Chapter 5

The “Dark Side” of Hypermobility Within Queenstown, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This study adopts a transformational perspective of globalization and draws on the theoretical framework of the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2004) and more specifically, employs the lens of ‘lifestyle mobilities’ (Cohen et al., 2015) in order to highlight the intersection of tourism, migration and neoliberal market flows within Queenstown, New Zealand also known as the world’s top adventure mecca. I analyze the discourse produced by lifestyle migrants currently residing and working in the area in order to illustrate the social consequences of the ‘darker side’ of hypermobility on the micro level, which are strongly influenced by the country’s past and current national labour and immigration policies.

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of global mobilities – the unprecedented circulation of people and socio-cultural practices – this chapter centers on the latest conditions of hypermobility of lifestyle residents as well as local and national labor policies within Queenstown, New Zealand, the world’s iconic adventure mecca as a result of the new globalized economy (Heller, 2003). Currently, we are residing in what Elliott and Urry (2010) have termed ‘the golden age of mobility’ where “massive social changes are implicated in the ever-increasing movement of people, things, capital, information and ideas around the globe” (p. ix). As a result, language as a resource - whether symbolic, interactional, material or ideological - flows, changes and is used by individuals to co-construct and in many ways also problematize the ephemeral, post-modern mobile subject. I adopt a transformational perspective of globalization and draw on the theoretical framework of the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry 2004) and more specifically, employ the lens of ‘lifestyle mobilities’ (Cohen et al., 2015) in order to highlight the intersection of tourism, migration and neoliberal market flows.

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Historically oriented scholars may advocate that what we are experiencing today in terms of globalizing forces, transnational migration and elite mobility (Birchnell & Caletrio 2013; Jansson, 2016) is nothing new (Kellner, 1989). The perspective taken in this chapter is that while globalization and transnational interdependencies (Vertovec, 2009) are not new, they have and continue to affect the rise of a new globalized economy (Duchêne & Heller, 2012) and the ways in which we talk about and conceptualize mobility.

Adopting a transformationalist perspective of globalization means acknowledging that we reside in an already globalized world where national boundaries are becoming more permeable based on particular interests of certain nation-states (Coupland, 2010). This means that we are faced with not necessarily new challenges, but varying degrees, speeds, and shifts of existing social processes connected to different political, economic, and cultural systems (ibid.). Two of these processes pertain to individuals increased mobility for economic reasons and the massive shift of tertiary work being dispersed on the global level (Coupland, 2010, p. 2-3). There is no doubt that such processes contribute to the growth of the middle class thus highlighting the divide between the rich and the poor allowing privileged individuals’ access to specific markets while denying access to others (Blommaert, 2010) illustrating that not all individuals ‘on the move’ are equal (Cresswell, 2001). Extreme mobility has led to new conceptualizations of both mobile individuals and the types of movement they are engaged in. The aim of this chapter is to contribute to discourse and tourism studies by taking a closer look at the ‘darker side’ of hypermobility (Cohen & Gössling, 2015), an area of research that has received little scholarly attention so far. A second aim, therefore, is to reveal how particular market flows and labor policies work in tandem to contribute to the ‘darker side’ of hypermobility among lifestyle travelers and residents of Queenstown, which economically thrives on tourism. In part two, I discuss tourism as a form of global mobility within Queenstown thus setting the scene for this study. In part three, I outline the theoretical framework used. Afterwards, I discuss my data, methodology and research questions. Part five is devoted to the analysis using examples from my data. In part six, I discuss my findings and conclude by addressing future research.

Adventures Tourism and Queenstown: Setting the Scene

Tourism, as a major form of (elite) global mobility (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010), is recognized as the world’s largest service industry having generated over $900 billion in international tourism receipts in 2010 (Adey, 2010, p. 2). It is an industry resilient in times of economic crisis, (Theobald, 2005) worth some $8 trillion (5.2 trillion Euros) and one, which employs around 240 million people annually (World Travel and Tourism Council; Adey, ibid.). So-called ‘adventure tourism’ constitutes a major mode of tourist mobility that is growing rapidly (Weber, 2001). Within the context of adventure tourism, Queenstown, New Zealand has become a major international and iconic tourist destination marked by its “Global Adventure Badge” (Lonely Planet 2010, p. 301) and prime location in the Southern Alps. According to Peat (2004), “Queenstown is unlike anywhere else in New Zealand”. The reasons being because “it is so different in its physical and socio-economic settings it could just about fly its own flag” (p. 7). Queenstown is considered to be the country’s “premier visitor destination” and a place where “tourism rules […] no argument” (ibid.). According to the 2013 census, Queenstown has an urban population of roughly 6,000 inhabitants, however, when looking at the number of visitors travelling to Queenstown annually, there is a radical increase in terms of population size. In fact, Destination Queenstown’s Visitor Report published in 2012 stated that the total number of travellers visiting Queenstown numbered 1.887 million in 2009. The total visitor expenditure that same year amounted to $ 874 million and is forecast to be $1.123 billion by 2016, which would be a growth of 28.6%. or $250 million dollars (p. 5).
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