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### **Abstract**

In recent years, writings on transnationalism have commendably repopulated a world stripped by globalisation theorists with institutions and capable individuals. But, in doing so, they have tended to focus on either end of the labour market, neglecting the middle, and to operate at altitude, neglecting the everyday, the intricacies of travelling and dwelling. Australia's working holiday programme enables young citizens of arrangement countries to holiday and work in Australia for up to 12 months. During 2001-02, I spent nine months researching - observing, formally interviewing, participating with - British and other working holiday makers (WHMs) in Sydney and a few secondary sites. I found that detailing transnational lives of the middle provides flesh for the bones thrown by Clifford (1992) when he wrote rather speculatively on practices of travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling. WHMs travel-in-dwelling passively through the Internet, television, radio, and portable objects, and interactively through phonecalls, e-mails, gifts and face-to-face conversation with other WHMs. And WHMs dwell-in-travelling through backpacker and local communities, drawing on objects and technologies, sites, and events and rhythms. I also found that detailing transnational lives of the middle gives us some new bones: the metaphor of uneven mobility as a means of differentiating middling transnationalisms. Some WHMs embrace corporeal, virtual and imaginative mobility more than others, as do some more permanent residents of Sydney.

**Keywords:** Working holiday makers, Transnational migration, Backpackers, Dwelling-in-travelling, Sydney, Australia

## **Introduction**

The literature we have come to know as transnationalism is neither new nor coherent. It dates back at least as far as 1971 to a special edition of *International Organization*, the most influential pages of which were those on which Field divided the world into (national, provincial) old tribes and the (global, cosmopolitan) new tribe (Field 1971). And, while there seems to be some agreement as to what constitutes transnational activity and its importance – people and ideas cross borders, supporting multi-sited projects, distributing resources, with implications for places and identities – it contains diverse writings, from premature celebrations of deterritorialisation (Appadurai 1996) to more cautious and grounded accounts of purposeful reterritorialisation projects (Sparke forthcoming), for example. Despite its age and incoherence, however, this literature has enjoyed much popularity in recent years, and for good reason. In response to grand narratives of globalisation which insist contemporary interconnections are global in scale and economic in nature (at least in the first instance), and narratives of postmodernism which focus almost exclusively on the local scale, texts and narratives at the expense of context, the writings of theorists such as Ong (1999) and Smith (2001) are highly effective and constructive in at least two broad ways. First, they give us a methodological framework which combines transnational ethnography and historicised political economy, thus enabling us to steer a path between human agency on the one hand, and social conditions on the other. Second, they bring realism to the table of transnational mobility studies; what Gregory calls substantive geographies (cited in Philo 2000): the world is full, of particular times and

places, natural and political borders, territorialising institutions such as the nation-state, technologies of fixity such as the passport and visa, capable individuals with supportive but also cost-bearing friendship networks, families and bodies.

So these are some strengths, but this Special Edition is also concerned with weaknesses in the literature as it currently stands. The editors, David Conradson and Alan Latham, identify two gaps. First, writings on transnationalism tend to focus on either the high end of the labour market – high skilled economic migrants – or the low end – low skilled economic migrants. And so they neglect a significant proportion of the world's transnational population: people in the middle, often motivated to cross borders by non-economic concerns. Second, despite their refreshing acknowledgement of micro-level actors, writings on transnationalism still too often operate at the macro scale, at altitude, and say little about the everyday lives of ordinary people on the ground, the intricacies of their travelling and dwelling.

My current research concerns the details and intricacies of transnational lives of the middle: texts and contexts, particular times and places, borders and border crossings, institutions and their technologies, migrants and non-migrants, capable transmigrants and their bodies, families and friends. So who are these transnationals? Who constitutes this middle? In 1975 Australia established its working holiday programme, allowing British citizens between the ages of 18 and 26 to holiday and work in Australia for a period of up to 12 months. Since that time, the programme has expanded in two ways. The upper age limit has been raised to 30 years. And reciprocal arrangements have been signed with a further 11 countries: Canada, the Republic of

Ireland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malta, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Hong Kong. The objectives, as stated on the visa form, read as follows: 'The working holiday programme aims to promote international understanding. It provides opportunities for resourceful, self-reliant and adaptable young people to holiday in Australia and to supplement their funds through incidental employment'. As for the numbers, on one particular but typical day in 2001, almost 47,000 working holiday makers (WHMs) resided in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

During 2001-02, I spent nine months in Sydney and some secondary sites as participant, observer, interviewer, and general pest to British WHMs and some secondary groups (Irish and Dutch), and also key players both within and regulating Australia's backpacker industry. I met WHMs through friends, on the beach and in pubs, cafes and hostels. Each WHM was interviewed twice. Between the two interviews, many kept a one-week diary, detailing their activities against clocktime and mapspace. In total, 40 one-hour interviews were recorded with 20 WHMs and 10 activity diaries were collected. I give voice to 12 WHMs in this paper. I choose to arrange their contributions by theme (stories of travelling-in-dwelling, Sydney's backpacker community, home, imagined futures) rather than individual WHM. I do this because I do not wish to focus on just one or two 'typical' WHMs. Rather, I wish to balance depth with breadth, and let my claims emerge as the quotations and empirical details mount up around particular themes. The problem with this approach is that research subjects can appear lifeless when heaped in a pile. With this in mind, I provide brief life situations for each WHM given voice in this paper in Table 1.

\*\* Table 1 - WHMs interviewed - about here

This paper has four parts. I call the first two Travelling-in-dwelling and Dwelling-in-travelling. These wordings come from Clifford's (1992) influential paper, 'Travelling Cultures', in which he makes the following argument. Traditional anthropology has a localising strategy. It centres culture around a particular locus, a mappable, manageable field (the village, the laboratory). It studies localised dwelling and rooted native experience. It marginalises or erases travel, transport technologies, prior and ongoing contact and commerce with other places, national context, and the wider global world of intercultural import-export. Clifford believes it is time to rethink cultures, as sites of both dwelling and travelling. It is time to concern ourselves with complex, historical, hybrid, cosmopolitan, travelling subjects (missionaries, merchants, tourists etc.); with hotels, motels, stations, airports; with fleeting encounters, inauthenticity, exile, rootlessness, but also exploration, escape and transformation; with the knowledges, stories and traditions travel produces. Late in the paper we get this pivotal sentence (1992: 108):

I'm not saying there are no locales or homes, that everyone is - or should be - travelling, or cosmopolitan, or deterritorialized. This is not nomadology. Rather, I'm trying to sketch a comparative studies approach

to specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and travelling:  
travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling.

Pivotal, by my reading, for three reasons. First, he acknowledges that not everyone is travelling – a point I return to below. Second, he positions the paper as a starting point, a ‘sketch’. Third, he writes ‘travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling’ but writes little *of* travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling. As concepts, he leaves them open; a sketch inviting further work. So in the first two parts of this paper I seek to do this further work. I add colour to the concepts travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling through attention to the details of WHM practices in Sydney and elsewhere.

Part three, Travelling and dwelling in and out of place, focuses on the different ways in which WHMs have been welcomed in Sydney, by one Mayor and business community in Sydney Central, and by another Mayor and local residents in two coastal suburbs, Coogee and Bondi. Discussion here centres on particular times (temporary and short-term verses permanent and long-term) and mobilities (extensive and speedy mobility versus projects of fixity and stability). In part four, Travelling and dwelling as a way of life?, I focus on what happens when working holidays come to an end. Some WHMs find ways of staying on in Australia. But most return to Europe and elsewhere, some with plans to travel again, others determined to settle down. This final section leads into some concluding comments on uneven mobility and different middling transnationalisms.

## **Travelling-in-dwelling**

Living in Australia for 12 months is a challenge for many WHMs, despite Australia's attributes of relative safety and familiarity (crucially for many British WHMs, Australians speak English). They cope with being away from home in a number of ways, two of which, after Clifford (1992), I call travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling. First, travelling-in-dwelling, or travelling-without-moving. WHMs do this relatively passively, through the Internet (websites such as BBCi), television (Australian television schedules contain many British made programmes such as *The Bill*), radio (the BBC World Service), and objects they carry from home, such as cassettes and compact discs of music, and photos of family and friends. (Note that on returning home, WHMs will travel-in-dwelling again, this time back in both time and space, to Australia 2001-02, through photo albums, scrap books, souvenirs etc.). And they do it (inter)actively, through phonecalls, e-mails, presents and face-to-face conversation with other WHMs. With phonecards, phonecalls are remarkably cheap between Britain and Australia now. Of phonecalls, Heidi says 'I'm feeling really in touch when I phone the family so it doesn't feel like that far away'. WHMs tend to phone home weekly, and especially on Sundays. Events and festivals are important. On Christmas Day 2001, some 780,000 international calls were made from Australia (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 2001). A number of these conversations would have included a thank you for what arrived in the post during December, from British WHMs for Marks and Spencer knickers, and Dutch WHMs for liquorice. And a number of these conversations would have involved arrangement-making for visits from family and

friends, who increasingly join WHMs in Australia for a week or two during the post-Christmas holiday period. On the advice of employment agencies, most WHMs purchase mobile phones on arrival in Australia. Many use these to text family and friends, either for privacy (Shirley calls her siblings but senses her mother and father listening in the background), or as a substitute for conversation. (Why desire a substitute for conversation? See the paragraph below). With access at work or via Internet cafes, e-mail is another means of maintaining relationships across distance for WHMs. Al says that with e-mail 'it may actually feel like you're not so far away'. Ruth says 'it's just the little things you don't want to miss. Like the little things that are happening. The little bits of gossip that you need to, like, be caught up on'. They send personal e-mails occasionally, and group or newsletter-style e-mails regularly, with photos attached, taken on digital cameras.

I have two comments on this travelling-in-dwelling. First, the relative ease and affordability with which travellers maintain contact with family and friends back home is a recent development. My parents migrated from New Zealand to England in 1967. Their one-way flight, bought on the cheap through a bucket shop, cost approximately £700 (1967 prices). On arrival in London, phonecalls home to relatives in Palmerston North cost £1/minute (again, 1967 prices). They corresponded more often by aerogramme, a slower means of communication in every sense: formal, measured, composed. Even a decade ago, when I first visited Australia myself, Internet-based e-mail accounts and Internet cafes were virtually unheard of. My second comment relates to how all this travelling-in-dwelling makes WHMs feel. The quotations selected for the



above paragraph suggest that, through their use of communications technologies, WHMs feel connected, in touch, close. But we can select others. Of telephones, Carl says 'it's good to speak to your parents, friends, but you do get that sort of feeling afterwards and during the conversation: well I miss you and the fact that I've phoned you now actually makes me feel worse'. Of e-mail, Katy says 'e-mailing home to see what everyone's doing... sometimes that just drives you mad, thinking about what you're missing out on'. And Al says 'I think also people can use e-mail too much. It can almost detract from the whole experience, because you're always contactable'. Of visits by friends and relatives, Amanda says 'my mum came out a couple of weeks ago and I got very sad saying goodbye to her. That was a low, which is bizarre cause I wouldn't have had that low if she didn't come'. These quotations suggest feelings of homesickness, distance and, paradoxically, frustration with the difficulty of achieving distance from disciplining home life.<sup>3</sup>

### **Dwelling-in-travelling**

In addition to travelling-in-dwelling, WHMs forge much more local associations within Australia, and particularly within Sydney, where most of them settle for a while and work: dwelling-in-travelling. There is a WHM or backpacker community in Sydney, the specific operation of which deserves comment in some detail, after three more general points about the community. First, not every WHM feels the need for this community. For some, the purpose of travel is to get away, meet the locals, forget home. Second, this community is diverse and fragmented. Within it, we might draw

lines between nationality (language is a factor here) and age (money, confidence and possibly a travel partner are factors here) – clearly there are other lines of difference among WHMs such as gender, but these two seem to be the most significant. Third, WHM attitudes towards this community are complex, captured by comments in interview about the standard backpacker conversation. Katy says:

It's all about where you're going and where you've come from, rather than what you did at home or how much you earned [...]. I'd like to think it's made me more tolerant [...]. You come here, you meet people at face value, and, you know, you don't find out, you know, whether they've been to university, where they went to school, what job they did. You don't find any of that out. You just talk to them.

But Jeanne speaks of 'small talk', 'transient friendships' and 'false environments'. She bemoans that 'you seem to have to have like a million travel stories, to kind of impress people with where you've been and all that kind of business'. On a more analytical level, Lisa adds:

Everyone invariably tells their story when they're travelling, and that's kind of how people place value on other travellers really: where they've been, how long they've been gone for, what stories they can tell, and what's the most dangerous place they've been, things like that.

So for some, association among WHMs appears power free (one economy from home is absent: qualifications, occupation, salary), while for others, the community appears power ridden (another economy from away is present: travel stories).

At the risk of proceeding with this paper in lists of three, I now turn to the resources on which WHM association rests in Sydney... for which I have three categories: objects and technologies, sites, and events and rhythms. First, objects and technologies. Because WHMs move about so much within Sydney, from hostel to flat, and from job to job, web-based e-mail accounts and mobile phones are essential for arranging meetings. And because WHMs move about so much between Sydney and elsewhere, continual meetings with new faces occur, for which technologies of sociability are important: card and board games, but also, to loosen inhibitions, alcohol (preferably box wine, which is cheap and large enough to share), tobacco (preferably rolling tobacco, which is easily crushed or seductively rolled for a new face) and cannabis (preferably rolled with tobacco, and passed slowly round the group from touched-hand to touched-hand). Other objects are clothes, through which community is performed – football shirts from home and sarongs from stopovers in Thailand and Indonesia – and magazines, which provide WHMs with the identifier ‘backpacker’ and listings of times and places for meetings – *TNT*, *British Balls*, *The Word*.

Times and places for meetings. Places or sites are important for dwelling-in-travelling. There are known and appropriately named backpacker pubs: *The World*, *The Globe*. Hostels encourage social contact through physical design: dorm rooms for

sleeping, communal rooms with pool tables and message boards, outdoor spaces with barbecues. For the most part, such provision is welcomed by WHMs, until they need some time alone, achieved by use of props again: books, personal stereos and sarongs hung from bunk beds as screens all indicate a desire for privacy. Times – events and rhythms – complete the picture. Pubs and clubs have weekly backpacker nights. Hostels have weekly communal dinners in or nights out. Fellow travellers have birthday parties and leaving parties. Annual festivals include the FA Cup Final, the Eurovision Song Contest, Christmas Day (still on Bondi beach for many), New Years Eve, Mardi Gras, the Melbourne Grand Prix, the Melbourne Cup.

Before moving on, to discuss everyday Sydney life for WHMs and their homemaking projects, I have one final point to make about the WHM community, the function of which is not just dwelling-in-travelling but also travelling-in-dwelling i.e. these two categories are not as discreet as my subheadings suggest. WHMs visit the Kings Cross Hotel for *EastEnders* and Premiership football, and the London Tavern for Old Speckled Hen and single malt whiskey. Story-telling about home is fuelled by cups of tea. Situated in The Work and Travel Company's central Sydney branch, Worldwide Snacks sells Marmite, Heinz Salad Cream, Coleman's Mustard, HP Brown Sauce, Bisto Gravy. Amanda searches out travellers from her home town, Birmingham: 'I know if I hear a Brummie accent I'll prick up my ears and go over. And I'll speak to people quicker than I would if I heard a German accent, or even a Liverpool accent for that matter. So it's probably just that sense of homeness, cause you're so far away'. Leah, from Ireland, drinks in Scruffy Murphy's, The Mercantile, and The Porterhouse. When

drunk enough, she sings her national anthem with the others. But Ciara, also from Ireland, says this of such behaviour:

When I was in Melbourne there were a few Irish bars, and there were a couple, when you go down to the Irish bars, it's just full of Irish people, and yeah, it was grand. But I wouldn't do it all the time. It's nice to meet the odd Irish person. Yeah, fair enough. But to be honest, I haven't come out to meet Irish people.

Ciara's words point to a contradiction, between travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling on the one hand, and travel as discovery, exploration, experimentation, transformation on the other<sup>4</sup>.

WHMs don't only dwell through the backpacker community in Sydney. For many, time in Sydney is constructed as time out from backpacking, to settle into the local community, to become a resident, if only temporarily. Rhythms are important again in this regard, or rather routines, the maintenance of which breeds familiarity, "a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties" (Giddens 1991: 39). WHMs join gyms, commute to work, read local newspapers, become regulars at local cafes, pubs and convenience stores, make friends with neighbours, go drinking with workmates on a Friday night, support local sports teams on a Saturday afternoon. Also of importance are namings - the Coogee Bay Hotel becomes the CBH, Maroopna Manor becomes The Manor - and material homemaking. Familiarity was one definition of home given by

WHMs in interview. Another, most common, was old friends, family and the family home in which they grew up. A third, though, was belongings, and this definition of home is interesting when considering transnational lives, because belongings are portable, or at least accessible wherever there are shops. Jeanne says 'I've bought, just accumulated, material possessions I suppose. Just to make me feel that, you know, this was my space and I'm not just passing through'. Her flat is filled with home comforts: house plants, photos, posters, a television, a comfortable sofa, a fridge full of (comfort) food and decorated with magnets. These are her belongings in two senses: legally, they belong to her, in that she bought them independently; but also, in a cultural sense, *she* belongs to *them*, because her sense of home or belonging is embedded in their materiality. In other words, away from home, in addition to the stories we tell (*we are what we say*), *we are what we own*.

### **Travelling and dwelling in and out of place**

There is an important spatial dimension to all this Guinness-drinking, Beckham-watching and Internet-surfing. In 1996, Frank Sartor, Mayor of Sydney, opened Sydney Central YHA, a 570-bed youth hostel next-door to Sydney Central train station. Why? Because this was one part of Sydney City Council's blueprint for the city, *Living City* (no date), which aims 'to create a vibrant, living city of world standing that will be prosperous in the long-term', and aspires towards 'a vibrant city that is active 24 hours a day'. Why? Because, despite containing its own travel agency, information desk, bar, convenience store, cafe, swimming pool, sauna, games room, cinema, book exchange,

terrace with barbecues, kitchens, television rooms, reading rooms, public telephones, laundries, and on, and on, its guests, from between 50 and 70 countries on any one day, still spill out onto surrounding streets, creating demand for travel shops (STA, Oz Experience), Internet cafes (Global Gossip), bars and restaurants, and eventually creating demand for more hostels (Wake Up, another 500-bed hostel, opened on the same block in summer 2002). In interview, Julian Ledger, Chief Executive Officer of YHA NSW, says:

They, I think, in general, hostels create life. And it's young, healthy, attractive life. And it's seven days a week and it's 16 to 18 hours a day. And a lot of places are busy. Go to Martin Place, it's busy. But you go there on a Sunday morning, you can fire a canon through the place. The American city problem, of sort of the donut, the, the dead heart. And Sydney, the present Mayor, Sartor, pronounced that he wanted the place to be a living city. He opened that place for us. And I think, you know, we made our contribution. And backpackers are more visible than a five-star hotel, which is all self-contained and, you know, everything is in the building. Backpacker hostels tend not to provide everything, so people tend to spill out. And that's good for the place, and they consume food and drink and souvenirs etc. But mainly I think the good thing is that 24-hourness about it. So yeah, we made a bit of a difference down there. I

mean, there's a Chinatown as well and huge other developments. I wouldn't take too much credit.

Inadvertently, he raises two important points about transnational spaces of the middle. First, WHMs are welcome in Sydney because they are 'young, healthy, attractive', and because they 'spill out' and 'consume food and drink and souvenirs'. These are characteristics of the middle, the right kind of transnationals (for Julian Ledger and Frank Sartor), in that refugees or low skilled economic migrants are constructed as many things but rarely as healthy or attractive, and high skilled economic migrants rarely spill out from their office blocks with underground parking, cars with climate control, and apartment blocks with pool and gym (at least in the particular global city narrative we have here).

\*\* Figure 1 - the Greater Sydney Area - about here

The second point begins with the word Chinatown. WHMs are the right kind of life (again, for Julian Ledger and Frank Sartor), but this life must be lived in the right kind of space: Sydney Central, because, with the train station and Chinatown, the area should happily, or at least quietly, accommodate 24-hour activity (travelling/dwelling-in-place). What happens, then, when WHMs leave Sydney Central and move into other spaces: the suburban living spaces of less happy, or at least louder voiced, Australians (travelling/dwelling-out-of-place)? In 2001, Dominic Sullivan, Mayor of Randwick,



was quoted in a British newspaper regarding the behaviour of British backpackers in Coogee, a beachfront suburb in south east Sydney:

The usual train of events is that people move into an apartment, all their mates arrive, and what started out as a flat with four people is soon holding as many as 13. Party night is Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday night, and pretty soon the apartment becomes a dosshouse [...]. It's a lifestyle conflict (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 2001).

While it is easy for politicians to rage against temporary residents to reporters – temporary residents do not vote – for many years now, some residents of Coogee and Bondi (a short walk north along the coast from Coogee, across the local authority boundary from Randwick into Waverley) do feel they have been battling against driveways blocked by abandoned cars (many WHMs abandon cars before catching flights out of Sydney), abusive neighbours hosting late night parties, and streets and beaches covered with rubbish (often eight or more WHMs will crowd into a three-bedroom flat or house, thus creating more waste and using more water than the average household, on which Council services are configured).

I do not want to set up a tidy binary here, with transnational, dynamic, cosmopolitan WHMs on the one side, and local, static, reactionary Coogee and Bondi residents on the other. The locals of these two places are diverse in their connections. Archaeologists tell us aboriginal people have lived on Sydney's southern coastline for

approximately 10,000 years. Despite smallpox, measles and influenza, first brought by the British fleet of 1788, their presence continues, in person (approximately 1,400 residents of Randwick identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the last census of 1996; the figure for Waverley was 209), but also in place names (including Bondi – or Boondi, or Bundi, or Bundye – and Coogee – or Koojah) and rock carvings (on Bondi golf course, for example). The census also found 36 per cent of Randwick's 118,905 residents were born overseas, most commonly in the UK, New Zealand, Greece, Indonesia and Hong Kong. The figure for Waverley was 39 per cent of 61,674, most commonly in the UK, New Zealand, South Africa, Hungary and Poland. I remember there were celebrations in Sydney every night of the 2002 FIFA World Cup – someone's team had always won. These locals also travel-in-dwelling, to other parts of Australia through the Australian State's national project, to their previous countries of residence through foreign language newspapers and overseas telephone calls, to Britain through previous colonial and curiously persistent Commonwealth projects, to one particular version of the USA through Hollywood films.

So, to state the obvious, but also to be clear, Coogee and Bondi are not pure localities. Rather, like other places, they are products of the continual and contested material and discursive practices of numerous people and the institutions they create. Day trippers to Coogee date back to the early 1800s. The Picnickers' Arms hotel opened sometime around 1830. The tramline between Coogee and downtown Sydney opened in 1883 (one year before Bondi's corresponding line). By the 1930s, up to 30,000 people were attending night surf carnivals on Coogee beach. And all this time there were

conflicts of various kinds, over what constitutes decent bathing attire, for example (see Dowd 1959). So one conflict of this moment is about the behaviour of WHMs or backpackers. The permanent residents of Bondi and Coogee hold diverse attitudes towards WHMs. The local Chamber of Commerce, for example, welcomes their trade. But it is worth outlining some themes around which many locals have united in opposition to the presence of British backpackers in particular. One theme, ironically, is central to Sydney City Council's *Living City* document discussed above: 24-hour activity. The 24-hour rhythm of many local people, working Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5, caring for families, tends to involve activity between 6am and 12am, but reproductive sleep between 12am and 6am. Time is important in a more general sense too. Some locals believe WHMs abandon cars and drop litter because their stay is temporary and their commitment to place short-term (as opposed to permanent and long-term, demonstrated by such practices as house buying).

If there are two sides here, they are best understood not in terms of globals and locals, but rather in terms relatively mobile and fixed transnationals. WHMs are young, childless, on career breaks, and are thus extensively, frequently and speedily mobile. Many local residents have children to care for, mortgages to pay, and are thus intensively and irregularly mobile. Or in positive terms, local residents are pursuing stability and security, what we might call purposeful projects of fixity. Interestingly, Randwick City Council is seeking to address the problems outlined above along these lines, if not in these precise terms. For over a decade, backpackers have been viewed as a land use management issue in Sydney. Renting beds to WHMs on a short-term basis

requires Council consent. Under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act of 1979, and the current Local Environment Plan, such authorised use is restricted in Randwick to just one zone: commercial land use. But more recently, Council officers have begun wrestling with the more fundamental question of how consent authorities configured to serve and regulate fixed populations are to deal with increasingly mobile populations. Noise abatement orders, for example, are useless if served on individuals likely to move on and be replaced, and not properties, the only constants. And existing local authority boundaries are unjust if one Council suffers the costs of visitors and the assets they come to visit (in Randwick's case, primarily beaches and coastal paths), and its neighbour enjoys the revenue of industrial and commercial activities (Botany Bay Council controls Sydney airport, Port Botany, and the Banksmeadow industrial district) – the argument made in Randwick City Council's *Submission to Inquiry into the Structure of Local Government in Eight Council Areas in the Inner City and Eastern Suburbs of Sydney* (no date).

### **Travelling and dwelling as a way of life?**

Most WHMs leave Coogee and Bondi eventually and return home. I begin my discussion of what happens when working holidays come to an end with a brief story. Between 1989 and 1992, Ivan Milat abducted seven hitch-hiking backpackers along the Hume Highway, brutally murdered them, and buried their bodies in the Belanglo State Forest. Sometime in early 2002, the following graffiti appeared on the wall of Videoezy in Coogee: 'IVAN MILAT 4 W/END RELEASE'. At the time, this event was interpreted

in the local press as a reflection of discontent with the presence of WHMs in Coogee. A few months later, however, interviewing a British WHM in an apartment just round the corner from Videoezy, I was told the following story. Late one night in early 2002, a Scottish guy, previously a WHM, just recently the proud new owner of a 457 visa (which enables employers to sponsor foreign nationals for a period of up to four years), left the Coogee Bay Hotel, and stumbled up the hill in search of a Kebab. On reaching his destination, he found a queue stretching out the front door, made up of British backpackers. Continuing round the corner, he addressed the wall of Videoezy, and wrote the words: 'IVAN MILAT 4 W/END RELEASE'. Now this is just rumour, and here is not the place to argue the merits of rumour as evidence in social research (although see Hutnyk 1996), but it fits nicely with this next piece of more concrete information. In response to some of the problems associated with WHMs in Bondi, a lobby group has been founded by Ian Johnson: Bondi Noise Action Group. Ian Johnson is also a former British backpacker, now settled on Sydney's southern beaches. It seems that some WHMs travel to Australia for 12 months initially, move on to four-year visas with the help of their employers, and then stay a while, further complicating the category 'local'. And it seems that some of this group become very protective of the lifestyle they've found in Australia. Once through the fence, they seek to shut the gate.

This is a minority, however. The vast majority of WHMs return home to their country of origin after between 12 and 18 months. Approximately half my interviewees would return with the travelling bug, eager to head off again, this time to more challenging places such as South America, a current fashion. But approximately half

would return to their families, some to their old jobs, with other needs and desires, for stability and settlement, for a stage in the lifecycle characterised by car and house ownership (within the catchment area of a good school), and career and family commencement. Vinnie says 'I didn't really want to be doing this at 30. I'd rather be back home at 30, sort of with a career [...]. I think it's all to do with age. I'm thinking God I really need a career now. I really need to start settling down a bit'. And Katy says 'I wanna do it now, before I get all tied down with a house, mortgage, that kind of thing [...]. I think after a year I'll be ready to go back and get a job and resume my career and earn some money again, and have a nice flat and a car'. We can cross borders when young and get it out of our systems; to visit Australia is a once-in-a-lifetime experience; and afterwards we must grow up and face the real world (of fixed lives, lived within national boundaries) – these are some common tropes of WHM narratives.

Yet, with portfolio careers, letting agencies etc., surely lives need not be so fixed. Indeed, given the increasing rate at which many of us seem to be shifting jobs, moving house and taking holidays (summer holidays, city breaks, winter sun etc.), surely lives will not be so fixed. So the above tropes and quotations are not about necessity or material conditions, so much as imagination and desire. Appadurai (1996) characterises the imagination as a force for transnationalism, and possibly even postnationalism. But some WHMs imagine a life of job security and proximate family, and set about performing such desires: purposeful projects of fixity again. Sennett (1998) writes of routine that, while in today's flexible world it is viewed as evil, in the mid-eighteenth

century it was the subject of much debate. He cites Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*, first published 1776), for whom routine was destructive; it numbed the mind, dulled spontaneity, taught boredom. And he cites Diderot (*Encyclopedia*, published from 1751 to 1772), for whom repetition and regular rhythm were positive, fruitful, virtuous forces, teaching control and order, serenity and calm. Sennett's sympathy lies with Diderot, ironically. He suggests routine begets narratives; gives shape, depth and coherence to lives. While, as always, there are problems with such grand ideas (surely a singular event – the successful completion of a trip to somewhere in the world considered challenging, for example – might support a strong narrative), that flexibility requires a particular strength of character – exceptional and adventurous individuals, who have the confidence to dwell in disorder and fragmentation, to forget pasts and risk futures – is important. Because, by definition, most people are not exceptional. Rather than nomads – promiscuous, playful polyglots (Braidotti 1994) – many WHMs are occasional travellers, yearning for and acting out stability and authenticity, however elusive and illusory.

## **Conclusion**

Detailing transnational lives of the middle, I make two sets of points in this paper. The first puts flesh on the bones of Clifford (1992): travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling. To confront anxieties, but also to share fun and relax, WHMs travel-in-dwelling passively, through the Internet, television, radio and portable objects, and (inter) actively, through phonecalls, e-mails, gifts and face-to-face conversation with

other WHMs. This travelling-in-dwelling is remarkably easy and affordable today in a way that it wasn't just 10 years ago. Yet its implications are ambiguous or double-sided. On the one hand, travelling-in-dwelling enables WHMs to feel connected, in touch, close to home. On the other, it produces feelings of homesickness, distance and, paradoxically, frustration with the difficulty of achieving distance from disciplining home life. For similar reasons, WHMs dwell-in-travelling through both backpacker and local communities. The backpacker community in Sydney rests on resources: objects and technologies (from chess boards to football shirts), sites (from public bars to designer hostel spaces) and events and rhythms (from weekly theme nights to annual festivals). Dwelling-in-travelling through local communities involves homemaking. Routines and namings breed familiarity, one understanding of home among WHMs. Other understandings include family, old friends, the family house in which they grew up, and, most interestingly when thinking about transnational lives, material belongings, home comforts. Like travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling means contradictory things for WHMs. Some find the backpacker community power free, since one economy from home is absent: qualifications, occupation, salary. Others find it power ridden, since another economy from away is present: travel stories. In other words, we must add what WHMs say (travel stories) to what they own (belongings) when thinking through how WHMs dwell-in-travelling. The final point here is that travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling are not discreet categories. An important space for WHM travelling-in-dwelling is Sydney's backpacker community (*EastEnders* at the Kings Cross Hotel etc.).



The second set of points relates to the concept of uneven mobility. WHMs are welcome in Sydney Central, home of Sydney Central train station and Chinatown, because the Mayor and local business community look at them and see something different to other transnationals, to refugees or high-skilled economic migrants. They see young, healthy, attractive consumers of food, drink and souvenirs. They see 24-hour life. WHMs are less welcome in Coogee and Bondi for exactly this 24-hour life. They are less welcome not because WHMs are dynamic, cosmopolitan transnationals and Coogee and Bondi are static, reactionary localities, but because WHMs are young, childless and relatively mobile whereas many local residents are relatively fixed, with families and mortgages, with personal projects of security and stability. In this context, WHMs are seen as temporary, short-term and lacking in commitment. Not all WHMs are temporary of course. A few find ways of staying on. But most do leave eventually. Some return home to Europe with plans to travel again, seemingly happy with travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling as a way of life. But some return with other needs and desires, for settlement, for another lifecycle stage involving job, house, car and family. Given current social trends, I suggest that such a future of job security and proximate family is unlikely, but accept that people are capable and have projects, that people are creative and sometimes act on their imagination. My final point brings this paper a full circle, back to writings on transnationalism. Smith (2001) seeks to replace the local-global binary with a transnational scale. The editors of this Special Edition, Alan Latham and David Conradson, point to different transnationalisms, and particularly to what they call ordinary and middling transnationalism. I support these

projects, and point in turn to different middling transnationalisms<sup>5</sup>. For those in the middle, cross-border travel (in every sense: corporeal, imaginative, virtual) is largely a matter of choice (though always social and cultured, never simply voluntary). In this paper, I give voice to many different people, all of whom choose to cross-borders in various ways, and differentiate between those who embrace and those less convinced by the ambiguities of travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling.

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### **Notes**

1. Commonwealth Government of Australia's Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. This figure should not be confused with total visas issued (76,570 for the period 2000-01).
2. For the usual reasons of confidentiality, WHM names used in this paper are products of my imagination.
3. I deal with the implications of travelling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travelling for WHMs intent on self-transformation through travel in another paper (Clarke 2004).
4. See note number 3 above.
5. I feel a little uncomfortable with the terms middling and ordinary. In a global context, WHMs are hardly middling. They may not be high-flying business

executives, but they are relatively rich, privileged and powerful nevertheless. Still, I prefer 'middling' to 'ordinary'. Can we describe WHMs as ordinary without asking that question: ordinary for whom?

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**Table 1.** *WHM interviewees*

Al <sup>2</sup>	Al is male, white, British and 27 years old. Back in England, he lived in Birmingham and worked in social policy research. He has a Masters degree. His father works in sales. His mother does secretarial work.
Amanda	Amanda is female, white, British and 30 years old. Back in England, she lived in Birmingham and worked as a business analyst in the energy sector. She has a degree, a builder for a father, and a care assistant for a mother.
Carl	Carl is male, black, British and 29 years old. Back in England, he lived in Birmingham and worked as a business analyst in the energy sector. He has a degree and was brought up by his mother, a childcare specialist.
Ciara	Ciara is female, white, Irish and 23 years old. Back in Ireland, she lived in Dublin and worked in theatre and television. She never finished university. Her father is a landscape gardener. Her mother assists her father and looks after the home.
Heidi	Heidi is female, white, Dutch and 27 years old. Back in the Netherlands, she lived in Amsterdam and worked as a research assistant. She has a Masters degree. Her father is a labourer. Her mother works on reception.
Jeanne	Jeanne is female, white, British and 30 years old. Back in England, she lived in Brighton and worked in social policy research. She has a Masters degree and comes from a family of teachers.
Katy	Katy is female, white, British and 24 years old. Back in England, she lived in Middlesex and worked in marketing. She went to university in Edinburgh. Her father works as a doctor. Her mother does secretarial work.
Leah	Leah is female, white, Irish and 24 years old. Back in Ireland, she lived in Dublin and worked as an administrator. She left school at 16. Her father divides his time between farming and construction. Her mother assists him and looks after the home.
Lisa	Lisa is female, white, British and 26 years old. Back in England, she lived in Stoke-on-Trent and worked as an administrator. She left school at 18. She comes from a family of teachers.
Ruth	Ruth is female, white, British and 18 years old. Back in England, she lived and attended school in Sheffield. She will return to a place at university. She has a professor for a father and a nurse for a mother.
Shirley	Shirley is female, white, Irish and 25 years old. Back in Ireland, she lived in Dublin and worked as a social worker. She has a Masters degree. Her father and mother make furniture for a living.
Vinnie	Vinnie is male, white, British and 27 years old. Back in England, he lived in London and worked in sales. He has a degree. His father works in insurance. His mother is a physiotherapist.



**Figure 1.** *The Greater Sydney area*