subject of deconstruction within resulting analyses. What this means
is that there is a need to recognise the work of privilege within migration and post-migration lives and to examine the conditions and social processes under which this is reproduced, contested and also, at times, resisted. This is a theme that Benson pursues further in her chapter for this volume, demonstrating through the comparison of the British in France and North Americans in Panama, the conditions under which migrants become aware (or not) of their privilege. It becomes clear that North Americans in Panama are more aware of their privilege than their counterparts in France; while at first they identify their feelings of unease with their relative privilege, attempting to displace this through their actions, over time and through experience they settle into their position of privilege in relation to the local population. As this demonstrates, privilege not only structures migration, it might also structure and be structured by experience within the destination.

The quest for a better life – from mere imagination to experience

Moving back to the individual quest for a better life that initially drives lifestyle migration, there remains unanswered questions about the relationship between imagination and experience that move beyond the mere assumption that everyday post-migration experience is shaped by imaginings and representations of place and a better way of life (see earlier). As we have both demonstrated elsewhere (see Benson 2011, 2012; Osbaldiston 2012), while such cultural dimensions are a feature of the migration decision and frame expectations of post-migration life, alone they are not sufficient to explain the migrant experience; they are merely one dimension of the various conditions and contexts that bring these about. As Halfacree (this volume) argues, representational approaches to understanding migration – for example the privileging of constructions of rurality in counterurbanisation research – may not be equipped to explain life following migration in all its complexities; ‘place exceeds any such socio-cultural framings’ (Halfacree this volume, add page number here; see also Halfacree and Rivera 2012). His manifesto to ‘jump up from the armchair’ invites us to reinsert landscape into the equation, to engage more phenomenological and affective understandings of place in how we interpret migrant subjectivities. These argue for recognition of the wider temporal and spatial processes through which migrant lives are structured and experienced, and that may bring about transformations in the self in ways that are perhaps overlooked in the focus on the representational.

Migrant subjectivities are therefore in process, neither fixed nor straightforwardly transformed through migration. Lifestyle migration is
an ongoing quest for a better way of life (Benson 2011), as thoroughly
entangled with settlement as with movement (Knowles and Harper
2009). Therefore there is a need to consider the longitudinal develop-
ment of migrant subjectivities (Halfacree and Boyle 1993), and how,
through post-migration lives the lifestyle sought may be refined and
transformed (Benson 2011). In this rendering, the journey en route to a
better way of life is a process that is worth opening up for discussion.

However, the messy reality of experience may mean that expectations
of a better way of life are not met. Rather than the unilinear march
towards a better way of life, slow as this may be, Salazar’s contribution
to this volume demonstrates the rocky progress of achieving lifestyle
migration. The two Belgian cases that he recounts demonstrate that this
does not come with any guarantees of success. Instead, there are very
real possibilities that the desire for a better way of life might meet with
failure, or that progress along this route may well be slower and less
predictable than originally hoped for.

Similar themes emerge in Vannini and Taggart’s account of off-grid
living. As they highlight, off-gridders may seek an alternative way of
life escaping the technologies and conveniences of much contemporary
living, but find themselves facing mundane complications that make
them realise that this simpler way of life is quite simply not as simple
as they had at first imagined. Despite the radical separation from tech-
nology and the sense of removal and escape that they experience, ‘No
island can afford to be fully separate from the rest of the world, and no
human can afford to live like an island of that kind’ (p. 205). While this
is a reminder of the contradictions between imagination and experience
(see also O’Reilly and Benson 2009) that characterise the post-migration
lives of many lifestyle migrants, this ambivalence is further shaped by
the specific motivations of off-gridders. Far from just being a comment
on the difficulty of removing oneself from the technologies and ameni-
ties, this powerful message reminds us that even dreams about escaping
the structures and technologies of contemporary living are framed
precisely through these. The consequence is that life on the island does
not fully live up to expectations.

Resisting questions of individualism and (re)structuring
the individual

As the Vannini and Taggart piece demonstrates, while we may promote
individual agency and privilege in our analyses of lifestyle migration,
there are always examples of structural difficulties that limit some indi-
viduals from future potential choices. One cannot simply up and leave
once embedded financially (especially) in their new areas. However as it is often the case in lifestyle migration theory, the discourse of individualism espoused by lifestyle migrants is so powerful that the structures that frame choice and freedom are sidelined, with the result that the migrants’ rhetoric of individualism is transformed into a point of analytical enquiry. For example, Bousiou (2008) presents the *Nomads of Mykonos* as adopting anti-structural orientations, while D’Andrea (2007) focuses on the pursuit of alternative, countercultural lifestyles by individuals who resemble Braidotti’s (1994) nomads in their rejection of the fixed and structural. Such interpretations depict these migrants as free to move at will in search of their ‘chosen vision of “the good life”’ (Bauman 2008: 58) – be it ‘good vibrations’ in Varanasi (Korpela 2009a and b) or nomadic spirituality and psychic deterritorialisation through Techno and New Age (D’Andrea 2007) – in their quest for self-fulfilment.

In many ways, these migrations are presented as both evidence and product of the individualisation thesis (Beck 1992); no longer embedded in the traditional structures such as social class, these privileged individuals have the freedom to choose the trajectory of their lives. Globalisation provides further grist to the mill of lifestyle migration; those with the freedom and privilege to move, Bauman’s (1998, 2000) ‘tourists’, are the beneficiaries of time–space compression.

Korpela (this volume) offers a new challenge to this type of use of individualism as articulated in the lifestyle migration of Westerners to Varanasi and Goa. As she demonstrates, a discourse of individuality that permeates the accounts of her respondents, their better way of life marked by the freedom to be who they want to be and live the lives that they want to lead. Drawing on Rose (1998), she claims a much longer history to individualism, stressing how a sense of the individual emerged out of the ‘psy’ sciences. Against this background, she argues that lifestyle migration should not be interpreted as opting out of society and its structure; rather it remains framed precisely by the ethos of choice within society.

It therefore becomes clear that lifestyle migrants may find themselves in the fortunate position where they are free of the constraints of structure in these ways, where they can choose at will where and how they want to live. The challenge for researchers is to distinguish between the discourse of individualism and the production of this discourse. As Savage (2000) and Skeggs (2004) demonstrate, individualisation may be understood in terms of the middle-class habitus that rejects class as a defining concept. It is therefore important to remain open to such claims of freedom and individuality as a product of middle-class imaginings.
and moral systems, drawing attention, once again, not only to their relative affluence but also to the relative privilege of these migrants.

**Conclusion**

To conclude the volume, O'Reilly brings together what is not simply an overview of the works discussed earlier, but also develops what can be seen as an outline for how we might approach lifestyle migration in the future. While we have set out above a concern with locating issues of structure, agency, imagination, place, action and response within a historical framework, O'Reilly focuses heavily on the relationship of structure and agency to issues of imagination and the ‘lived’ experience of lifestyle migration. Hinged on her ‘practice stories’ approach to migration developed through Stones, Giddens and others (O'Reilly 2012), she produces a discussion which renders the phenomenon open to further theoretical debate and consideration.

Of importance to this, as others in this volume also consider, is the imagination. Following on from Bauman and others, O'Reilly (this volume) considers that structuration and practice orientated theory/methodology tends to ‘overlook imagination’ as a forebear for action. Imagination, she argues, resides in the individual but cannot be deduced as a product of purely psychological invention. Rather, imagination as a type of ‘habitus’ is produced through one's life stories, which we, at times, can witness in the lifestyles of those who have migrated (see Benson 2012; Korpela this volume). Such life stories are a composite of experience, internalised and external structures, and agency. Nevertheless, it is easy to forget the structural conditions that make lifestyle choices and the legitimisation of these possible (Benson this volume; Korpela this volume; Salazar this volume). As O'Reilly argues, power is an oft-neglected concept in lifestyle migration research, demonstrating the need for more sensitive historical analyses that reveal the structural hierarchies at play in and through lifestyle migration. Such hierarchies may complicate the picture somewhat, presenting challenges to the ability of lifestyle migrants to establish strong economic or social footholds in their new communities. We cannot, however, ignore the power and political discourse that surrounds migration into some nations such as Australia where skilled international migrants can acquire a lifestyle migration only because of their perceived economic benefit to the country. This sits in deep contrast to the current border protection policies enacted by the Australian government against unskilled asylum seekers. Other contemporary examples include recently reported cases of property-tied
residency (exchanging residency for property investments of a certain value) in Southern European countries. Certainly, we could easily begin to establish a case that lifestyle migration is one of the contemporary illustrations of the power embedded in global migration structures.

Theoretically there are several aspects of lifestyle migration that deserve further exploration. As O’Reilly states, after the publication of the original text (Benson and O’Reilly 2009b), the opening up and identification of these has grown immensely. Much of this is derived through the exceptional ethnographic work being undertaken across the world and which is illustrated in this volume. Although there are competing theoretical approaches to navigate, we consider this to be part of a process in which we can become more knowledgeable about internal and external mechanisms that have constructed contemporary lifestyle migration. Multiple entry points, theoretically, can also produce undoubtedly multiple points of analysis that will, if implemented on the ground, enable a broader appreciation of this movement. This volume therefore is another step forward, we hope, towards a better understanding of lifestyle migration.

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