Pastures New or Old? Migration, Narrative and Change

Caroline Oliver *University of Cambridge, U.K.*

Abstract: The paper explores how motifs of continuity and change are used to narrate the migration process and in so doing, help construct ageing identities. Based on research with international retired migrants in Spain, the article shows how older travellers emphasize the transformational aspects associated with movement. However, the research reveals how underneath this narrative of change, there is widespread evidence of continuity with former ways of life. This simultaneous emphasis on change and continuity must be understood as related to the life course of migrants and the wider paradoxes in contemporary cultural expectations of ageing. Narratives of change and continuity become a convenient shorthand through which the complex emotional adjustments wrought by ageing can be expressed. They allow for retired migrants to claim "new" identities, yet still have at hand the familiar and necessary resources required to manage the challenges presented by growing older away from "home."

Keywords: ageing, international retirement, migration, narrative

Résumé : L'article explore comment l'utilisation de motifs de continuité et de changement permet de raconter le processus de migration et par là, d'aider à construire des identités dans le vieillissement. À partir de recherches menées auprès de migrants vivant leur retraite en Espagne, l'article montre comment des voyageurs âgés insistent sur les aspects transformationnels associés avec le mouvement. Par contre, la recherche révèle comment, sous ce récit de changement, on trouve un témoignage répandu de continuité avec d'anciens modes de vie. On doit comprendre cette insistance simultanée sur le changement et la continuité dans sa relation avec le parcours de vie des migrants et avec les paradoxes plus larges dans les attentes culturelles contemporaines à l'égard du vieillissement. Les récits de changement et de continuité deviennent une sténographie pratique pour exprimer les ajustements émotionnels complexes demandés par le vieillissement. Ils permettent aux retraités émigrés de revendiquer de « nouvelles » identités, tout en conservant sous la main les ressources familières et nécessaires pour gérer les défis associés au fait de vieillir loin de « la maison ».

Mots-clés : vieillissement, retraite à l'étranger, migration, récit

Introduction

One of the most basic conceptual metaphors in relation to ageing is "life as a journey," which associates the passing of time with spatial movement. It depicts:

> a correspondence between a traveller and a person living the life, the road travelled and the "course" of a lifetime, a starting point and the time of birth, and so on. [Lakoff and Turner 1989:60-61]

This metaphor is undoubtedly reinforced by the many examples of actual relocation at varying stages of age-transition. Rites of passage around the world often involve the ritual relocation of initiands to a temporary sequestered zone, demonstrating the taken for granted ways in which aged identities can be signified by spatial movement. In this article, I want to pay attention to the way that meanings attached to geographical movement become important means by which individuals express their adaptation to, and comprehension of, corresponding periods of personal, social and physical change. This understanding helps explain the persistence of the trope of change and the associated downplaying of continuity in migration. Despite evidence of significant continuity, the motif of change through movement provides a metaphorical shorthand by which other, less easily socially articulated, aspects of identity, such as ageing, are negotiated.

International Retirement Migration

The discussion is addressed here in relation to the age-transitions and adjustments of retirement. This is a domain which shows much evidence of the metaphorical structuring of the life course as a journey, particularly as it is culturally constructed in contemporary Western society as a junction galvanizing people to reflect, plan for and ultimately act upon choices about which roads they should take.[1] Regardless of whether old age has been

interpreted from a policy perspective as a period of social redundancy (Phillipson 1982), or as in more recent seizures upon notions of the third age as a period of opportunity and fulfilment (Blaikie 1999), retirement is constituted as a time of adjustment in the life course, a "different" period, when all manner of things in an individual's life changes. One choice emerging to retirees in the contemporary era is that of international retirement migration (see King et al. 1998, 2000). There are increasing possibilities of spending "retirement years" in leisure pursuits due to the expansion of affordable global travel (see for example Counts and Counts 1996 on the growing popularity in the U.S. of recreational vehicles for retirees and Gustafson 2001 on Swedish seasonal migrants in Spain). The lure of experiencing a "new" lifestyle in the warmth and comfortable surroundings of a traditional tourist destination as a permanent or semi-permanent aspect of life is easy to understand (see Oliver 2007a).

International retirement migration is an expanding field of study and part of an often overlooked domain of "lifestyle migration" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a). In this phenomenon, migrants are typically more privileged, affluent and motivated to relocate for lifestyle reasons (Amit 2007; Benson and O'Reilly 2009a, 2009b). International retirement migrants share with many other lifestyle migrants a desire for a "better way of life" perceived in the destination, which contrasts to disappointments and decline narrated "at home" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a). Much of the literature on international retirement migration has a policy focus (Casado-Diaz 2006; Rodriguez et al. 2005; Schriewer and Rodes 2006) but some also explores how the migration process intersects with individual experiences of ageing (Gustafson 2001; Oliver 2007a). This is crucial as the cultural gerontologist Stephen Katz (2005: 202) observes, "place" of retirement becomes "an increasingly vital dimension of later life because ... issues of mobility, residence and community are linked to gerontologic ideals of independence and successful aging." Permanent or semi-permanent mobility to a "new" and arguably "better" lifestyle in traditional tourist destinations offers particular advantages at this stage of life for older people. The opportunity for international retirement migration to allow the revamping of self is particularly evident in Howard's (2008) study of Western retirees in Thailand, for example, where there are increased chances for retirees to exercise their sexuality in old age.

Indeed, the combination of both the change-inspiring moment in the life course of retirement and physical relocation means international retirement migration provides a clear example of anthropology's conceptualizations of movement as "change." Retired migrants' narratives provide no end of evidence of how migration is experienced as a catalyst for a new way of living (Oliver 2007a), reinforcing the wider trend noted among lifestyle migrants of their use of a meta-narrative of escape (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a). Emerging from the cultural shift in which traditional age-based expectations have been transformed, the tethering of retirement with travel in Northern European and North American cultures draws deeply on the mythologized transformative possibilities of spatial relocation (Blaikie 1999; Rojek 1993; see also Hoey 2005). As such, the correlation of geographical movement with the identity transition of retirement offers a powerful space to articulate a reconceptualization of self, particularly symbolized by physical departure from the homeland and one's "past" self.

However, the extent of such radical change is, in reality, debatable. Amit (2007 and this volume) observes that although movement offers the possibility for change, sometimes it "encapsulates this potential within a structural bubble of people in similar circumstances" (2007:7; see also Oliver 2007b and Harrison 2003). Lifestyle migrants' retrospective and often romanticized accounts may reflect a desire for transformation more than any objective reality (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a). Ethnographic work confirms, instead, the rather limited novelty exercised when migrants recreate old homes and habits in new destinations. A theme well rehearsed in studies of transnational migration for example is the continued pull of familial or communal ties over national boundaries, evident in the imagined communities of resurgent nationalisms (Danforth 1995).

My ethnography of British international retirement migrants in Southern Spain also shows that essential changes in lifestyles, temporal structures and social activities wrought through migration are regularly tempered by the reintroduction of the familiar (Oliver 2007a). The lifestyle of migrants is far removed from the popular stereotype of this area as "Little Britain" (O'Reilly 2000), yet there is nevertheless much evidence of continuity with former ways of life. Whether one looks in simple material terms—evidenced by the widespread English-speaking infrastructure catering to tourists and foreign residents—or the more personal tendencies of migrants to succumb to old comforts, social forms and habits such as social class distinctions (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010), it is easy to see how international retirement migration can be interpreted as offering a circumscribed encounter within relatively safe parameters of difference when inhabiting another country. This is further complicated by the consideration that, as Gustafson (2001) argues, international retirement migrants exhibit a range of

transnational strategies, reflecting different positions on cultural difference, the importance of mobility and place-attachments. Yet this presents an interesting conundrum: given the widespread evidence of continuity, why do many of the migrants stress difference to past lifestyles?

To answer this question, I propose attention to the differential meanings associated with change and continuity in migrant narratives. In addition to extensive participant observation, my research involved lengthy semi-structured interviews with 67 individuals, during which they often recounted long, uninterrupted stories of their previous lives, migration process and current experiences (for full details of the study see Oliver 2007a). Locating myself in the "narrative turn" in the social sciences, which emphasizes the importance of narrative as emerging out of, but also structuring, daily experience (Ochs and Capps 1996), I focus on the role that stories play in identity-formation. Particularly important are the ways they destabilize, challenge and subvert other dominant tropes of contemporary society (Andrews 2002). Using a narrative lens and focusing on the structures of stories told, it became evident in my research that motifs of both continuity and change are useful structuring vehicles by which individuals express and frame emotions (particularly, in this case, those around ageing). However, as the article goes on to show, this does not occur in a straightforward linear manner. It is more complex, as the metaphors and associations of change and continuity found in migrants' narratives are malleably reinterpreted (and even inverted) to express the turmoil of feelings associated with decision-making provoked during this stage of life. As such, my approach suggests a careful reading of narrative as experiential and embodied. It requires sensitivity to the emotions implicit and seeping through the words, even when those emotions may not have been immediately obvious to myself as researcher, or even to the individuals themselves (see Gubrium 1993 on the importance of this "research debris").

The approach I adopt is particularly inspired by the sociologist Mike Hepworth's work on emotions in ageing (1998). He suggests emotions of ageing are subjective states which are communicated to the outside world through the use of particular culturally prescribed images and modes of expression. Emotions are commonly managed through a "social shorthand" of images, whereby terms or clichés such as "I don't feel old" readily convey an easily understandable reality to others (1998:173). Hepworth warns that this use of cultural shorthand is ultimately problematic in relation to age. First, the available vocabulary of social imagery may be too limited to convey fully the range, depth and changing nature of feelings. Second, he points out how, "private individuals may wish to conceal their personal feelings from public view and concentrate their energies on producing passable performances of the emotions they have come to believe to be socially acceptable" (1998:174). Building on these insights, I contend that stories depicting other life events might feed into this shorthand, or more specifically, that the migration process and journey stories provide useful materials which can encapsulate emotions and feelings around the process of change that is ageing. This technique is also noted by Hoey among North American "corporate refugees" relocating to the American Midwest, who, through moral narratives, utilize places as "personally therapeutic landscapes" (2009:34) or anchors for identity in a world where identity-making through work has been radically altered by postindustrial economic change.

In this light, the recurrence of dominant narratives of change and continuity found after the migration episode can also be interpreted as attempts to frame, capture and structure emotions—in this case about growing older. Tales about carving out different lifestyles and adapting to the physical and mental changes of life abroad are revealing of the individuals' hopes, fears and experiences of retirement that they simultaneously negotiate. In line with Hepworth's argument, tropes of change and continuity may prove particularly powerful and more socially acceptable vehicles for retirees to condense and enable the expression of other emotions around growing older. And perhaps most importantly, not only do they enable individuals to experience and articulate desired images of ageing through the narration of change, they do so in an environment where individuals still have at hand the necessary resources and familiarity required to manage the challenges presented by growing older away from "home."

Research Contexts

The article is based on data from an ethnographic study undertaken between 1998 and 2002 and follow-on research until 2005 in a town and a village on the Costa del Sol in Spain. The research was conducted in an attractive holiday destination: a town with several beaches, a variety of shops and numerous hotels and apartments catering to the many thousands of holidaymakers drawn annually to the area. I lived as a foreign resident in a smaller village a few kilometres inland, which was home to a little over 2000 inhabitants. The village is perched high on a hillside and its stunning location provides the subject for many photographs and paintings of an archetypal Andalucían white Moorish village. Both town and village have attracted many Northern European tourists and residents over the

last 40 years. Correspondingly, a vibrant expatriate community network has built up, with a well-developed social infrastructure for new migrants and foreign residents originating mostly from Northern Europe and some from the U.S. My study was undertaken to specifically explore the experiences of incoming, mainly British, older migrants who had retired to the area. During my 15 months in the field, I forged acquaintances with foreign (although mainly British) residents and spent time at the numerous social clubs, associations and interest groups run by and for foreign residents in the locality (see Oliver 2007a).

I. Change: Pastures New?

It was initially striking, when I talked with retired people in the field, how, in one sense, they simply reproduced dominant narratives about the changes they experienced through movement. International retirement migration is a process embedded in consumer culture and as such is awash with loaded imagery about the possibilities of pursuing ideal, "new" lifestyles. Television programmes (such as the U.K. Channel 4 series *No Going Back* and *A Place in the Sun*), accompanying manuals (including Elsey and Coombes' (2004) *How to Get a New Life*), and wider media coverage seduce and entice more people than ever to buy property abroad. "Good life abroad" novels also relay the often humorous and exciting experiences of the protagonists' adventures in moving to an unfamiliar and exotic country, perpetuating tantalizing myths about escaping the rat-race, returning to more traditional models of sociability and living a more comfortable life at a fraction of the cost at home. Attention to narrative gives purchase on individual perspectives, yet in this case, it was striking how far migrant narratives reproduced shared, common myths about migration.

The reproduction of familiar clichés about the dramatic changes experienced through lifestyle migration is also observed by other scholars. O'Reilly's work on British residents in Spain (2000) for instance reveals how the migrants employed a "bad Britain" discourse, whereby they juxtaposed their happy lives in Spain with an exaggerated vision of the downsides of their former homeland. They tended to emphasize the unappealing weather, high crime rates and hectic pace of life in the U.K. Distinctively for migrants, they shared a "myth of (no) return" (O'Reilly 2000:96). Her findings are reinforced in other studies of lifestyle migration and are equally pertinent to international retirement migration (see Sunil et al. 2007). For example, Cribier notes that retirees returning from Paris to the rural provinces where they were born were attracted by the simple and friendlier relationships in the country, in contrast to the city, which they described as "unbearable, infernal, impossible ... insane and murderous" (1982:119).

In my research, retired migrants in Spain likewise painted their new home as a "different world" entirely to the U.K. Some even seemed to equate the migration as a movement towards happiness itself. For instance, Jenny related the different environment and the effects of the weather to a change in the pervasive mood of all around, when she said, "But the first thing I notice when I go back to England is that nobody smiles there. Everyone smiles here. They never smile there because it rains all the time." She discussed her migration in terms of "escape" to a happy nirvana, a theme common in others' depictions:

> I've found it, my utopia. [Willie, former businessman]

And,

> I just wake up here and say, here we are, another boring day in paradise. [Lilian, retired nurse]

Here, migration was narrated not only as a physical move away from one country to another, but also, through loading Spain with qualities of perfection, was almost a "life-saving" process that took migrants away from general negative health, burdens and emotions (see Hoey 2009). Jim, a former builder for the Dental Council in London suggested, for example, that migrating,

> gave me an escape from the nonsense. I came for a simpler life. I don't get bored because I could see that my job [in London] was a killer.

In these narratives, moving to Spain was cast as a complete change and contrast to the pressures, problems and "overload" left behind. Barbara, a retired headteacher also described the prevailing sensation of liberation she felt after moving:

> The mountains and the sea, it's so very special. You get this overwhelming feeling of not having a relentless timetable ... It was a luxury, great, so long-lasting the feeling of not having social problems, the pressures of government, the internal struggles, the overload of work. It is the most amazing luxury.

However, interrogating these narratives further, it is clear that the negative associations were more about experiences they had been subject to in the place they had moved from. In this sense, the U.K. was conflated with an experience of "work," politics and the "real" world, whilst Spain was a place of non-work, rest and leisure (see O'Reilly 2000). These stories about movement therefore emphasized a corresponding shift in their life course tran-

sitions into a retirement experience. Thus, even though very few people retired and moved to Spain at the exact point of retirement, geographical movement was nevertheless used as shorthand to denote the equally significant change in personal circumstances wrought by giving up work.

In their narratives, migrants also invested life-giving qualities in the destination, particularly drawing on the positive impact of the weather and lifestyle on migrants' longevity. Doreen, for example, said "I think that it keeps you alive out here [in Spain], it keeps you younger." Molly, a former teacher explained that her peers in Britain had died, yet for her, moving to Spain had, she felt, prolonged her life:

> But then all my relatives and in-laws have died, and the whole crowd who I used to work with all died ....It is definitely true that living out here makes you live longer. Some close friends from England came to visit ... they looked at property, but then he had a heart attack and they didn't want to deal with different doctors and languages. Now, since I've left, they've all died.

Regardless of other important factors such as the effects of genes and lifestyle, Molly felt that simply living in Spain affected the length and quality of people's lives. This echoes findings in Cribier's study of retired migrants who moved from Paris; she found that some people, "went as far as saying that to stay in Paris would have meant death and that leaving has prolonged their life" (1982:119).

In these narratives, it is clear that movement facilitated an imaginative spatial relocation of different social constructions of ageing. Spain was associated with possibilities for experiencing an active and interesting old age in comparison to a putative structured and monotonous experience of old age at home (Oliver 2007a). For example, Tony, a former businessman held a great affection for the U.K., kept his home there and "would always keep [his] roots there." Nevertheless, he explained that he did not want to spend all his retirement time in the U.K. because, "they're all a bunch of fuddy-duddies." This is also clear when attention is paid to the traits of boredom and security projected on other ostensible "Brits" (tourists or residents) who inhabited the area. For example, Sharon referred to an English woman opening a café selling English food in the typical Spanish village and pondered angrily, "why do they do it? Out of security I suppose." In these interpretations, continuity with the homeland became therefore synonymous with convention, stagnation and monotony, traits which were best avoided at this precious time of life. This can also be seen in Annie and Peter's discussion about the imagined characteristics of the people who frequented the clubs in town, where Britishness itself was conflated with oldness and boredom:

> Peter: But they're all so *old* aren't they when they're about 40? And they're British.
> Annie: They're all Brits. British, ankle socks and cardigans and sandals.
> Brian: No we don't use British bars.
> A: They're so 'king boring, British bars here they really are. Everyone has almost the same stool every day.
> P: And they're double the price.
> B: And you get the same old questions, how long have you lived here, how long have you been here, do you like it?

The same theme was demonstrated in a lengthy exchange at a social event at the American Club. Meeting for lunch in the regular venue of the Chinese restaurant, Belle, the American Chairwoman, favourably compared retiring in Spain to Florida in the U.S. to an American prospective new resident. She explained,

> I go to America to see my son, and he says to me, "don't you think you've had enough now Mum? Why don't you come back?" "And do what?" I answer. I get so bored after a couple of days, and I'd be so bored there.

The visitor agreed wholeheartedly with Belle's opinion. He explained to those of us at the lunch meeting that he had been looking into some purpose-built condominiums available for older people to move to in the U.S. These were planned with assisted living facilities for older people and he continued, "they have plans laid out so that it is the gym one day and bingo the next." At this, Belle tutted disapprovingly, "it's so boring" and the visitor concurred, "There's no cultural interest at all." Belle added,

> Yes, my son wants me to go [back to the U.S.] but I can't wait to get back here. I say, "what do I want to go there for? Just to sit in my rocking chair and wait to die." No, "here," I say, "I'm coming back to my paradise." This is my Shangri-La, I call it.

As in Tony's example, Belle's contrast of destination and home provides a useful bracketing for good and bad experiences of old age. Undoubtedly this is reinforced and given power by genuine experiences of physical liberation when people moved to the warmer climate of Spain. The weather eased many of the bodily aches and pains experienced in the home country. The leisure orientation of the region also meant there were many opportunities for outdoor sporting activities such as tennis, swimming, yoga, aqua-fit, going to the gym or simply walking in the surrounding countryside. For example, one Irish woman

who lived in the village slowly walked to the peak of the surrounding foothills of the Sierra Nevada every day. Another conversation I had with Annie, Brian and Peter went as follows:

> Peter: Yes, I mean I've always loved mountains and most of my working life I spent in the Midlands in Birmingham, there's no sea, no mountains. But here you can be on a 13,000 foot mountain with snow and two hours later you can be swimming on the Med and you can't get that anywhere in Europe. We're so fortunate here.
> Brian: But then again, I think that's a thing of living here a long time, I think you appreciate the area you live in.
> Annie: The "feel good factor" that makes you want to go off and find things out.

As this account demonstrates, the undiscovered surroundings offered through migration were felt to provoke a re-energizing effect. There was a strong link between moving to unfamiliar surroundings and engaging in new activities, whereas the familiarity of growing old in the homeland was linked to stasis, stagnation and even death. This association is subtly referred to, for example, in Jim's description of his former job being a "killer," but also in Will's description of the "deterioration" in the way of life in the U.K., "where everything is falling apart." These images correspond with Belle's vision of her limited activity in the U.S., of "sitting in a rocking chair," a futile and time-wasting movement that leads nowhere other than to death.

Such themes were also repeated in the way migration put newcomers in the position of having to try out new experiences. The ease in which new social relationships were formed was striking, and this was particularly important at this time in life where, as Molly had explained, many people had lost their partners and close friends. For instance, one woman told me excitedly about a silent retreat she had just been on with the local ecumenical centre. Participants were mainly widows but she pointed out the irony that she had never talked so much in her life.

For other people, moving itself was underpinned by the conviction that at this time of life, there was no time to waste (see Oliver 2007a:chapter 4). Molly for example, told me her move to Spain was instigated by the day she walked on impulse into a property developers' fair in her home town. Hitherto, she had not considered moving at all and at the event felt serious reservations at the expense. However, she explained, "when I saw this advertisement for inspection flights I thought, why not? I'd never flown before!" The desire for new experiences was also met in the cultural differences retirees encountered in Spain, which became a language appropriate to narrate other aspects of character change associated with their parallel move into retirement. For instance, the visitor at the American Club lunch asked how people adapted culturally to living there and the Chair talked of adjusting to a slower pace of life in cultural—rather than life course—terms:

> Well, there were things that took some getting used to. Shopping, for instance. In New York, you go in a shop and you stand in a queue and wait to get served. Here they serve someone, and then stand around chatting about the family and all that sort of thing. In New York, you'd get the sack for that. But that's the thing. There, time is money. Here, it doesn't seem to count ... you know in the hours they work too, its half socializing. These things you have to get used to. Now, I tend to think, well it doesn't matter, I'm not going anywhere.

Not only was moving to Spain presented as offering immunity from the everyday struggles plaguing migrants' former lives, it was narrated as making possible interesting "new" experiences and sociabilities. The particular issues emphasized in the difference, novelty and change of lifestyle in Spain fitted well with their own desired identities at this time of life.

II. Continuity: Looking for Pastures Old?

However, the "novelty" presented in moving to Spain is only one aspect of the tale. Certainly some observers would find migrants' assertions of radical change in lifestyle a dubious claim. Even in simple material terms, continuity with migrants' former ways of life is visible to any visitor. A glance around the town shows a number of familiar sights. There are British bars sporting names such as "Pirates" and "The Market Tavern," which are run by British staff and which sell traditional food and drinks to tourists and residents alike. Supermarkets sell a vast number of specialist branded products popular with many of the Northern Europeans visiting the area. There is also a vast array of clubs and associations such as the British Legion, International Club and American Club, and other interest groups, including a bridge club and art classes. Club membership is almost exclusively made up of foreign residents.

For any onlooker, the Spain of British migrants is less the completely different world often narrated than a "home-plus sunshine" (Hannerz 1990:241). It combines the advantages of the destination—such as the weather and the relatively cheaper cost of living—with familiar aspects of migrants' lifestyles at home. Viv, for example, lived in an urbanization[2] in the town and spoke no Spanish

whatsoever. She spent her time at the expatriate societies and volunteered in a local charity shop, which was staffed and managed by the Anglican Church. Similarly, although Molly felt she had changed as a result of her move to Spain, she nevertheless still lived in a flat equipped with all her comfortable home furnishings which included a rug on the floor, stately armchairs, desk and desk lamp. Retirees still had strong attachments to material possessions which they could not bear to leave behind. For example, Doreen explained how her late husband had insisted on bringing an electric fire out from the U.K. to Spain: "he said, 'when we go to Spain, that fire comes and goes with me.'"

Perhaps the clearest indication of the continuity in former ways of life is the persistent use of the English language. English is the lingua franca of the social clubs, there are many English language newspapers and magazines produced locally in the area and there is a regular supply of imported national publications. In the town, there is an English bookshop and a second hand bookshop with a film rental area, renting mainly English-language titles. A number of local expatriate radio programs also offer English speaking commentary and music throughout the day. Although newcomers attempted to learn Spanish, many still had considerable difficulty reaching a level that enabled them to adequately hold basic conversations. This language barrier meant that inevitably many foreign residents kept to their own social "circles" of friends and had only superficial relations with local Spaniards. This was reflected in the views of Juan, for instance, an older Spanish man who expressed his desire to become part of the international fine art society,

> Well, that is a very interesting organization. Obviously it's a bit like a closed circle from my point of view, because of exactly the fact that the meetings are in English, no? And they go to speak, to speak in English and if you only know a little of the language ...

The persistence of the English language is interesting given that some migrants, despite embracing a new way of life, did not even attempt to learn Spanish. Their justification for this most obvious continuity with former lifestyles was put down to their life course stage; they considered themselves "too old." Bill, a retired expatriate professional, reasoned for example, "at my age, do I want to start learning a language again?" Another common response was that of John, who explained he did not really speak Spanish as "I'm too old, but I have enough to get by." However, there were genuine reasons why the effort expended in learning the language thoroughly was not considered a good use of time, or that it was, in some senses, now "too late to start." For example, Annie explained,

> Annie: If anyone asked me what I regretted about living here it is that I didn't continue studying, I wish I'd gone on until I was 100% fluent so that I could have an in-depth conversation with a Spaniard.
> Caroline: What level would you say you were?
> A: Oh I'm only halfway there really and as you get older, the trouble is your memory gets very bad, you get older, it's not easy to retain 4000 new words you know.

With such evidence of continuities of language and lifestyle between the home and migrant society, it is important to consider why people felt so much "difference" when living in Spain. Probing this question exposed a remarkable irony as the differences highlighted in Spain reflected nostalgic desires for *continuity* in a way of life migrants felt had been destroyed forever in their homeland. Spain was mythologized as offering a less stressful way of life and a more integrated community (O'Reilly 2000; Oliver 2007a), whereas an important push factor was the negative impacts of capitalist development witnessed at home. It was, as Belle described, the change between the sociability of Spanish life and the rushed encounters in New York where "time is money." Therefore, when John, an artist, moved to the Spanish village many years ago, his motivation had been his sense of alienation in his home, a village in the Abingdon countryside in England. It had become an attractive destination for second or holiday home-owners due to its commutable distance to London. As such, the difference he felt in moving to Spain actually related more the aspiration to return to a *different type of sameness*. He complained of his home village,

> We'd walk, and yet not see a soul. Yet here, people help each other out. A friend fixed up the guttering. It's how things used to be when I was a boy ... for example, the Spanish get dressed up in their Sunday best for a *paseo* (walk).

These narrations emphasized the comfort and security to be had from living in an apparently "unchanging" community. However, this was more likely a "fictional cohesion and unity" (Cribier 1982:128) which provoked migrants to protect the "different sameness" of their paradise against the homogenizing effects of change (see Oliver 2002). It was extremely common to hear complaints about how things had changed equally in the region and how they were not as they used to be. Change here, from this angle, was less interpreted positively than linked with

contrasting and uncomfortable feelings of transience, loneliness and insecurity that retirees had hoped to avoid. For instance, Mary was a widow who had lived alone in her large house in the hillsides. She had lived in the area for about 40 years and complained,

> It's changed so much here you see ... we were the first ones here. Now its so different ... I don't know anyone. Before, I knew everyone ... they always used to just call in as they were passing through, always drop by the gate. Now people ask me if I've been here long [she laughs sadly]. I'm glad my husband died too before we had to lock the door.

The construction boom and expanding population meant that rather than inhabiting a comfortable "different sameness" as they grew older, people felt caught up in the relentless pace of change they had hoped to escape. Elizabeth, the first foreign migrant to move into the village over 40 years ago complained of the same trouble. She went for a walk around the streets every day despite significant problems with her mobility and she could rarely get more than a few metres without someone stopping to ask after her health. Nevertheless, she expressed how she "doesn't know the village anymore" because most of her friends had moved on or had died. This isolation was compounded by a very bad experience when she had temporary amnesia and found herself staring out, bewildered, asking for help with no idea of how she'd got into this position or how long she had been there. Rather than feeling secure and familiar, the changes she witnessed in the village exacerbated her feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

Elizabeth's example shows that the unfamiliar and "different" aspects of Spain, once narrated as exciting, could easily become alienating at this time of life. This was powerfully displayed by Jean's account of the impact of a stroke. She explained,

> With the stroke I lost all the Spanish that I had learned, which was the hardest to bear. I felt English living here anyway, but the fact that I didn't understand everything didn't bother me before. It does now, when I walk down the street, I feel isolated and angry that I can't understand the people talking in the streets.

Jean planned to move to be near her sons and to find a comfort in her homeland that was eluding her in Spain. She had been hospitalized for ten days when she suffered the stroke and explained that although she could not fault her treatment,

> there was something missing that I can't explain. There was no aftercare, and no, I don't really have any Spanish friends. I'd say the people in the village are very friendly, but I don't have special friends ... But I'm not leaving because of that, its not because people don't come that I'm leaving, but I just want to be near my boys, I want to be near home now.

Although retirement migrants in Spain can often access health services using interpreters (La Parra and Mateo 2008), Hardill et al. (2005) show the impact that severe health problems play in international retirement migrants falling out of love with their "paradises." In Jean's experience, the familiarity of home—once maligned—was reinterpreted as offering comfort and security in a more positive sense. John's wife similarly moved on because she needed regular dialysis, but in this case to New Zealand where her children lived. John was due to follow her shortly, as he reasoned,

> We're moving on because we're getting old now. The place is too big ... Here it's very expensive to get dialysis and to be honest we'd prefer to put her in the hands of people who can speak English. It's better to have members of our family around in our older years.

Both examples show how continuity through moving back to be with family was desired when the bodily experience of illness or physical and mental discomfort became insurmountable. Ultimately, the security associated with the homeland or family, once distanced from or even mocked, was reinterpreted as attractive and comfortable and instead Spain was interpreted as the alienating, "cold" place. Kate and Bill for instance moved back to the U.K. when Bill's health deteriorated. However, on a visit back to Spain, Kate expressed nothing less than relief at returning to the U.K.:

> I am thoroughly enjoying it, it's so much better. You think when you're in Spain about the weather being good for your health, but our health [in the UK] has improved so much. When I'm in bed, I can leave my hands hanging out without waking up with crippling pains from where they've frozen ... you have the central heating on you see. There's carpet on the floors so you don't get these drafts.

In these cases, the comforts and securities of the homeland, such as central heating, nearby family or even English-speaking healthcare staff, became reinterpreted as more attractive rather than as indicative of a restricted and dull way of life.

Conclusion

A question was posed at the beginning of the paper: Why is it that British retired migrants in Spain capitalize on

change offered through migration in their narratives, whilst there is considerable evidence that they also recreate a life that goes on in a similar fashion as before? I contend that the evidence presented around change and similitude is only fully understandable in the context of migrants' life course. The migrants, like all of us, are caught up in what is metaphorically referred to as a "journey" from birth to an unforeseen death. Yet, the latter part of that life journey is a particularly loaded time, which raises conflicting expectations about how best to spend that unknown period (Oliver 2010). These tensions are poignantly exemplified in the words of Lynn, a retired migrant living in the village, who said:

> I've started a death list since I've been here, there has just been number 31, all are people I've known very well and they're not all old. So, it's a reminder, in the next 12 years, my active life'll be over. And I'm planning for that, because now I'm in my future and I think aren't I lucky? I live on my old age pension and there are so many things to do and you live life to its full extent because you know that time is running out.

Lynn's account strikes at the heart of the conundrum posed in this article. The pressure to "live life to the full" and try out a different or "new" existence is created by the finitude of time. Yet this same progression to the end of people's life-journeys which exerts that pressure, also increasingly demands familiarity, continuity and security as people grow older.

I have shown how narratives of migration and particularly the themes of continuity and change become important means by which the feelings associated with this wider dilemma are condensed and expressed. Meanings attached to the migration process become socially acceptable metaphors, or a social shorthand, by which people adapt and understand corresponding times of personal, social and physical change. Narrating "newness" and change in moving to a mythical, unchanging, traditional community enables the tale of the life journey to continue a theme of progress and liberation into retirement, even though much may stay the same. This narrative also supports the decision to migrate as it compares favourably with narrations of stasis, monotony and modern alienation projected onto experiences of ageing in the homeland. Furthermore, changes in practices prompted by ageing, such as "slowing down" and "taking it easy" are explained in terms of different cultural practices in Spain rather than through the personal life course. Retirees hope to find comfort in nostalgic readings of life in a Spanish community offering the exciting, yet comforting, blend of a different type of sameness, in contrast to increasing alienation feared in connection with growing older in the U.K.

Finally, there are also important methodological implications of these findings. The argument presented here shows the importance of combining a narrative approach with long term ethnography, as it shows how people revisit their positions over time as they age, using the same shorthand to express alternative feelings. Narratives of mobility and the motifs of continuity and change give migrants a rich and highly malleable vocabulary through which to understand their parallel experience of physical ageing. Continuity with the U.K. was rejected when migrants wished to embrace novelty and change in their retirement projects. Ultimately however, the U.K.'s perceived qualities of comfort and familiarity were reinterpreted more favourably when health difficulties emerged. In a similar vein, the once positively interpreted difference of Spain was reconsidered by some people as alienating and uncomfortable at these times. Using a contextual narrative approach with long-term ethnography does not shy away from conflicting messages arising within the data or attempt to iron out inconsistencies. Instead, this method positions these contradictions as fundamental and as part of the rich and shifting narrative people use, which is coherent over time as events and people themselves change. This is an approach that more fully reflects the complexity of existential issues of identity that emerge in later stages of life.

Caroline Oliver, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 184 Hills Road, Cambridge. CB2 8PQ, United Kingdom. E-mail: co269@cam.ac.uk.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article and to Liz Stanley for encouraging me to consider my material in this way.

Notes

1 In particular, the creation of retirement as a determined legal cut-off point (Myerhoff 1984) forces a separation between working identities and identities in the life beyond.
2 An urbanization is a private housing development with its own community services.

References

Amit, Vered
2007 Structures and Dispositions of Travel and Movement. *In* Going First Class? New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement. Vered Amit, ed. Pp. 1-14. Oxford: Berghahn.

Andrews, Molly
2002 Introduction: Counter-narratives and the Power to Oppose. Narrative Inquiry 12:1-6.
Benson, Michaela, and Karen O'Reilly
2009a Migration and the Search for a Better Way of Life: A Critical Exploration of Lifestyle Migration. Sociological Review 57(4):608-625.
2009b Lifestyle Migration: Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences. Farnham: Ashgate.
Blaikie, Andrew
1999 Ageing and Popular Culture. Oxford: Berg.
Casado-Diaz, María
2006 Retiring to Spain: An Analysis of Difference among North European Nationals. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 32(8):1321-1339.
Counts, Dorothy Ayers, and David R. Counts
1996 Over the Next Hill: An Ethnography of RVing Seniors in North America. Peterborough, ON: Broadview.
Cribier, Françoise
1982 Aspects of Retired Migration from Paris: An Essay in Social and Cultural Geography. *In* Geographical Perspectives on the Elderly. Anthony M. Warnes, ed. Pp. 111-137. Chichester: John Wiley.
Danforth, Loring A.
1995 The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
Elsey, Anna, and Anna Coombes
2004 How to Get a New Life: Moving, Working and Living Abroad. London: BBC Books.
Gubrium, Jaber. F.
1993 Voice and Context in a New Gerontology. *In* Voices and Visions of Aging: Toward a Critical Gerontology. Thomas C. Cole, W. Andrew Achenbaum, Patricia Jakobi and Robert Kastenbaum, eds. Pp. 46-63. New York: Springer.
Gustafson, Per
2001 Retirement Migration and Transnational Lifestyles. Ageing and Society 21(4):371-394.
Hardill, Irene, Jacqui Spradbery, Judy Arnold-Boakes and Maria Luisa Marrugat
2005 Severe Health and Social Care Issues among British Migrants Who Retire to Spain. Ageing and Society 25(5):769-783.
Harrison, Julia
2003 Being a Tourist: Finding Meaning in Pleasure Travel. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
Hannerz, Ulf.
1990 Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture. *In* Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity. M. Featherstone, ed. Pp. 237-251. London: Sage.
Hepworth, Mike
1998 Ageing and the Emotions. *In* Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues. G. Bendelow and S. Williams, eds. Pp. 173-189. London: Routledge.
Hoey, Brian A.
2005 From Pi to Pie: Moral Narratives of Noneconomic Migration and Starting Over in the Postindustial Midwest. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 34(5): 586-624.
2009 Pursuing the Good Life: American Narratives of Travel and a Search for Refuge. *In* Lifestyle Migration, Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences. Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly, eds. Pp. 31-50. Farnham: Ashgate.
Howard, Robert W.
2008 Western Retirees in Thailand: Motives, Experiences, Wellbeing, Assimilation and Future Needs. Ageing and Society 28(2):145-163.
Katz, Stephen
2005 Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds. Peterborough, ON: Broadview.
King, Russell, Anthony M. Warnes and Allan Williams
1998 Editorial Introduction. International Journal of Population Geography 4:87-89.
2000 Sunset Lives: British Retirement Migration to the Mediterranean. Oxford: Berg.
Lakoff, George, and Mark Turner
1989 More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
La Parra, Daniel, and Miguel Angel Mateo
2008 Health Status and Access to Health Care of British Nationals Living on the Costa Blanca, Spain. Ageing and Society 28(1):85-102.
Myerhoff, Barbara
1984 Rites and Signs of Ripening: The Intertwining of Ritual Time and Growing Older. In Age and Anthropological Theory. D.I. Kertzer and J. Keith, eds. Pp. 305-330. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps
1996 Narrating the Self. Annual Review of Anthropology 25:19-43.
Oliver, Caroline
2002 Killing the Golden Goose? Debates About Tradition in an Andalucían Village. Theme issue, "Modernity in the Mediterranean," Journal of Mediterranean Studies 12(1):169-190.
2007a Retirement Migration: Paradoxes of Ageing. New York: Routledge.
2007b Imagined Communitas: Older Migrants and Aspirational Mobility. In Going First Class? New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement. V. Amit, ed. Pp. 126-143. Oxford: Berghahn.
2010 Between Time Not There and Time Not Theirs: Temporality in Retirement Migration to Spain. Journal of Aging, Humanities and the Arts 4(2):110-118.
Oliver, Caroline, and Karen O'Reilly
2010 A Bourdieusian Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualising Process. Sociology 44(1):49-66.
O'Reilly, Karen
2000 The British on the Costa del Sol: Transnational Identities and Local Communities. London: Routledge.

Phillipson, Chris
1982 Capitalism and the Construction of Old Age. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Rodríguez, Vicente, Gloria Fernández-Mayoralas, Maria Ángeles Casado Díaz and Andreas Huber
2005 Una perspectiva actual de la migración internacional de jubilados en España. In La Migración de Europeos Retirados en España. Vicente Rodríguez, Maria Ángeles Casado Díaz and Andreas Huber, eds. Pp. 15-46. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
Rojek, Chris
1993 Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel. London: Macmillan.
Schriewer, Klaus, and Joaquín Rodes García
2006 Los cuidados médicos en un contexto transnacional. Jubilados europeos en la Región de Murcia. Paper presented at the conference on Migrations and Social Policies in Europe, Universidad Pública de Navarra, June.
Sunil, Thankam S., Viviana Rojas and Don E. Bradley
2007 United States International Retirement Migration: The Reasons for Retiring to the Environs of Lake Chapala, Mexico. Ageing and Society 27:489-510.