Itinerant Western Retirees in S. E. Asia: emancipation through mobility

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ABSTRACT
Western retirees as permanent tourists in S. E. Asia are the focus of this article. Itinerant seniors are a rising category of mobile individuals, bridging the concepts 'travelers', 'tourists, and 'migrants'. This sector reflects the aging population worldwide. My investigation took place in Malaysia and Cambodia in 2015 and 2016. The participants, all aged 60+, were from Australia and Europe. The great attractions of S. E. Asia were its low costs, convenience, and general respect for older people. These non-affluent individuals wanted the cheapest rent, food and transport, along with social acceptance. Their home was now *no* particular country, but a generalised S. E. Asia. They moved across borders – Vietnam Thailand, Indonesia - as finances and whim required. Mobility is their solution to the economic and social impediments of aging in their home nations.

Keywords: mobility, retirement, travel, S.E.Asia, Ageing

'Tonight I'm gonna have myself a real good time
I feel alive and the world I'll turn it inside out - yeah
And floating around in ecstasy
So don't stop me now don't stop me
'Cause I'm having a good time having a good time
Freddie Mercury, 1978.

INTRODUCTION: LEISURELY TRAVELERS

As the global population ages, International Retirement Migration (IRM) is significant worldwide. More than a billion people will be 65 or older by the year 2030. Current demographics in the western world show an extensively growing cohort in the senior age range: the proportion of the population aged 60+ will increase to 33 % in 2050. Any alteration to this is implausible until the baby boomer cohort reaches very old age (Hossain, Bailey and Lubulwa, 2007; Nimrod, 2008). How, and where, will they live? This has become a dilemma of this period in history. For many of this demographic, IRM from a First World to a Third World country has become a strongly-favoured option. Relocation to a developing country is just one illustration of the transformation in ideas about what it means to age.

My recent fieldwork in Cambodia and Malaysia revealed a particular sub-category of relocating retirees: permanent transients. These are retirees of various nationalities who have moved to S. E. Asia in general, rather than to any country in particular. They readily transit borders, as whim, visa requirements and personal finances allow. This, after all, is the generation for whom Lonely Planet was invented (Sobocinska, 2014). This is an era when tourism as an infrequent temporary experience outside of everyday life has evolved. Lifestyle tourism has become a modality though which transnational life is structured (Hannam, 2009). For the

participants in this study, there was an assumption of the basic right to mobility. Travel now defines their entire way of life. In the twenty-first century, it seems that mobility could be the key to liberation for reasonably fit, elderly people. Just as there was a hippie trail through Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, now a retiree trail is emerging.

Inevitably these travelers have impacts on the economies and communities of the selected destinations, both fiscally and socially. Kim and Thang point out that the lack of local language by retirees in S. E. Asia limits their ability to mix with a new community in the host culture (Kim and Thang, 2016). They are missing a crucial point: this does not trouble or inconvenience these retirees. There is no interest in such an engagement. It is very easy to pay for accommodation, and to buy food and drinks, without languages in common, or with reliance on the host's English / French / German. Establishments in diverse locations become known for being elder friendly. While many Japanese and Korean retirees are a significant part of this transnational flow (Kim and Thang, 2016), English-speaking Westerners are the focus of this paper. The largest national group was Australian, using S. E. Asia as something like a permanent, affordable back yard playground.

The main agenda to this study was to consider current transformations away from Western stereotypes of older people: to explore the practices of retirees who relocate to S.E Asian countries. It was only through fieldwork that I found this substantial cohort of retirees who had not settled anywhere. They happily told me their stories. To contextualise their experiential narratives, I needed to locate political-economic and social processes that encircled this hypermobile phenomenon (Hannam, 2009). How did they interact with local populations? How did they manage financially? Was relocation a life time dream? Or was it a reluctant compromise to achieve a standard of living no longer possible at home?

Whilst the participants in this study did not refer to their travel practices as 'alternative', their choices and activities match those of a website that recommends living in a foreign country as one of ten ways to 'experience life outside the mainstream'. That advice includes this: 'You don't have to feel stuck by the parameters of modern society. You can choose a life that helps you be happy, have less stress, and fits with what you value and enjoy. Go out there and have an adventure!' (www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/ten-awesome-alternative-lifestyles.html).

EMANCIPATION THROUGH MOBILITY

These people did not identify themselves as 'migrants', which to them implied settlement in a particular place. They used terms like 'permanent tourists', 'long term tourists', 'older travellers', categories so far overlooked in retiree relocation literature. 'Life style migrants' do get some academic mileage. Benson and O'Reilly conclude that 'broadly speaking, 'lifestyle migrants' are relatively affluent individuals, moving to places that, for various reasons, signify something loosely defined as a quality of life' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; 224). Herzog identified European retiree migrants as mostly middle and upper income classes, 'with above-average cultural capital' (Herzog, 2015; 220). Kordel maintained that they could be categorized as a very mobile and well-to-do group (Kordel, 2016).

The elder travellers in this study were certainly very well-off compared with the local population. In Cambodia and Malaysia, the wealth differential between the new settlers and the local people provides a service sector for ageing expatriates, who are dependent on this discrepency.   But in contrast with Bensons and O'Reilly's claims, most of the subjects of this

study were mobile because they of their lack of wealth by western standards. A comfortable retirement in their home country was financially out of reach.

The notion of western baby boomers as a highly advantaged group obscures the fact that for this cohort identified by age, both class and income are also variables. Historic social advantages may, in a retrospective view, seem to have favoured this group, with their access to free education, health care and reasonable-cost housing, and avoidance of war participation or major global depression. But they are not a uniform group with uniform life experiences. Nor does age determine lifestyle choices. Stereotypes about inevitably sedentary old age in Western countries are becoming redundant.

In comparison with people in my earlier studies of retirees settling in Bali (Bell, 2015 and 2015a), this research cohort differed in that they had little disposable money, and no wish to settle permanently anywhere. Nor were they aspiring to a standard of living involving grand houses, swimming pools and servants, as I found for many retiree migrants in Bali. These were transients who carefully budgeted their lives every day. They had no expectation of, or interest in, owning property in S. E. Asia. For them, travel was not a one-off occurrence, but a 'broader life course experience' (Botterill, 2016). They did not describe themselves as migrants, but as travellers. A few used the term 'slow travellers': they were not in any hurry to go anywhere in particular. In scholarly literature on tourism 'slow travellers' generally refers to tourists trying to make little environmental impact as they travel (Oh, Assif and Baloglu, 2016). This issue was not a concern to the sample discussed here. To them 'slow travel' meant moving about in a leisurely, unhurried fashion, as there was no need to be get anywhere quickly. The usual time / money / hurry equation of most quick-trip tourists did not apply to them.

The present-day relative ease of traversing borders in the region enables their lifestyle. Sojourns to various countries eg Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, or Malaysia could take place through their own choice. This was generalised to a notion of S. E. Asia as their overall domicile. They rejoiced in the emancipation that travelling in retirement was providing. 'I don't need much: just a few spare clothes, comfortable shoes, and my passport. I never expected to feel this liberated in my 70s', an American women told me. Material needs necessarily shrink for the highly mobile. Conventional identity-building structures of home / job/ family /possessions had been shed, or overridden.

In the world of late capitalism with its emphasis on consumption, individual identity can be sought through consumer choices. For many individuals, retirement has become about individualization and consumerism (Haas, 2012). For these retirees, mobility is a desirable consumable. They are highly motivated: relocating is an expression of agentic empowerment, a proactive alternative to being pushed into marginalization back home. Various sites have become appealing destinations, for instance the places explored by the subjects of this paper. There they will find businesses and enterprises that support their needs, such as cheap accommodation, cafes and bars which provide companionship. The usual tourist penchant for shopping is irrelevant. Emancipation had been achieved through transnational mobility. This new life phase has the potential to be an exciting one. 'You need to be a bit brave to do this at my age (73)', one English woman told me. 'But once you are on the plane, then you arrive here – the adventure begins.' An Australian women, 74, told me that 'this is the most liberated in I've been in my life. I'm not tied down to a job and a house and bills. I don't even have to live anywhere!'

The attainment of a desirable quality of life at retirement is a consumable for a generation experienced at making choices about their own customer performance. 'Third age' individuals

are not necessarily needy people requiring extra supervision and care. Nor are they inevitably entirely dependent on the state. Rather, they may be placed as 'consumers whose rights are determined by their power in the market by their wealth, or lack of it'– a highly familiar feature of neo-liberalism (Polivka and Longino, 2004; 4). In the case of these travellers, they had found their own high water mark of lifestyle affordability.

METHODOLOGY; 'HELLO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?'

D'Andrea's call for mobile methodologies suggest the following should be undertaken: at specific geographic locations the researcher must (a) identify and interpret practices that constitute hypermobile formations locally; (b) analysis of the socio-economic context of the subjects and communities; (c) explore multiple sites to enable identification of the connective character of hypermobile formations across diverse spaces (D'Andrea, 2006).

Fieldwork for this paper took place in Cambodia and Malaysia in December 2015 - February 2016. 32 western retires were interviewed, seven in each four locations (Siem Reap and Phnom Penh in Cambodia, Melaka and Georgetown in Malaysia; plus a further four in Langkawi, Malaysia). Every interview took place in a café, bar or hotel lounge chosen by the respondent; none took place in private spaces in their / homes / guest houses / hotels. Meetings with 4 of the retirees were through pre-arranged meetings via the internet.

The remainder resulted from chance encounters in participant observation situations. This meant being present and involved in their everyday real world. The casual meetings of a mobile researcher (Vannini, 2010) matched the daily activities of these people. 'Mobile ethnography draws researchers into a multitude of mobile, material and embodied practices of making distinctions, relations and places' (Buscher and Urry, 2009; 105). The delight of this is the capacity to investigate idiosyncratic conditions, locations and circumstances; to find satisfying explanatory analysis of non-standard experiences.   This approach for this demographic proved effective, convincing me that any other methodological proposition was unlikely to be as fruitful (Bell, 2015).

The respondents went to bars and cafes, they had drinks, they relaxed, and they smoked. Superficial visual assessment of a newcomer (age, race, language, gender) was sufficient to recognize a prospect for conversation. The immediate identification of the approximate age of someone else in the café determined likely compatible company, even for an hour or so.

They talked to whoever was there. Hence it was never difficult to find participants for this study. They often approached the interviewer first. 'Hello! Where are you from?' was the usual smiling opener. The establishment of having language in common was their first prerequisite. Knowledge of a newcomer's national identity would convey other values, including sharing origins that were part of generalised cultural notions of 'west'. Connections were quickly noted: for example, an English person might quickly tell an Australian that 'I went there a few years ago to visit my brother, who moved there in the 1990s'. The desire for the company of another visitor around their own age obviously facilitated these approaches. The cafés / bars provided a neutral comfortable space, where spontaneous encounters are the norm. Transient acquaintances – often just one long conversation with a stranger – seemed to fulfil their need for friendship and intimacy. One said to me 'I have far more interesting chats with people here than I ever did at home. I got so tired of the routine, the boredom, the predictability; of knowing exactly what people would do and what they'd talk about.' In many ways the retirees were more similar to tourists than to expats who had settled for work. They did not have

networks of employed fellow nationals or other working expats. Their daily social contacts were with tourists also enjoying free time and leisure.

For this research, methods of data collection had to be 'flexible, informal, and context dependent', mirroring the behaviour and activities of the subjects (Hannam, 2009; 110). The findings were contingent on the mobility of both the subjects and of the researcher. The project illustrates how mobility enables observation, engagement and theory. Mobility facilitates a methodological landscape in which, for example, hanging out in cafes in another country becomes the methodology. As Büscher, Urry and Witchger explain, the term 'mobilities' establishes a 'moment driven' social science in which movement is constitutive of economic, social and political relations (Büscher, Urry and Witchger, 2011; 4).

The duration of the fieldtrip (six weeks) required transport, accommodation and meals. The researcher's mobility meant that like the respondents, she too was participating in local culture, engaging with local people, developing some awareness of and insights into local political issues, and contributing as a consumer to the local economy. The research depended on the intersection of my portable world with theirs, and could not be isolated from the context in which it took place. The significant differences between the researcher and the researched, despite similarity in age, ethnicity and language, were that the researcher was there for just a few weeks, travelling on a salary, and would soon happily return to strong moorings elsewhere.

The participants: running away from home
Aged in their 60s and 70s, all but one couple and one single woman were permanent transients, moving around various parts of S. E. Asia as they wished. The couple had found a home for a year initially. They expected to continue moving after that. The single woman based herself in a permanent rental home in Langkawi, but travelled to destinations in Asia, she told us, for about half the year. The remainder were itinerants. Several told me that they knew people in their 80s also doing this. Their home countries were as follows: Australia (9, including one couple), Denmark (1), Germany (3) England (6), USA (3) Scotland (1), Netherlands (2), Sweden (3), Belgium (1), France (2), and Swiss (1). No-one said they knew anyone who had been such a traveller, but who had now gone home: there was no evidence or information about a cohort of returnees. There is no data source that enables investigation of this (Giner-Monfort, Hall and Betty, 2016). Every person readily told me their age – in fact, usually quickly volunteered it - obviously proud to defy stereotypes about fitness and sense of adventure in ageing.

Apart from the one couple, the remainder were single. This is a fair reflection of the demographic reality of this cohort internationally.   Singleness means liberty to make significant life changes without having to negotiate with a partner. Most said they had no family commitments anywhere, so they had the freedom to go where they wished. One of the few women with adult children said 'They live in various places, they're in their 40s and busy with their own lives. They don't care what you do. I keep in touch occasionally, but they don't need me more than that.' Lone travellers can freely choose daily activities. A large part of their day was spent socialising in cafes or bars. The mobility of this demographic resulted in the creation of distinct social spaces, orchestrating a viable social life.

In order to loosely organise their mobile lives, all had become proficient on the visa requirements of nearby countries, and offered advice to fellow travellers; their own mobility capital was valued. They talked about the cheapest accommodation, restaurants, alcohol, buses and train fares. This was tallied against the prerequisites to uplift their pensions from home; or

having not qualified, or relinquished, that income, they found other income (temporary house-sit or live-in situations; unofficial work such as language teaching; or dealing in items easily and profitably sold across borders eg cars, motorbikes, local art). These retirees, like the cohort of British retirees in Thailand studied by Botterill, juggled their own sense of privilege at being so mobile, with everyday financial precarity (Botterill, 2016; 2).

About 60% owned a house or flat somewhere in their home country, which they rented out for income. Most of these owners had no intention of returning home. Just three said they'd go home if they had too, referring to possible future health issues, terrorism or natural disasters such as a tsunami. 'But that would create problems about money' one person explained. 'I just cannot afford to live there any more'. A few who did not own property said that as a very last resort if they got very sick they'd go home and 'live in my brother's / niece's basement / spare room'.

'I'm quite willing to die here' an American observed. 'It would save a lot of hassle.' There was a general fatalism and acceptance that they were likely to end their days in S. E. Asia. 'It really doesn't matter', one man told me. 'Why would I care? I've had a good life. I'll eventually die here. End of story.' An American explained that he had a will, and a few assets to leave to some nephews he hardly knew. 'I never had a family, that's just the way it worked out. I washed up here; I'll die here'. Three people reported that they knew of retiree expats who had died in guest houses. 'The death certificate always says 'heart attack'' an American in Phnom Penh told me. 'They'll tidy the body away; it's just another dead foreigner'.

An Australian man aged 62 explained the maths and rationale for his itinerancy:
'I get $560 Australian a week for my flat, with a good permanent tenant. $160 of that stays in my Australian bank account for rates, maintenance and so on. I live very comfortably on the rest, $400 per week.'

'I never pay more than $20 per night for accommodation; often a lot cheaper like where I am right now, just $9 per night. Then it's $15 per day for food. I like to a have a bit to spare. My luxury is a beer or coffee out, so then I meet people to chat to. Transport is very cheap; I just move on when I'm ready.   If I was in Australia I'd be working until I'm 67, to qualify for the pension, which would be hard to live on there, even with the flat. This is a far better option. I'll never go back. I can afford to do this forever. I see this as my last window to have fun.'

I asked him about his needs for companionship. 'Yes, that would be ideal, to travel around with a mate. But you can't stick around waiting for someone to make up their mind. I talk to someone most days'.

He explained that renting out is house long term would mean that when it was eventually sold, it would be assessed as an investment property, not his home, so would be subject to capital gains tax. He shrugged, 'but I'll be dead, so why would I care?'

Others were angry that their life's main asset - their house back home - affected their means testing and eligibility for pensions. One said. 'so we made the decision. We cashed up our property and made the decision: sell up, pack up and move out. We figure we have enough money to stay here (Langkawi or elsewhere in S. E. Asia) for as long as we live'.

None of those interviewed in Malaysia were part of the Malaysia the government- operated programme 'MM2H' ('Malaysia my Second Home'). That programme aims to attract IRM settlers motivated to improve their status quo for a better and enjoyable retirement (Wong and Musa, 2015). For the Malaysian government, the goal is to encourage international retiree residents as a practical economic strategy. Those registered are obliged to meet certain criteria of income and expenditure. But this scheme was rejected by these itinerants. Its prerequisites to settle include sums of money in the bank, income and commitment. A Malaysia researcher called for 'second home tourism policy makers… to satisfy the retirees' requirements… to ensure the attractiveness and success of its second home retirement programme' (Wong, 2015). A participant in my study explained that 'it is great if you are rich and trying to escape Yemen or somewhere, for example, and want to live here forever. But if you want to be a free agent, you just do your own thing'.

The infrastructure established for tourists supports these longer-term itinerants. These retirees claim relocation as an achievable option because, while they see themselves as impoverished compared with many fellow citizens back home, they are in a position to access the resources that enable present day mobility.

An American woman, 70: 'us older travellers, we're putting our money where our mouth is, not just dreaming it, but doing it.'

An English woman, 73: 'you need to have courage to follow through your plan, to do this when you are older. But it is really not that hard: you just get a flight, catch some buses or trains, go where you like.'

She added: 'I don't feel I had much option. I didn't want to be an oldie forced to be in a place with other people, sharing a kitchen and arguing about the dishes. Can't be bothered with that! A room of my own in any interesting town in S. E. Asia is far more fun, and cheaper, too. Sometimes I share a bathroom, but that is okay, too'

D'Andrea refers to a 'category of civilisation whereby the dweller is positively assessed over the wanderer' (D'Andrea, 2006; 107). These wanderers have rejected the conventional expected life as an older person in western society. As individual critics of their home cultures, they have not allowed themselves to be constrained within unappealing boundaries. They may be identified as enterprising and self-assertive exemplars of 'positive ageing' (Warnes, 2009; 361): they have run away from home to have adventures, within their modest and sustainable means. They are active subscribers to nomadology, proactive performers in the 'global hypermobility of the contemporary world' (Hannam, 2009; 105). Cresswell writes that the 'nomad is never re-territorialised' (Cresswell, 2006;34). These subjects may be described as nomads in that they continue to travel. But they need, and find, touchstones. While most do not intend returning to their home country, and they move around a lot, they have found comfort zones in various parts of S. E. Asia, and often return to those spaces (specific guesthouses, and favourite towns in various adjoining countries).

Itinerant retirees recapitulating colonialism
'I'd always wanted to come to the Far East, so I started off in Thailand. But Malaysia used to belong to Britain, so I thought I'd be more at home here'. (British man, 76).

Several of the retirees from Europe referred to Cambodia and Malaysia as being in the 'Far East'. This Eurocentric term derives from historic notions of a geographic paradigm in which Europe was the centre of the world. It can be tracked to the 12th century, the Far East out

beyond the Near East and Middle East. 'Far East' is not just a geographic label, but also bears powerful cultural resonances: it implies Oriental mystery and exoticism. In geographic fact, both Australia and New Zealand were beyond the Far East, but not included under that term, because of their affiliations with Britain. Today's term 'S. E. Asia' is generally, and more appropriately, used.

Nevertheless, some British retirees still used the old term: 'I imagined the Far East, and the Mekong River: romantic, exotic and pretty, meandering through rice fields and jungle. That is obviously an old idea from before plastic bags, drink bottles and aluminium cans. The filth is a shock at first, but you get used to it. You just find clean spaces in between, like your room, or bars and cafes.'

The comment (above) from the British man illustrates the process by which colonial cultures are converted into a postcolonial setting, within the context of travel and tourism (Sobocinska, 2014). Imperial and colonial histories are of enduring significance to expatriate migrants' subjectivities. Malaysia's status as a British colony was dissolved in 1946. Yet the colonial legacy still steers 'migratory imaginings', and convictions of entitlement to exercise continuities with the colonial past (Benson, 2013; 313). 'In previously colonised contexts... expatriate national identities can still be grounded in historical notions of racial and cultural superiority versus the local other' (Kunz, 2016; 101). Colonialist outlooks remain because they are advantageous to these travellers. The global power inequities established during the European Empire and colonialism have engendered a continuing sense of prerogative, including the freedom of international mobility as an undisputed right of Europeans and their descendants.

Various tourism studies writers have addressed the recapitulation of colonialism as an inherent part of tourism by Westerners to former colonies (for example, Sobocinska, 2011; Tucker, 2014; Bell, 2015; Crick, 2012). Tourists take advantage of the power and fiscal inequality between their own nation and that being visited; their status as westerners (visibly pronounced through their white skin), and wealth relative to local people, means they assume privilege. As Sobocinska explains, the lineage of alternative travel along the hippie trial in the 1960s and 1970s was heavily influenced by imperialist attitudes. This has 'transfused into contemporary 'alternative' tourist practices in Asia' (Sobocinska, 2014; 2).

The travellers' investigated in this study have formed something of a tribe, not static, but ebbing and flowing, a turnover of individuals taking similar routes on similar journeys. These elder travellers in S. E. Asia separate themselves from the 'tourists' who visit for a very short time, then go home. Members of that latter group provide useful momentary company if they happen to show up at the accommodation, restaurants and bars that the long stay travellers frequent. While residential elder travellers may coalesce around nationality, as equally strong an identifier is an imagined 'West'. Westeners are positioned in relation to the local 'Others', the nationals of the host country.

It was common for these retirees to comment to one another as if experts on the local culture, with the confident supposition that they had come from somewhere superior. This was not just about mutual whiteness, but also an example of 'everyday racism and wider discourses of cultural difference that prescribe a broad range of strategies to 'manage' the local in daily life' (Kunz, 2016; 97). Their casual attitudes matched that definition of racism as 'that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity amongst ethno-racial groups'... a form of

oppression inherently related to privilege (Berman and Paradies, 2010; 217). Such values were articulated often during both the interviews and casual conversations. Local people were referred to as 'they'. 'They (Cambodians, Chinese Malaysians) have a lot of catching up to do, before they really become global players. But their culture keeps them backward'.

In a study of foreign retirees in Panama , the author noted that 'I make sense of the power inequalities at work in the migration and post migration lives of North American migrants in Panama through the mobilisation of two interrelated concepts: postcoloniality and privilege' (Benson, 2013; 316). Mobile research exposes that people and place, politics, economics and mobility are all thoroughly interconnected. This category of traveller is firmly linked to the realities of global power relations.

Lifestyle mobility, transformation and precarity

According to World Bank data, the GNI per capita of Cambodia is an estimated $US1,020 in 2014, and $US 11,120 in Malaysia. (This compares with GNP $US43,390 o in UK, $47,590 in Germany, and $64,090 in Australia) (http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD). While those latter countries enjoy significantly greater wealth, nevertheless many of their citizens find the cost of living a struggle. Once in S E Asia, their relative wealth rises: clearly, 'different settings evoke different experiences of privilege, fractured along a range of different axes (for example, 'race', ethnicity, class' (Benson, 2013; 328).

Their point of reference is always with the level of affluence required to live the good life back home. By those standards, these are not wealthy travellers. Pension laws are at the forefront of decision making. For example, since 2012 Australian pensioners can spend just six weeks at a time out of the country, while still uplifting their pensions. Obviously the government wanted that pension money to be spent in Australia. This now stymies mobility for some older Australians. Pension conditions for retirees in their home nations were a commonly voiced agitation by participants in this research.

One put it this way: 'I got my first job at 15, and paid taxes for over 50 years. That's my money! You go through life knowing you'll get the pension, then they take it off you!'

Another hypothesised: 'It'd probably be cheaper for them to pay me the pension here that back home. I am not using any Australian services at all over here. I think we should have equal rights, wherever we are.'

These sentiments are echoed in the research findings of Danish writer Blaakilde. She explains that the concept 'ageing in place' aims to create living arrangements for elderly people which enables them to stay in their home environment while adjusting to changing needs and conditions with age. The assumption is that increased ageing will require an increased need of assistance and dependency for care and support. Blaakilde has identified this as a general European issue: that less affluent expatriates, whilst living on portable pensions, are insufficiently protected by their nation's universal rights to health protection They are therefore 'placed in an unequal situation compared to other Danes living in Denmark' (Blaakilde, 2016; 160).

Those who did not have a cash flow from home via rent or other investments spoke of how they managed.

FINANCIAL SURVIVAL

An American in Phnom Penh:

'I can't afford to go home, and I don't want to, so I'll just wander about S. E. Asia, forever. I have kind of washed up here. If I went home (USA) what would I live on? Here I still have a bit of money from in my 40s and 50s. I've always been a smell-of-an-oily-rag sort of guy. Plus I hustle this and that, cobble cash together (occasionally sells local art to tourists, or finds live-in accommodation supervision). I wander between here (Cambodia) and Vietnam, mostly.' He spoke of people he knew in similar situations. 'Here they can live dirt cheap, which they have to because they haven't got money. You can get by on $20 a day, if you need to'.

An English woman, 76: 'I teach English informally, you know, for cash, and I'll edit things that are in 'Chinglish'. I'm not at a school or college or anything. For the last few years that has given me enough to get by. It's been a struggle at times, but what are my options?'

Australian woman, 76: 'My mother died at 96. I sold everything she had. I didn't own anything myself. That supports me now, just, if I'm very careful.'

British man, 78: 'a lot of us are in the same boat. We've run away from home with almost nothing. But it's warm and it's cheap. We'll be okay.'

Asked whether this lifestyle was a compromise, most were vehement that it was not.
'I am just so relieved to escape the mediocrity of home (Australia).You know what you are going to do every day, it is so predictable. See the grandkids on certain days, play bridge on certain days, see friends on certain days, have lunch on certain days...every day is predictable. Here I don't know what we are going to see or do each day. Here you have time to be indulgent. It's exciting!' (Australian woman, 74).

'It is boring being an older person. People expect you to be sick and useless. Denmark has great welfare systems, but I feel that I am the lucky one, escaping.' (Danish man, 78).

Their situation matched that described as 'precarity' by Botterill in her study of British retirees in Thailand (Botterill, 2016). Like the expats in her study, these people (above) 'belie the assumption that lifestyle mobility is purely the property of the privileged' (Botterill, 2016;2). Their apparent affluence compared with local people concealed their actual precarity.

Transformed lives for older women

For many of the women the financial challenges had definite compensations. They enjoyed new attitudes to older people. Three women in their 70s, Australian, American and English, spoke of how this was transformative:

'At home I am a non-person. I get treated like an old person. Here it is all about respect. Old people are respected'.

'It's great for someone here with grey hair. They really respect older people. I don't dye my hair, I have grey hair, that means I am an old person, which is why I get treated with respect. Back home I don't.'

'At home I became invisible: just an old lady living in a flat. Anonymous, worthless, of no use to anyone. Here I have an amazing life. There is something exciting happening every day. And you meet interesting new people all the time.'

An Australian woman (74) living in a hotel in Siem Reap, Cambodia: 'I never do housework, ever. Someone makes my bed, cleans my room, cooks for me. It pretty basic, but I can afford it, if I live carefully. Two cocktails a night, that's $3 or $4; that's my luxury and my social life taken care of! I meet new people every day. I honestly have fun every single day!'

Freedom, but there could be danger

The participants were asked if there was anything that worried them about living in S E Asia. Most had already spoken about their vigilance with money. A few mentioned dirtiness, poor hygiene, and health risks. But these issues were not seen as significant. 'You just get used to it, and work your way around it'.

One man said he'd hesitated to leave home forever, alone. 'But it's easy to find company. In just a few days I could see I'd be a hell of a lot lonelier back home.'

Most saw home as negative compared with positives of their new location.

'Home is all rules and regulations. You can't build a shed, you can't smoke, your bills go up, never down. You don't have control of your own life' (English man, 76).

'At home we are bullied all the time by politicians. The news media gives them far too much coverage, and we get regurgitation and repetition of news, over and over. There is a whole nasty negative climate of bad news all the time. You are just bombarded with propaganda by the media. Here we get hardly any international news, so we are free from all of that. I don't buy newspapers here. I am to not remotely interested in local politics' (Australian woman, 73).

Interestingly, for a person who claimed no interest in global affairs, she told me that she and her husband 'did not bring anything except our clothes. We have fitted out this apartment, it was just $3000 to lease for a year, and we've spent maybe $1000 fixing up a few things. Plus everything on Langkawi is duty free. We'll stay here until the lease runs out, then maybe try a few months in another part of Malaysia, then Vietnam. But if we are anywhere in S. E. Asia and have to leave suddenly, for political reasons or terrorism or a tsunami or anything, we can up and go somewhere safer immediately'. (Langkawi was hit by the massive 2004 tsunami).

A former nurse in Langkawi (72) referred to the precarity of one cohort of retirees: yachties. 'There are a lot of drunken old sailors here, nowhere else to go, too old to sail much anymore. So they live on their boats. They would drink themselves to death wherever they were. It is just cheaper to buy alcohol here'.

She said she fantasied about setting up a facility for them. 'They could rent permanently, with someone to keep an eye on them. They could bring their Thai girlfriend if they like'. But she explained that she did not wish to commit indefinitely to anywhere in Malaysia. 'I wouldn't put all my eggs into one Langkawi basket, or even one Malaysian basket. Who knows, with tsunamis and terrorism, if you might have to make a quick getaway?'

In her study of British retirees living in Thailand, Botterill noted that older migrants, whilst maintaining their status as privileged white Westerners, were 'simultaneously negotiating

constraints in access to basic economic, political and social rights' (Botterill 2016;1). These included financial insecurity, health inequity and status discord. Every participant in my study referred to their financial situation. About half had health insurance. Most mentioned a fatalistic attitude to ill-health: 'I am 72, I have to die sometime'; 'I get sick, I die. End of story'. One said 'I can't afford any safety nets. That is just the way it is'. The obverse argument was this: 'Look, I am ten times healthier here than I ever was in Scotland. It's always warm, I walk a lot. I'm not stressed or hassled about anything. I'll probably live ten years longer just by being here.'

In terms of social and political rights: 'we're a bit below the radar here. It's like being invisible, compared with the nanny state spying on you all the time back home. Suits me!' The mechanism for this invisibility was their transient status. Their very mobility meant they could escape being pinned down to anything. 'I have no rat race days here. And there is no Big Brother watching my every move' one man told me. While the women quoted above had lamented the demeaning invisibility of their status at home, the avoidance of monitoring by the everyday bureaucracies of their home nation was an often-stated major source of liberation.

No one expressed any sense of how they might be perceived by local people. One said 'we pay for visas, we're entitled – allowed - to be here. Everyone is happy.'

Longer lives, 'First World problems'
Humans are likely to continue the quest to prolong longevity in the next century. This calls for reconsideration of the ways society is arranged, to ensure that lengthy old age is both fiscally viable, and enjoyable.

Through moving to S. E. Asia, the individuals in this study are intrinsically critical commentators of their own culture, which they do not see a providing for their needs as they age. Relocation, they hoped, will be transformative as it mediates negative effects of ageing, and enriches well-being (Botterill, 2016). It is only through revisiting, and finding these same people, as they reach their 80s and 90s, whether their plan to stay in S. E. Asia forever in fact played out.

A formulaic depiction of international retirement migrants postulates 'healthier, more active and innovative members of the cohort of older people…. not-poor couples often living off the proceeds of the sold family home' (Warnes, 2009; 353)   (or savings, investments, rents, inheritances etc).   My research findings for this paper contradicted that claim. Most of these itinerants had little money: a reflection in part perhaps of their predominantly single status, with less opportunity to accumulate capital than for two-income couples. Most did not have close family ties. These elements appeared to weaken their connection to home. They did not seem to be anchored anywhere. 'Those most likely to relocate have fewest moorings; they are not wholly satisfied with where they live' (Longino, Perzynski and Stoller, 2002; 45). This group has found ways to take advantage of the relative affordability of S. E. Asia. The dominant equation that drives them is budget vis a vis personal wellbeing.

This practice and these processes are ways of exacerbating some of the negative side effects of tourism. Like other tourists, these long term itinerants are there as consumers, with none of the obligations, responsibilities or concerns of citizenship. They adopt a mainly segregated lifestyle, largely unaffected by local customs and values. In our conversations, about one third were scathing about local way of life and religious practices: they exhibited a general

disrespect. Two of the men could be described as drunks, annoying other guests at the home stay. The proprietor told me that 'from now one, we won't take bookings for more than a month. The three month and six month bookings, money upfront, are tempting; but it drives away our younger guests'.

No-one expressed any interest at all in their social or environmental impacts. This form of mobility may be seen as another venue for Western entitlement. The focus for them all as ageing individuals were their own so-called 'First World Problems'.

CONCLUSION

These retiree adventurers could be described as adjusting to a post-societal agenda of the world, an avoidance or rejection of national borders as a normal framework for understanding society and its management of citizens (Urry, 2000). It has been suggested that older migrants, and I'd include these permanent tourists, 'deserve a more prominent place in social gerontology' (Warnes, 2009; 360). Insights into their situation exposes what it is that their home country does not deliver.

The findings in this project illustrate categories of mobility identified by Buscher and Usher (2009). The travellers combine (a) corporeal travel in a time-space modality: retirement is their leisure and adventure in another country. (b) Their new spaces of inhabitation require a reconfiguration of understandings of place. S. E. Asia becomes their playground, one in which they, as westerners, conceive themselves as relatively privileged. (c) The actual travel is accompanied by imaginings and preconceptions: adventure! Affordability! (d) Engagement in place differs from that of ephemeral tourists, as they meander for years, with no intention of settling.

Hannam suggests we ask how and when tourists become migrants. For these subjects, migration to one specific nation was not a goal. Perpetual tourism allowed them to escape from constraints of citizenship, taxpaying, voting, and commitment. The overriding agenda was a quest for freedom.

Research based on personal conversations in cafes or bars in supposedly exotic places is something of a luxury in the academic world. It was striking that every person interviewed said how much they'd enjoyed the chat, they'd loved having someone to talk to for an hour or two. Many of them even hugged me as they left! Wherever they were, that human connection was a significant element of wellbeing, actively sought each day.

There was a noticeably disturbing irony evident in global affairs as I undertook this research. My daily contacts were western individuals happily choosing to move, at will, around countries in S.E. Asia. Each evening on the hotel television there were shocking news items about Syrian refugees desperately attempting to cross borders into Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, trying to reach Europe. How does mobilities theory deal with this gigantic contrast between the privileged and autonomous versus the extremely desperate?

Perhaps the current mass retiree mobility will turn out to be unique to this generation. As the next generation struggles to own homes, that asset as a source of income in later life may not exist for them. At present some countries guarantee pensions from sometime in the 60s. With far longer longevity, and a low birth rate reducing the numbers of younger workers to pay taxes, this cannot remain viable.

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