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The OE goes 'home': Cultural aspects of a working holiday experience

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Abstract

In this article we examine cultural aspects of the working holiday experience using the New Zealand Overseas Experience (OE) as a significant and revealing exemplar of this kind of travel. To date, the working holiday experience has been poorly served by tourism and migration literature in general terms, with even less attention paid to cultural aspects of these experiences in relation to both their origin and form. Using archival material and interview data on the OE as an empirical base, we explore in detail the cultural determination of this working holiday experience, the cultural connections that facilitate and reinforce its continuing form, and the hybrid cultural practices of the OE itself. Findings suggest that cultural aspects are central to the working holiday experience. We therefore suggest that the role of culture deserves more explicit attention in both tourism and migration studies that address such working holiday experiences.

Keywords

culture; migration; national identity; overseas experience (OE); working holiday

Introduction

While widely – even universally – acknowledged, the role of cultural factors in establishing and maintaining specific travel patterns and experiences has often been only a background feature in tourist studies. There would be little dispute that specific cultural conditions and circumstances are necessary conditions for tourism but, as with so many taken for granted assumptions, there has been only relatively limited direct focus on these conditions and circumstances. In standard accounts, cultural factors are framed primarily as facilitators rather than as active motivational factors or influential processes in structuring travel patterns and forms. They become prominent

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only in studies of host-guest encounters in which, most often, cultural distance is seen to create a number of reciprocal (and usually negative) impacts and interactions.

This tendency to background cultural processes in tourism studies contrasts with the emphasis they receive in much work on migration. Intercultural contact and connections, acculturation, cultural adaptation and questions of cultural identity are commonplace in migration studies literature (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001). An intermediate case that highlights these different treatments of cultural processes are categories of travel often termed 'working holidays'. This form of travel typically involves extended stays in other countries by 'holidaymakers' with consequential immersion, to varying degrees, in the economic, social and cultural dimensions of the host locales. This leads to a cross-over with forms of temporary migration, certainly in experiential terms and also, we argue, in cultural terms.

Interestingly, working holidays are sometimes, even often, examples of tourism between origin and destination regions that share substantial cultural, historical and economic links. This contrasts with tourism studies in which the focus is on dissimilarities between 'hosts' and 'guests' and which therefore generate particular (and familiar) analyses of tourist-host contact (for example, Aramberri, 2001; Moaz, 2006). Conversely, it also contrasts with many studies of migrant workers that focus on economic inequalities and consequent cultural domination. The study of the working holiday, that is, can also challenge or modify notions of economic dependency as a driver of temporary migration.

Given this potential for working holidays to fuse or blur conventional accounts of travel and migration in the research literature, we argue that there is considerable benefit in examining in detail cases of such travel. A case that fits this position as an 'intermediate' form of travel/migration involves what has come to be called the New Zealand 'OE', or 'overseas experience'. In recent years, the number of young people around the world who travel for long periods and work while away has increased in scale both numerically and geographically. The temporary migration to Britain by young New Zealanders and Australians, however, is one of the longest-standing examples of this working holiday phenomenon. For over five decades, thousands of young people from these colonial outposts have been going 'home' to Britain. A sojourn in Britain and, in particular, a working holiday based in London, offers young Antipodeans extensive employment opportunities, a cosmopolitan lifestyle, a jumping-off point for travel around Europe, a temporary home in a foreign country where the primary language and culture are familiar, and where a substantial population of like-minded compatriots are located.

As already noted, in New Zealand this working holiday is known as 'overseas experience', usually shortened to the acronym 'OE' (Orsman, 1997). Over time, the OE has become a cultural icon in New Zealand and going on an OE has become part of the social norm. The OE is considered a rite of passage, offering participants a liminal period within which they have the opportunity to experiment across many aspects of their lives (Jamieson, 1996; Bell, 2002; Wilson, 2006). In accordance with this conceptualization as a rite of passage and with working holiday visa regulations, the OE is usually undertaken by those aged in their 20s, before long-term commitments are made to partners, starting families or establishing careers. While the principal reason for going on an OE is to travel, the distance travelled and a typical OE duration of three years makes work whilst

on OE a necessity. Working while away extends the OE beyond the normal boundaries of holiday travel and allows participants a degree of immersion in other cultures not typically experienced by tourists.

Our aim is to highlight the way in which the OE has, for New Zealanders, emerged and evolved as a cultural process. Its development has been a significant process of forming cultural identity but, most interestingly, this process involves two locales (New Zealand and, usually, the United Kingdom) and two processes of identity formation. The first locale is New Zealand itself. The second locale is, in the OE's most distinctive form, the United Kingdom, especially London.

The two processes are, first, the historically anchored and linked development of a distinct New Zealand cultural and national identity and, second, the individual New Zealander's developmental process of self-identity formation. This latter process, as we will show, connects self-identity with cultural-identity through a distinctively New Zealand 'rite of passage'.

It is interesting to note by way of beginning this exploration of culture and identity that cultural anomalies surround the OE. The OE developed because of 'cultural connections' between New Zealand and Britain but has, over time, despite manifesting itself 12,000 miles from home, become a cultural expression of New Zealand. New Zealand, the last settled of the Dominion colonies, remains culturally similar to Britain in respect of many social customs, education and legislative systems and language. In fact, many OE participants are surprised to encounter cultural difference and the OE experience involves varying degrees of cultural adaptation. The degree of this adaptation is tempered by the existence of a specific OE culture. Vitally, for many participants, the OE experience leads to awareness of their own culture and cultural identity, previously absent.

The discussion to follow is based on data from 70 qualitative interviews with past and present OE participants and an extensive review of archival and popular media material relating to the OE. The research was undertaken between 2004 and 2006 in both New Zealand and Britain. The aim of that research was to obtain a better understanding of what people did on their OE and to document the ways in which the practices of OE had changed over time (Wilson, 2006). It was from this extensive combination of primary and secondary data sources that our ideas on the pivotal role of cultural processes in the OE arose.

First, the general literature on working holidays is briefly reviewed in order to situate the OE as a unique travel-related form of life. Second, the debate over the role of national cultural characteristics is acknowledged and highlighted especially in relation to 'dominion capitalist societies' (Armstrong, 1978). In the third section we narrow our focus onto the OE itself and investigate the cultural connections specific to New Zealand that led to the establishment of the OE. This provides the foundation of our argument concerning the cultural processes involved in the development of a distinctive, and historically embedded, New Zealand culture; the role of the OE in this cultural 'project'; and, the 'folding in' of processes of self-identity formation for young New Zealanders, in particular, as a crucial aspect of the OE. This section briefly considers other work on migration (permanent or temporary) and the role of 'culture shock' and related processes of cultural identity formation and evolution. The working holidaymaker is sited within this general research context. This leads to a return, in the fourth section of the paper, to consideration

of the OE in detail. The focus in this section is on the processes of cultural adaptation and identity formation at both the personal and cultural levels that underpins much of the experience of the OE. Conclusions are drawn in the final section.

Working holidays and the OE

The antecedents for the working holiday phenomenon lie in Europe. The tramping traditions and youth movements of 19th -century Europe led to the development of a mode of travel that differed from single destination holiday trips (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). For many long-term budget travellers, short periods of work whilst 'on the road' were necessary to sustain travel (Riley, 1988). Provision for more formalized working holiday experiences and expansion beyond Europe came with the establishment, in 1962, of the British Universities North America Club (BUNAC), a non-profit student club that offered work and volunteer exchange programmes in the summer camps and ski fields of North America. Today, a considerable gap-year industry has developed in Britain. In 2004 there were over 800 organizations offering volunteering placements in 200 countries, in addition to 30 overseas paid work providers offering au pair and child-care employment, internships, sports instruction, seasonal work and teaching English as a foreign language (Jones, 2004).

Formal working holiday schemes in Britain originated in response to immigration regulation changes in 1972. This was of particular relevance to the former dominions of Britain, where the tradition had developed of young people moving to Britain for temporary periods before the start of formal careers and marriage. The *British Immigration Act 1971* reduced access to Britain for citizens from the dominion nations of Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Prior to this there were no immigration controls. The instigation of working holiday schemes alleviated these restrictions by continuing to allow temporary access to Britain for working holidays. Under the Working Holiday Scheme regulations, those aged 18 to 28 (the upper age limit was extended to 30 in 2003) were entitled to two-year working holiday visas although, for many, ancestral rights continued to offer unrestricted access for work and permanent residence if desired.

Globally, the number of working holiday schemes remained relatively limited until well into the 1990s. Australia offered reciprocal working holiday visas to British citizens from 1975 (Clarke, 2004b), but it was not until 1993 that the New Zealand/British agreement became reciprocal (Wilson, 2006). The numbers of participating countries with working holiday schemes have increased markedly over the last decade, expanding beyond the Commonwealth to include a number of European, Asian and South American countries.

Despite these increased opportunities, Britain, and particularly London, has remained the most popular working holiday destination for New Zealanders and Australians. Because OE participants are not recorded as a separate immigration category and because of the variations in the nationality status of New Zealanders in general, it is difficult to estimate how many go on an OE. New Zealand immigration figures and British permit records suggest that around 20,000 OE participants have departed per year since the 1970s (Lidgard, 1992, 1994, 2001; Statistics New Zealand, 2004). British statistics show that New Zealand-born people resident in London have increased from 10,872 in

1981,18,379 in 1991 to 27,493 in 2001 (BBC News, 2005). West (2006) also reported that a significant proportion of the 20,000 Australians issued with British working holiday maker visas between April 2003 and April 2004 went to London.

Working holidays are hybrid experiences that question many traditional conceptions of migration, tourism and leisure. The New Zealand overseas experience, for example, while not involving permanent migration, normally entails extended residence overseas, certainly of longer duration than most tourism definitions can accommodate. Additionally, for most, a significant portion of OE time is spent working, thus challenging definitions of tourism at a more fundamental level. Tourism is usually linked to leisure, the antithesis of work. Despite this, most research on working holidaymakers has come from tourism studies with a small, but increasing, number of studies considering the working holiday as a form of migration.

Uriely (2001) was one of the first to address specifically the work-tourism interaction. He proposed a typology of four types of working tourists, based on their motivation to focus on either the work or travel aspects of the experience (Uriely, 2001). Working holidaymakers are commonly studied as a subset of backpacker studies, an approach fostered in part by large numbers of British gap-year participants who work and travel in Australia (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Clarke, 2004a, b).

It is indicative of the complexities of the working holiday experience that, despite being a longstanding practice, the OE has not attracted research interest until relatively recently. The earliest of the specific OE studies focused on the OE as a tourism experience and took an anthropological/sociological approach which concentrated on the OE as a 'rite of passage' (Jamieson, 1996). Jamieson (1996) identified the OE as an experience that offered freedom from social commitment and perceived restraints, adventures involving risk, perceptions of excitement, temporary financial hardship and casualized employment. Bell (2002) conceptualized the OE as a type of secular pilgrimage and as a rite of passage. This useful broad-brush account described the origins of the OE, its position as a cultural icon in New Zealand – which we revisit in more detail in this paper – and the narratives of adventure the experience involved. She reported that within the experience, national difference was reflected upon, as were national characteristics of independence and initiative (Bell, 2002).

The work aspects of the OE experience have attracted considerable research interest. Barry (1998) looked at the effect of the OE on individuals' careers and a raft of publications has reported data from this, and similar, career research (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson et al., 1999; Inkson, 2003). While the focus in much of this research has been on career development and human resource concerns, it contributes useful data on the characteristics of the OE experience and on types of OE participants. There are several specific OE typologies. Myers and Inkson (2003) noted patterns in the way people talked about their OE experiences and, from these patterns, developed a typology of the OE focused on the way in which work and non-work interests were balanced.

Most early studies of the OE were undertaken in New Zealand but, more recently, the OE has attracted research attention in London. London-based OE research has focused on more experiential aspects of the OE, such as the importance of friendship networks, identity development and conceptions of national identity (Taylor, 1996; Titshall, 2004; Conradson and Latham, 2005). Titshall (2004) found that individuals

felt that significant changes had occurred in their identities at major transition points of the OE – at their departure from New Zealand, their early time in London, their acceptance of London as their new home and their eventual departure from London. A common theme to emerge from these studies was the cultural nature of the New Zealand OE, a travel experience that is as much about the generating country as it is about the destination.

Culturally determined travel

A number of studies have sought to understand how patterns of tourist behaviour might be explained by culture, or more specifically by national cultural characteristics. Dann (1993) criticized the use of nationality or country of residence in tourism studies particularly when employed as the sole criterion in segregating tourists according to behaviour. While Pizam and Jeong (1996) agreed with Dann (1993), they thought that national cultures have an important intervening effect on tourist behaviour. Cohen (1973) found evidence that certain types of travel were culturally specific; in the 1960s most drifters were Europeans, although there were increasing numbers of Americans, Canadians and Australians. According to Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), modern youth tourists are the products of liberal and affluent societies, specifically North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and, since 1985, Japan.

Dann (1993) did not view nationality and culture as synonymous and his criticisms were based on what he saw as increased globalization (and the mobility of populations under globalization) and de-differentiation of national populations. According to Dann (1993), for example, the numbers of those for whom nationality and country of residence differs is increasing, challenging the value of basing research on this criterion. Further, Dann (1993) argued that because of a new political order, with increased factionalism in many countries, the importance of nationality was dwindling. He suggested that problems arise in many tourist-generating countries, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, which were built on waves of immigrants and 'therefore can no longer be realistically viewed as a single national entity' (Dann, 1993: 100).

We want to emphasize that Dann's (1993) macro approach does not allow for the special characteristics of those newer settled countries that, despite multiple immigrations, have developed cultures of their own. This latter group of countries includes those Armstrong (1978) labelled 'dominion capitalist societies' – comprising New Zealand, Argentina, Canada, Australia and Uruguay – countries which occupy an intermediate position between the world centres and peripheries and which exhibit characteristics of both. In New Zealand, at least, a considerable volume of literature has addressed issues of both national culture and national character (Sinclair, 1986; Cleveland, 1978; King, 1991; Spoonley, 1991; Reeves, 1992; Taylor, 1996; Brown, 1997; Bluck, 1999; Laidlaw, 1999). A recurring theme in New Zealand identity studies is the remoteness of New Zealand that has led to a propensity to travel by its inhabitants. In countries such as New Zealand and Australia, extended overseas travel has become culturally and socially accepted as a stage in an individual's lifecycle, a tradition that has developed, in part, because of cultural links with a 'mother' country. Here, then, we note the way in which cultural identity projects in such societies interweave with self-identity formation, and because of cultural connections

over large distances come to create a distinctive form of travel and culturally specific phase in individual development.

Cultural connections

The OE tradition grew out of the cultural ties and closeness of the relationship between New Zealand and Britain. New Zealand, the last settled of the Dominion colonies, has historically demonstrated close links to Britain; most migrants to New Zealand were British and up until Britain's entry into the EEC in 1973, New Zealand's economy was almost totally dependent on Britain (Patman, 1997). Around this time there were also changes occurring in New Zealand. In particular, there occurred a repositioning of New Zealand in the Pacific and a corresponding 'world-view that was centred in Wellington rather than in London' (Patman, 1997: 13). The changes in the British immigration rules simultaneously weakened the ties between Britain and New Zealand and strengthened New Zealand's status as an independent nation within the Commonwealth.

Some sense of going 'home' to Britain remained with New Zealanders for a long time. In the early days of New Zealand settlement, there had been a kind of cultural cringe – based on the principle that things achieved overseas were necessarily better than anything achieved at home. For aspiring New Zealand writers and artists throughout the 1920s and 1930s, journeys 'home' (to Britain) were a cultural necessity (Ell, 1994). Easthope (1993) attributed this, in part, to the fact that, while by the 1880s the majority of New Zealanders were born in New Zealand, they were still being taught British-based subjects at school in the 1950s. English language, culture and history were very familiar to New Zealanders. According to some reports, the cultural cringe associated with being a New Zealander continued until well in to the 1970s (Bell, 2002). Ell (1994) attributes the eventual weakening of cultural cringe to rising national confidence, as well as increasingly cheap and quick air travel and improved mass communications enabling artists to live in New Zealand, while still working internationally.

For ordinary New Zealanders, the OE began in the 1960s and really 'took off' (in terms of the numbers going) in the 1970s as a result of social and technological change. The 1970s was a decade characterized by a large volume of emigration from New Zealand as the birth cohort produced by the baby boom was passing through the most migratory prone phase of the life span (Heenan, 1979). New Zealand at this time had a high standard of living and this, coupled with the advent of more frequent air services, made overseas travel more affordable (McCarter, 2001). Social changes, along with delayed marriage and childbearing, also brought increasing freedom for women (McGill, 1989). Most accounts agree that the generation travelling to Britain in the 1970s had less cultural attachment to Britain and continental Europe (see, for example, Easthope, 1993; King, 1999; Laidlaw, 1999; McCarter, 2001; Bell, 2002).

Geographical isolation is cited as a determinant of travel for most young New Zealanders going on an OE. The distance that needs to be travelled to get away from New Zealand is much further than for the rest of the world's population, making it more expensive. This, when coupled with a traditionally weak currency (by western standards), makes long-term travel viable only if one can live and work overseas.

This combination of historical circumstances, geographical factors and socio/cultural links established Britain as the foremost destination for the New Zealand OE and helped

determine the shape of the OE as a working holiday experience. The continuation of this has been dependent on reinforcement in New Zealand. Over time, the OE has gained status as a cultural icon in New Zealand. It appears frequently in news reports and in the popular arts. The OE has been the focus of fictional novels (Ovenden, 1986; Marriner, 2006), anecdotal accounts (Clark, 1992; McCarter, 2001), short films (Brough, 1996; Butler, 2003), a feature film (Lahood, 2003), television documentaries (Flightmate Films, 1994; MF Films, 2000) and theatre productions (Ewing, 1981; Quigan & Gumbley, 2002; Hall, 2004). The OE has also featured on several postage stamps.

The frequency of OE appearances within New Zealand cultural expressions has also reinforced its position as a societal norm through the continual reiteration of the 'value' of the OE. Various icons and values associated with national identity – and with being a New Zealander – are exhibited and reaffirmed by the OE. Chief amongst these is the geographical remoteness that engenders the need for the population to travel, and the conceptions of personal challenge and self-testing that come with 'rite of passage' types of travel like the OE. According to Bell (2002: 143), 'their [OE participants] low budgets test the acclaimed national characteristics of independence and initiative. National difference is reflected on from a distance: myths of place – home – intensify'.

Images of the OE in New Zealand advertising also reinforce mythical images of home; numerous television advertisements portray life in New Zealand as simple with eternal sunshine, in direct opposition to images of London – cold, wet and challenging. Whilst much of the product promotion has obvious and logical links with travel, detailed research shows that in many cases the OE is 'employed' to advertize products with more tenuous links to travel (communication companies, banks, credit cards and so on), or ones that have nothing to do with tourism, as in the case of an advertisement for a type of bread. The slogan for the latter proclaimed that 'the world is full of homesick Kiwis'; the 'Kiwis' in question were in London. Guidelines on what type of travel the OE should involve appear in literature, advertising, television, film and music. The purchase of a kombi van for extended travel around Europe, for example, has appeared in advertising (a MasterCard advertizement), in film (Lahood, 2003) and in the lyrics of popular music (Hay and Strykert, 1982).

The OE offers New Zealanders a vehicle through which they can explore their national identity and establish their independence from Britain. Paradoxically, the OE developed because of cultural connections and similarities between the two. The OE is both a 'right' (Laidlaw, 1999) and 'rite' of passage for New Zealanders (Jamieson, 1996; Bell, 2002). Over time the OE has grown beyond being a response to these factors to become an entity in its own right. Consequently, it has developed particular travel practices that have special meaning to those involved. These include not only places to visit but also places to work and types of work to be undertaken. Work has become an integral part of the experience abroad because it provides the money to allow for more travel (which is why volunteer work is not normally an option on the OE) and because it offers OE participants the opportunity to live within, rather than merely visit, other cultures. In this respect, this type of travel might be said to more closely resemble migration.

Of central concern in migration studies has been intercultural contact. The processes involved in intercultural contact vary dependent on situational variables such as purpose, time span and type of interactions, as well as on the types of groups involved (Ward et al.,

2001). Visiting or living in a new culture is thought to involve aspects of strain, a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation, and may generate negative emotions such as rejection, confusion, surprise, anxiety and disgust (Oberg, 1960). The experience of culture shock is supposed to vary according to visit duration and is normally discussed according to a range of different types of culture travellers. Furnham and Bochner (1986), for example, described culture shock in respect of migrants, sojourners, tourists and business people. Those on OE are a hybrid of these migration categories as they demonstrate features of all four groups.

Much of the early work on culture shock dealt with negative aspects of intercultural meetings whereas contemporary theories on culture shock encompass cultural learning, stress and coping, and social identification processes (Ward et al., 2001). Culture shock literature suggests that the consequences of migration vary depending on the cultural distance between the groups meeting and acculturation strategies adopted. Many studies have focused on the extreme end of the contact spectrum, where groups from markedly different cultures come into contact, for example, permanent migration or tourism exchanges between third and first world countries. With such migration, there are often obvious language differences that cause problems for both the new migrants and members of the local population. At the other end of the spectrum, there appear to have been few studies into movements 'between' first world countries.

The migration of people between countries such as New Zealand and Britain where the first language is the same, and where there are many common cultural connections, has rarely been specifically investigated. The literature suggests that even with a common language there is still potential for stresses to occur. There are subtle socially and culturally defined rules and regulations that govern social encounters; all of which can stress migrants (Ward et al., 2001).

O'Reilly (2000) reported the tendency in migration for individuals with similar cultural origins to cluster together and become residentially separated from the rest of society; this is particularly the case with marginal groups who cluster in ghettos or expatriate workers in enclaves. She found, however, that the British in Spain were not so much an ethnic group as a symbolic community – 'their isolation and discreteness are better conceptualized in terms of networking, exchange and the construction of symbolic boundaries than in terms of residential segregation' (O'Reilly, 2000: 118). Bell and Newby (1976) proposed a similar type of community that they labelled 'communion': 'a human association characterized by close personal ties, belongingness and a warmth between its members' (Bell and Newby (1976), cited in Urry, 2000: 133). Social support is offered by others in the same position and migrant sub-cultural enclaves or 'expatriate bubbles' serve 'protective functions whereby psychological security, self-esteem and sense of belonging are enhanced, and stress, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness and alienation are attenuated' (Ward et al., 2001: 86). Such a conceptualization agrees with Conradson and Latham's (2005) examination of the friendship networks of New Zealanders in London.

Adler (1975) suggested a model of transitional experience that described positive consequences of culture shock. This transitional experience is a movement from a state of low self- and cultural-awareness – through stages of contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy and finally independence – to a state of high self- and cultural-awareness (Adler, 1975). The experience begins with the encounter of another culture and evolves

into an encounter with self, bringing with it cultural learning, self-development and personal growth. Adler (1975: 22) noted that, for some, the greatest cultural shock may be the 'encounter with one's own cultural heritage and the degree to which one is a product of it'.

According to Sussman (2002), it is common for individuals to be unaware of their own enculturation processes and it is not until they move to another country that they become conscious of the things which identify them as belonging to a specific cultural group. The realization of personal cultural identity is often seen as the first stage of adaptation processes (Sussman, 2002). A recent *Tourist Studies* paper examined the ways Australian working holidaymakers engaged with their national identity through their patronage of 'Aussie' themed pubs in London (West, 2006). West (2006) argued that for those voluntarily estranged from their homelands, such trivial and simplistic representations of nationality become manifest signifiers of identity. According to West (2006), these findings contribute to sociological debates over the durability of national identity in the face of increasing globalization.

Working holidaymakers have attracted interest in migration studies for the new forms of diasporic or transnational communities they create. Bianchi's (2000) study of resort workers in the Mediterranean, Clarke's (2005) examination of British gap-year participants in Australia and Conradson and Latham's (2005) work on New Zealanders in London are all examples of such studies. The au pair experiences of Slovakians in London have also been examined as a socially and spatially constituted form of migration (Williams and Baláž, 2004). The conceptualization of working holidaymaker communities as diaspora recognizes ongoing cultural connections between such migrant communities and their homelands. Wilson, Fisher and Moore (2009) suggest that the OE constitutes a 'reverse diaspora' to that normally associated with the expatriate populations of colonized societies.

As noted earlier, this OE diaspora evolved as a result of the cultural connections between Britain and New Zealand, and the practice of the OE which created it is culturally reinforced from within New Zealand. While the OE is clearly part of New Zealand culture, it is unusual in that it occurs outside New Zealand. This has resulted in the development of a particular OE 'culture' that is a hybrid of New Zealand and Britain. OE participants learn how to behave in another country while surrounded by compatriots of a similar age. They do things that they may not feel that they can do at home, that is 'situational disinhibition', or what Lett (1983) referred to as 'ludic' and 'liminoid' aspects of tourism. Such practices support conceptualizations of the OE as a rite of passage. However, there are particular OE rules which are known to participants, along with expected forms of behaviour, partly generated from the realization that those on OE are not the same as the local population. We now turn our attention to cultural aspects of the experience in Britain.

The experience of the OE

In comparison to most other working holiday schemes, New Zealand citizens have generous rights to live and work in Britain. British working holiday visas are valid for two years and there is no limit on the number issued per year. Many New Zealanders are eligible for British passports or permanent residence because of more immediate ancestral

connections. Altogether, 65 of the 70 OE participants interviewed worked in Britain for at least some of their OE (and of these, only nine did not work in London); two of the other five did not work at all whilst on their OEs. OE participants offered a variety of reasons for selecting Britain, and particularly London, as their OE destination. For many, it was a decision based on simple practical considerations of language and availability of work. The established pattern of movement to London, reinforced within New Zealand culture, was an important contributing factor. As one participant commented, 'it is almost like we are sheep – we go to London because everyone goes to London'. This concentration of New Zealand expatriates in London is supported by British census figures which showed that, in 2001, 47 percent of New Zealand-born people living in Britain were in London (BBC News, 2005). In some cases, work experiences followed a geographic progression as OE participants started in London, then moved elsewhere in Britain and eventually found work in Europe.

Although the primary reason for going on an OE is to travel, for most, the majority of their time overseas was spent working. Interviewees were asked to estimate a travel-work ratio; the average time spent working was 65 percent, although over half of those interviewed worked for more than 80 percent of their time overseas. The type of work undertaken varied enormously, from traditional travellers' jobs (such as nanny and bar work), middle income professional jobs like nursing and teaching, to high-powered professional career jobs (in finance, banking, and the like). Over time, the OE population showed signs of some upward progression in the number doing more professional work (similar to many migrant groups); although within any individual OE there was limited upward movement. The typical two-year time frame of an individual OE generally restricted OE participants' ability to move up the employment chain. Also, for most OE participants their OE work experience was merely a functional source of travel funds, rather than a primary motivation.

Europe was the focus of OE travel and there was little evidence of geographic expansion (as happened with work locations over the course of an OE), although some did travel to more 'exotic' and non-European destinations after gaining travel experience. While broader changes in tourism have impacted on these European travel experiences over the five decades of the OE, a number of key destinations and travel styles have evolved and are undertaken by each new cohort of OE participants (for further discussion of this see, Wilson et al., 2007).

With this focus on Europe, most OE participants visit more culturally diverse places whilst travelling than they do for work, but for many, the places they worked and lived seemed to leave a more lasting impression. In interviews, most of the discussion of culture was associated with work and life overseas, rather than with travel experiences. This suggests that the experience of difference results from a combination of 'cultural distance' and 'penetration immersion'. So, even with less cultural distance (for example, Britain rather than Europe) but high immersion (living and working there) there is a greater experience of difference. As Pearce (1982) noted, the tourist experience of culture shock, while often involving considerable cultural distance, is generally more transitory than that associated with a migrant experience. In respect of migrant experience, the working holiday described by the OE appears to most closely parallel that of the expatriate worker.

In most cases, those interviewed were aware of, and acknowledged, their own personal ancestral and cultural links to Britain. Their ancestry, characteristic of an immigrant nation, covered a range of 'people' connections. Some were born in Britain and had grandparents or other family still there, others had no immediate connections but had British ancestry; many had friends or siblings already on their OEs to connect with. For some, the OE experience changed their conception of where 'home' was. One participant, for example, was born in Britain to British parents, but had grown up in New Zealand and reflected:

> I always feel more British when I am here in New Zealand but with an accent like mine in England, you are not British, you are a Kiwi. My accent and my lifestyle are Kiwi but my blood is British.

Another participant recalled that, prior to going on her OE she had:

> … felt quite connected with England because my father was English and I was a bit of an anglophile… but I was a Kiwi and I guess it took me by surprise. I particularly didn't like being teased about my accent… but it made me feel like a Kiwi – in the differences from the English.

Most of the discussion generated about 'living' in Britain was about difference. This 'difference' was discussed from several perspectives. There were tangible differences in work practices, living arrangements, transport and banking systems and, while most expected these differences, the experience of difference on a cultural level was more unexpected. As one participant, who taught in London, commented:

> [I] didn't feel like I was along way from home but there is a significant cultural divide between us and the English. I was surprised by that – just the culture in the staff rooms and even the pub culture is different.

When asked to explain these cultural differences, however, many participants struggled to elucidate beyond generalities of 'people looking different' or 'behaving in a different way'. Fellow New Zealanders were usually seen positively as 'stronger, fitter, and healthier looking', whilst behavioural differences were simply noted for their oddity – in the case above this related to the ways in which ownership of staff room chairs and crockery was established. This identification of difference often reinforced interviewees' awareness of their New Zealand culture, and cultural identity, both of which had gone previously unnoticed.

While the original intention of many had been to maximize cultural experiences whilst on their OE, the reality of their OE experiences was quite different. Some made initial attempts at cultural integration before returning to the New Zealand fold, as in the case of one female who had lived with English girls when she first arrived in London. She found their style of living to be so different that, eventually, it was 'easier to just go and live with other Kiwis'. When asked to further clarify the difference in living style she had encountered, the interviewee described a shared house situation in which food, cooking duties and fridge space were allocated in different ways to that

typical in New Zealand. Another interviewee recalled, 'it is easier, even though you have gone over there to experience another country; it is easier to do it with like-minded people'. In comments like these, there was often a sense of apology for having remained within the New Zealand community in London.

Others apologized for having gone to London at all. London was seen as a 'soft' OE option because it was not different 'enough' and because of the number of New Zealanders already there. An increasingly formalized support infrastructure and communications developments have reduced the liminality of the OE experience in recent years. The expatriate London lifestyle of New Zealanders on OE, with its focus on New Zealand social events, held in expatriate venues, in the company of other New Zealanders, challenges notions of the OE experience as a self-testing rite of passage. According to West (2006), Australians in London struggled to resolve the seeming conflict between their identity as independent travellers and their patronage of Aussie theme pubs. Similar conflicts arose for New Zealanders in London – the cultural challenge of London and the value of personal benefits that 'even' London could offer were, however, justifications for London-based OEs.

Personal benefits were associated with the realisation of their New Zealand culture: as one interviewee noted:

> even in London you have to learn to relate to people in different ways to what you're used to and what that does is collects together the things that you personally regard as your culture, because now you are experiencing someone else's. I think if you stayed here [in New Zealand] you would never do that.

Another noted that through '[being in London with other New Zealanders] you notice things about New Zealand that you hadn't noticed before and it made me much more patriotic'. This agrees with the positive aspects of culture shock and the realization of enculturation processes reported by Adler (1975) and Sussman (2002).

This newfound New Zealand identity was subsequently employed by some as a measure of cultural difference, especially when accounting for unexpected experiences of culture shock or as a means of making more of the cultural differences they were encountering. Participants commonly attributed their culture shock on arrival in London to the fact that, as New Zealanders, they were from a small country and were unused to large cities. Many of those interviewed made a point of saying which small town in New Zealand they were from, as an illustration, or measure of, just how different from home London was. There was also the multicultural nature of London to contend with, as one employment agency representative pointed out 'if you teach in the East End of London there will be cultural differences that aren't actually English'. One participant described what he liked about London, 'you'd just have to walk down the street… [it was] just like living in any foreign country…. not English foreign… more sort of Indian and Pakistani'.

For many aspects of work, and functional day-to-day activities, adaptation is made to the British way of life. Because of similar education and training qualifications, New Zealanders offer Britain a well-trained, educated and easy to accommodate work force. New Zealanders living in Britain are allowed to vote, have access to the British health

system and speak the same language as the locals, albeit with an accent. In some respects, OE participants are well-integrated into the London population as they live across a variety of geographical locations (rather than as a segregated community), drink in local 'pubs' and shop in local supermarkets. Socially, however, many remain within a 'home' community of expatriate New Zealanders much like O'Reilly's (2000) 'symbolic community' or the 'communion' of belonging suggested by Bell and Newby (1976). A sense of belonging to a New Zealand community, engendered by living overseas on OE, was a common theme in interviews. 'There is something special about the Kiwi community in London – it was a transition place – in another country, but we could still speak our own language'.

The social support offered by this community was more important in the early phases of the OE experience:

> When I first got to London I was way out of my comfort zone… but we had a really close support group of people who were all in the same boat and we all knitted together. As we got more used to it and more relaxed, the group sort of broke up and in fact it disintegrated completely in the end, but in the beginning it was very important.

While this progression agrees with Oberg's (1960) phases of emotional reactions it is notable that few OE interviewees recalled an initial 'honeymoon' stage. Instead, the early stages of their OE experience were, for many participants, characterized by feelings of discomfort, perhaps magnified by the unexpectedness of the cultural difference they encountered.

The encounter between New Zealand and British culture also changed subtly with each new cohort of OE traveller. Over time, as the New Zealand cultural and social networks in London expanded, participation in this hybrid New Zealand community in London also became more acceptable. In both New Zealand and overseas, fading cultural cringe and greater awareness of national identity brought new confidence; cohorts of OE participants in the 1990s and 2000s were more comfortable celebrating their New Zealand culture than were those on OE in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s and 1970s, OE participants were often 'anti-New Zealand' – in respect of seeking expatriate community belonging – and, at the same time, were also opposed to the notion of 'Britain as home'. Increased acceptance of the OE in New Zealand society, the cultural reinforcement of London as the home of the OE, and the development, over time, of the substantial social and cultural New Zealand networks in London all contributed to a new OE culture.

Conclusion

This examination of the New Zealand OE has shown that cultural aspects of the working holiday experience are important, even central. The OE has changed over time as it developed from a response to the historical, colonial situation of New Zealand to being a New Zealand cultural entity in its own right. The OE has its own social structure and social systems; it has its own history, myths and legends reflecting its role in a distinctive New Zealand culture. OE culture and society does not, however, mirror

that of New Zealand. Working holidaymakers, such as those on OE, present an unusual migrant group: '[OE is] real time out because nobody gets old (like parents) and nobody has babies – everyone you spend time with [in London] is young'. The fluid and self-replacing nature of the OE population (rather than it being a stable aging population) ensures that links to New Zealand and its evolving cultural expressions are continually refreshed.

These links were responsible for the establishment of the OE and have been instrumental in determining the pattern of movement between New Zealand and Britain of these working holidaymakers. This examination of cultural aspects of the New Zealand OE showed that 'home' for the OE, and for participants on this working holiday experience, may be found in both Britain and New Zealand. Ongoing cultural connections between these antipodal, but culturally similar, countries maintain the OE. The OE is a cultural travel practice that does not easily fit into any definition of tourism. In some ways it is closer to temporary migration and yet the primary purpose is to give young New Zealanders the opportunity to travel. In fact the OE can be understood on a number of levels – as migration; as work; as a cultural phenomenon; and as travel. Consequently, it can also be missed by each of these areas of study because it does not fit neatly within existing paradigms.

As examples of increasingly significant global forms of modern travel, working holidays occupy a grey area between tourism and migration. What has been implicit in many of the working holiday studies to date are the cultural specificities of both the working holidaymakers themselves, the destinations they travel to and the form each type of working holiday takes. The role played by culture, however, is rarely made explicit. It is in this regard that the OE perhaps differs from many other working holiday experiences because of its long history and because of the length of the experience. It may, however, be seen as a harbinger of what might happen to many other working holiday experiences. This is not to say that extended working holidays from other countries will necessarily follow the exact pattern of the New Zealand OE, because of the specific role of the home culture in developing the experience. There is an early indication that the British 'gap year', for example, has its own traditions. It is important, though, that tourism studies pays more attention to the cultural determination of, and cultural expression within, travel experiences in general and working holiday experiences in particular. Currently, this aspect of travel is better dealt with in migration studies. Although research into this type of migration is increasing, it is still relatively undeveloped. In migration studies, as in tourism, there remains a need to better understand the mechanisms within the home societies (at the local scale) that determine patterns of movement and cultural interactions on a global scale.

At one level, then, working holidays blur the distinction between tourism and migration and so represent illustrative examples of the limits of each form of analysis for understanding modern travel. At another level, however, they also represent an opportunity to foreground the cultural dimensions that have perhaps always been present in most forms of travel – whether traditionally categorized as migration or tourism. In this context, detailed and rich accounts of such travel forms can help inform theoretical advancement in several areas and, at the same time, highlight conceptual linkages.

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