

## **Gender, sexuality and lifestyle migration: exploring the impact of cosmopolitan place-marketing discourses on the post-migratory experiences of British women in Spain**

### **Abstract**

This article responds to a recent call to problematise the theoretical underpinnings of lifestyle migration and in particular, to critically examine the construction of lifestyle migrants as an ideal-type of individualised subject, freed from the constraints of normative social structures (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016). Recent research has begun to do so, by demonstrating how class, race and gender can intersect to delimit the post-migratory experiences of lifestyle migrants, as they negotiate multiple social hierarchies (Croucher, 2014; Lundström and Twine, 2011). This article adds a new dimension to these studies by showing how class, gender and sexuality interconnect through the prism of 'cosmopolitanism' to structure the lives of British women in the affluent Catalan town of Sitges. Although British lesbians have more social autonomy than other British female lifestyle migrants in the town, they are simultaneously rendered subordinate in relation to Sitges' cosmopolitan discourse, which privileges a stereotypical male homosexuality instead.

**British, class, cosmopolitanism, gender, lesbian, lifestyle, migration, place-marketing, sexuality, Spain**

## Introduction

Seeking to understand processes of identification has remained a key concern of contemporary sociology, with recent years having seen a shift in theorisation towards a perspective that emphasises identity as individualised and rooted in lifestyle-based consumption practices (See: Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2005; Giddens, 1991). As sociological research has sought to empirically investigate this phenomenon, a particularly fruitful line of enquiry has considered groups of people embarking upon 'lifestyle migration', initially defined as the 'relocation of relatively affluent people within the developed world searching for a better way of life' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009:608. See: Benson, 2011; Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010). And it is easy to see the attraction, not least because their decisions to migrate are in the first instance suggestive of individual agency, but it is also because the different contexts that geographical mobility offers are often understood to generate new possibilities for projects of self-realisation, *automatically* (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009:615. See: Benson, 2011; Oliver, 2012). As relatively privileged people in contexts in which they may appear to have access to a similar level of social-economic resources, lifestyle migrants can easily be seen to exemplify those most likely to embody such individualised, consumption-based identities (D'Andrea, 2007; Korpela, 2009; Hoey, 2014).

Yet despite more general sociological research that has sought to critically deconstruct the shift towards conceptualising identity as reflexive and individualised (See: Bottero, 2004; Brooks and Wee, 2008; Savage et al, 2013), the idea of 'lifestyle' within lifestyle migration literature has remained relatively under-explored (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016:409). Instead, lifestyle migration has more often than not, been adopted and utilised as a relatively unproblematic conceptual framework (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016. See: D'Andrea 2007; Korpela, 2009; Hoey, 2014). More recently, emphasis has begun to be placed on understanding the way that key macro-structural factors including neoliberalism, postcolonialism and globalisation can shape lifestyle migration, lifestyle migration, here understood as a process in which individuals are simultaneously enabled and constrained as they adapt to and alter the 'habitus of the communities within which they live' (Benson and O'Reilly 2018, p2).

As a result, some notable examples have begun to emerge which outline how factors that can shape lifestyle migration, such as class, race and especially gender have play out in direct relation to these migrants' post-migratory experiences (Benson, 2014; Croucher, 2014; Lundström, 2014; Lundström and Twine, 2011; Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010). Instead of privileging agency, these studies attempt to move beyond determining migrants purely through socio-economic characteristics, to focus on on individuals' post-migratory social relations and subsequent identity-making (Benson and O'Reilly, 2016:21; Croucher, 2014; Lundström, 2014). It is to this research that the article speaks. Drawing on

over 12 months of ethnographic research amongst British migrants living in the Catalan tourist town of Sitges, the article focuses on comparing the experiences of lesbian lifestyle migrants in relation to (specifically *married*) heterosexual British women living in the town. In so doing, it adds to current attempts to complicate the way that lifestyle migration is used as an analytical framework, by considering two key research questions; firstly ‘how does gender act as one of the key social relations shaping lifestyle migration?’ and secondly, ‘how does gender articulate with other modes of identity’ – here specifically, with sexuality and social class? (Croucher, 2013:25).

The article begins by describing the context and method of research, including how Sitges’ place-marketing draws on its historical positioning as a centre of counter-culture, to explicitly promote a cosmopolitan identity. The fundamental role that homosexuality plays in relation to this particular construction of cosmopolitanism is outlined, in relation to the narratives of British migrants living there. Literature that has sought to complicate the concept of lifestyle migration is discussed, with a focus on studies that explore the definitive role that gender (as it intersects with both class and race) plays in structuring post-migratory experiences (Croucher, 2014; Lundström, 2014; Lundström and Twine, 2011). Finally, the experiences of heterosexual and self-identified homosexual women are compared, to argue that although lesbians generally experienced a sense of (especially economic) autonomy in comparison to other British women, their experiences were ultimately curtailed by the highly valued role that a stereotypical version of male homosexuality played, as a marker of elite cosmopolitanism.

### **The Context and Method of Research**

With a population of around 28,000, Sitges is a relatively large town on the North-Eastern coast of Spain (Foro-Ciudad, 2018). Approximately 35 kilometres from Barcelona, Sitges draws heavily on its 19<sup>th</sup> century reputation as a meeting place for the leading lights of Spain’s Modernist movement, from Lorca and Rusiñol, to G.K. Chesterton and Salvador Dali. Sitges is subsequently seen to have avoided mass tourist development and to have thereby maintained an air of authentic bohemianism (Binkhorst, 2008:132; Boone, 2007:176). The late 1980s - early 1990s saw a huge upsurge in immigration and Sitges’ population has seen a year-on-year increase ever since, becoming home to a diverse international population (Foro-Ciudad, 2018). Alongside this diversity, the town nonetheless retains a strongly represented *Sitgetan* identity, conveyed by its majority local population. Out of this, around three hundred are British people who live most, if not all, of the year there. And it was amongst these British migrants that twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork was conducted.

Initially, a two-week pilot study was undertaken, which included a survey of all of the public places that British people might meet and interact. Following a 'snowball' sampling strategy, I successfully relied upon contacts made during those two weeks contacts to introduce me to other British migrants living in the town (Denscombe, 2010:37). Those Brits who were the main focus of my study were deemed eligible for inclusion by the base level criteria of being British and over 18 years of age. This meant the sample was wide-ranging, from a group of predominantly female teachers at a local international school, to retirees; from families, to small business owners, as well as those who were independently wealthy, some of whom were publicly renowned. Around a fifth of the sample were homosexual, the gendered breakdown was approximately 60% female to 40% male and of the almost two hundred British people I had some form of contact with, all bar five (two from Northern Ireland, three from Scotland) were English and all participants, except for one family of British-Asian origin, were white.

During the twelve months of fieldwork that immediately followed, I actively participated in the lives of British migrants in the town, from socialising in cafes and restaurants, attending birthday parties and local festivals, to helping out behind a bar during the town's Gay Pride event and working backstage in a multilingual pantomime. I made extensive, in-depth fieldwork diaries and conducted over one hundred unstructured interviews. Initially, I attempted to record these interviews, but the content and conversations seemed stilted (Speer and Hutchby, 2003). After discussing this with one participant, he suggested that some Brits perhaps worried that my work would end up as a kind of tabloid-esque exposé, so may be reluctant to be recorded. I took the decision to take short-hand notes instead. This is, of course, an approach that raises two key questions; firstly, is the material gathered reliable, and secondly, what are the ethical implications of the suggestion that participants were more forthcoming when *not* being audio-recorded?

It is clear that relying on notes taken during an interview has several disadvantages, perhaps most importantly that notes 'cannot be replayed' and therefore may be incomplete, based on recollection and the researcher's interpretation – they are not and cannot be objective (Tessier, 2012:446). Yet, although undoubtedly more reliable in one sense, audio recordings are themselves not necessarily infallible. Just as note-taking can be viewed as 'both a process and a product', transcription too, is a subjective practice that can invoke substantive epistemological questions based on determining where the transcript as data ends and analysis begins; two people, in other words, may experience the same recording very differently, regardless of how many times it is replayed (Tessier, 2012:448). Although quotations below should be read with this caveat in mind, steps were taken in 'accord with good practice' to ensure that the findings are both accurate and credible (Denscombe, 2010:299).

To do so, every care was taken to adhere both to the ethical framework of the university represented, as well as to a practical, relational ethics, based on mutual respect for participants and for their opinions, even – or perhaps, *especially* – when they shared opinions or made statements that I disagreed with, found distasteful, or sometimes shocking (Ellis, 2007). These were, nonetheless, quotes made in the context of interviews, which were clearly conducted as such. In other words, they took place in a format *recognisable to participants* as being an interview. This was confirmed on numerous occasions by conversations that took place after the notebook was closed, defined by participants themselves as being ‘off the record’. The project aims and intentions were clearly explained, verbal consent was gained and all participants were given contact details and the opportunity to withdraw their participation at any time – one participant did so, and this interview data was deleted. It was clear at all times when notes were being taken, meaning that participants were unlikely to forget that their words were being recorded, as opposed to the idea that only once participants ‘forget’ a recording device is there, do they offer ‘naturalistic’, experiential data, with the ethical implications that entails (Speer and Hutchby, 2003:317).

All interview notes were typed up into long hand immediately after the interviews and care was taken to include contextual information; information that might otherwise be lost when audio-recording alone (Denscombe, 2010:187; Tessier, 2012:448). The interview data was grounded in extensive long-term fieldwork, which allowed in-depth analysis – and crucially *re-analysis* - of information given by interviewees, thereby providing ‘a solid foundation for the conclusions based on the data’ adding to the ‘credibility of the research’ (Denscombe, 2010:299). This included the opportunity to confirm findings through respondent validation – two participants who were quoted extensively in the final thesis, read the transcripts of those interviews to confirm their factual accuracy and were then re-interviewed (Denscombe, 2010:299). These steps were key to how the research progressed. For example, it was not until I interviewed a British lesbian that I became sensitive to disparities of experience and representation in the town, which led me to re-examine earlier interview content and to subsequently recognise the prominence given to gay men and the invisibility of lesbians within the town’s cosmopolitan discourse and to test out the topic with other participants, which reinforced its thematic relevance (See: Dixon, 2015:40).

So although not fully generalisable in a statistical sense (which would in any case necessitate a much larger sample, alongside different methods of data collection and analysis), the quotes chosen below even where they may seem extreme, are those deemed to be the most ‘transferable’, or representative of general attitudes shared amongst this particular (disparate) group of Brits, living in this particular location, at this particular time (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The main aim of the project was then, to try to understand how this group negotiated their subjective identities in relation to the

town's predominant cosmopolitan discourse, which advocated an openness towards ethnic and cultural difference, whilst simultaneously being explicitly and somewhat paradoxically constructed on the basis of a hierarchy of identitarian distinctions. These distinctions included class, race/ethnicity and gender, but most importantly to this analysis – homosexuality.

### **Cosmopolitanism, Homosexuality and Place-Marketing**

Sitges is an extremely popular migration destination, not least for British people who make up a sizeable percentage of the total immigrant population (Foro-Ciudad, 2018). In many ways, British migrants living there could be seen as archetypal lifestyle migrants, with the necessary socio-economic capital to have taken a conscious decision to move to Sitges for a 'better way of life' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009:608). And indeed, every British person I interviewed, gave the 'lifestyle' the town offered as a fundamental reason for migration, even where there were other motivating factors such as employment, or indeed, the opposite. Underpinning this perception was Sitges' reputation as a cosmopolitan location, a narrative that has been consciously and explicitly constructed as such through the town's place-marketing. As a brief scan of holiday websites shows, the word 'cosmopolitan' occurs again and again in the way that Sitges is described:

"The cosmopolitan town of Sitges, an hour east of Cambrils, is a favourite of the arts, party and gay crowds..." (First Choice Holidays, 2017)

"Because of its cosmopolitan character, its extraordinary leisure, dining and cultural offer and its lively night life, Sitges has become one of the most popular destinations on the Catalan coast. (BlauSitges, 2017)

Perhaps understandably in light of this direct marketing discourse, cosmopolitanism was a key feature amongst British migrants' understandings of the town, with its cosmopolitan reputation suggesting a very specific kind of 'lifestyle':

"It's very tolerant, very cosmopolitan. It's expensive and that helps. I mean, say you have to commute to Barcelona, it's a whole extra zone from Sitges...And then you've got the tunnels, too [toll roads that link Sitges to Barcelona by car]. They're expensive, so they keep the riff-raff out, if you know what I mean! People don't want to pay to come through them, or they can't afford it, so it keeps lower class families out. You know the types, they'd be better off in Benidorm or somewhere like that" Paul, businessman.

Paul was a businessman who had been living in Sitges for just over 18 months, after he had met and married a woman from Barcelona. They had chosen to move to the town with the intention of

starting a family. A successful businessman back in the UK, Paul enjoyed the challenge of doing business in another culture. As he suggested, cosmopolitanism was clearly a key aspect of Sitges' locational identity, one that both defined and enabled the kind of culture-filled 'lifestyle' that British migrants living there had actively sought. As Hoey argues, for 'life-style migrants, the choice made of where to live is consciously, intentionally also one about how to live' (Hoey, 2005:615. See: Benson and O'Reilly, 2016:20). But as the quote above also highlights, for British migrants it was also an undeniably elitist, class-inflected understanding of cosmopolitanism that informed this decision too. Similarly to other studies of British lifestyle migration, with normative objective markers of economic distinction unavailable, Brits in Sitges consistently sought to differentiate themselves via '(re)producing dominant cultural tastes' (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010:59).

Most often this was achieved by positioning themselves in direct contra-distinction to 'Benidorm', which operated as an umbrella term used to refer to mass tourist resorts in the Southern coast of Spain, and those who would choose to live or visit there. As will be shown below, this trope was also used to frame differences *between* Brits within Sitges too. As Paul explicitly states, 'Benidorm' and the places this term represented, were deemed to be both 'lower class' and by virtue of having been consciously constructed to cater to people *en masse*, as inauthentic (O'Reilly, 2000:32; O'Reilly, 2003:304-306). Sitges, on the other hand, was understood to be a place of culture and tradition, to have avoided the kinds of overdevelopment seen in other tourist towns in Spain. Crucially, because of its very particular trajectory of historical development, it was also ultimately understood to have always been cosmopolitan in a way that fitted neatly into its contemporary place-marketing guise.

Since at least the 1990s, place-marketing discourses across Western Europe began to give a new prominence to a specific construction of cosmopolitanism (Binnie et al., 2006:28; Dixon, 2015; Rushbrook, 2002:183; Young et al., 2006:1687). This coincided with a renewed interest in the concept throughout the social sciences and within sociology in particular, which in line with the shift in understandings of identity referred to above, began to explore cosmopolitanism as a lens through which to investigate the influence of contemporary forms of globalisation on connections between state and society (Mitchell, 2007:2). As this project has been pursued, differing conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism have tended to fall into two distinct and opposing groups; those who see cosmopolitanism as an elite, intellectualised, 'aesthetic stance' (Hannerz, 1990:239) and those who argue for a subaltern cosmopolitanism, 'propounding a "bottom up", "vernacular ethnic rootedness" in opposition, one that need not automatically negate openness to cultural difference

or the fostering of a universalist civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local' (Dixon, 2015:42. See: Werbner, 2006:497; Appiah, 1998).

This is of course, a somewhat crude distinction, but the key point to emerge is the recognition that 'groups and individuals perform their own sense of cosmopolitanism dependent on context – their own particular locations in various axes of power, as well as the broader structuring forces of global capitalism and geo-politics' (Mitchell, 2007:9). This is crucial, particularly when it comes to the micro-level ways that cosmopolitanism became manifest amongst British migrants in Sitges, as discussed below. But on a macro level too, as global capitalism has forced urban centres into increasing competition with one another, being able to market locations as cosmopolitan spaces of cultural tolerance and diversity, has become 'one of the most desirable forms of contemporary cultural capital' (Rushbrook, 2002:183). It is this aspect in particular, that Sitges was extremely well-placed to build on and not least, because of its potent mix of traditional Sitgetan identity and contemporarily large, diverse and relatively wealthy immigrant community. But perhaps even more importantly, it was able to do so due to its long-standing reputation as a place that not only tolerates, but supposedly explicitly and actively celebrates, a highly conspicuous (and internationally diverse) gay community.

This long-standing reputation as a 'gay-friendly' location has been central to Sitges' place-marketing, as macro-level shifts have seen homosexuality become a key marker of desirable difference so that 'gay culture occupies a pivotal role within the production and consumption of urban spaces as cosmopolitan' (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004:40. See: Brown, 2006:133; Ghaziani, 2014:3; Rushbrook, 2002:183). As it has done so, locations that are able to explicitly highlight an acceptance of visibly, openly gay populations become linked, forging broader alliances as the 'acceptance of homosexuality functions as an index of modernity' which 'in this narrative fits neatly into a broad neoliberal ideology that values cosmopolitan credentials, because it is (ideologically at least) at once able to make a place particular and thereby act as a form of cultural capital, whilst at the same time be positioned as a transnational form of identification linking people and places across both space and time' (Dixon, 2015:39. See: Ghaziani, 2014:3; Giorgi, 2002:57). Again, narratives about the town in tourism marketing materials demonstrate this clearly:

'Bohemian, cultural and cosmopolitan, Sitges holidays attract a great number of international gay visitors, as well as trendy locals' (Holiday Hypermarket, 2011).



‘Sitges still retains an arty, ‘anything goes’ atmosphere and attracts a diverse range of visitors from sunseekers to art lovers, sports enthusiasts to gay couples’ (Thomsons Holidays, 2011).

Sitges’ highly visible gay community subsequently played an important role in relation to the kind of cosmopolitan identities the Brits with whom I worked sought to enact. A widespread belief in the acceptance of homosexuality in Sitges was continually offered up by Brits as the ultimate evidence of the town’s cosmopolitanism; indeed, the two often became synonymous. I was never quite able to discover exactly when, nor why, nor how, Sitges became a renowned gay destination. Brits themselves, however, offered up several different explanations:

‘Sitges used to be, before the tunnels, you know, it was really hard to get to. So what happened was, you had these rich families, all the traders and the aristocrats and the rich people in Barcelona and of course back then, it was different; being gay, it just wasn’t acceptable in polite society. So whenever they had a gay son, for example, they would send them to Sitges, sweep it under the carpet, I suppose you’d say? Basically, it meant they were far enough away to do what they wanted, but close enough to visit their mothers on a Sunday!’ James, teacher.

The idea that Sitges had operated as a geographically separate locale, in which the gay offspring of 19th century Barcelona’s great and good could live their sexual lives in secret, was a highly popular narrative amongst British migrants, but why were they able to do so? For British migrants, the origin of Sitges’ reputation as a gay hot-spot lay firmly with the town’s artistic heritage. As one gay participant, Matt, a TEFL teacher who had lived in Sitges for over five years put it:

‘Is Sitges cosmopolitan? If we think of the dictionary definition of cosmopolitan then, well, it’s definitely gay friendly, but it’s always been like that hasn’t it? You know, because of the art, the artists...’

This was undoubtedly the point at which the search for an answer to ‘why’ stopped. As Matt’s quote highlights, British migrants across the board associated art with alternative ways of living and particularly, with ideas about non-normative sexuality. Within Sitges at least, this association of homosexuality with artistic pursuits bears some historical weight. In the late 1800s the town found itself at the centre of the Catalan *Modernisme* movement through one of its most famous inhabitants - the artist who would go on to give Picasso his first big break - Santiago Rusiñol. As with other *fin-de-siècle* art movements across Europe, expressions of sexual decadence that often

included elements of homosexuality, were vital to the requisite rejection of bourgeois values, which were explicitly articulated in Sitges during this period (Aldrich, 1993:219). Crucially, these included a re-imagining of Classical representations of sexual relations between men. Homosexuality, with roots in Ancient pedagogy, could be reconfigured with an elitist cachet, cementing the Mediterranean's renown for sexual openness, with the weight of antiquity (Aldrich, 1993:219).

For British migrants in particular, Sitges had therefore always 'been gay' because of the artists and always cosmopolitan because it had always been gay (and had artists). Any apparent tensions implicit within the seemingly paradoxical articulation of a local (particular) and a global (general) identity, between the seemingly paradoxical articulations of a progressive futuristic identity that had nonetheless apparently always existed, were resolved, because Sitges had always been cosmopolitan in the sense that it was now understood; its cosmopolitanism was, moreover, therefore authentic. It soon became clear however, that although the articulation of homosexuality which could function to make cosmopolitanism legible in the town was heavily classed (and implicitly racialised), it was above all else determined by gender.

### **Gender, Sexuality and Lifestyle Migration**

As emerging studies have suggested, there is little doubt that gender is a key factor that determines the trajectory of lifestyle migrants' post-migratory social relations, just as it has been recognised as fundamental in migration studies more generally (George, 2005; Goldring, 2001; Hodagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Pessar and Mahler, 2003). Croucher (2014) for example, shows how female lifestyle migrants who had moved to Mexico (mainly from North America), had often done so seeking liberation from what they found to be oppressive gender roles in the places they had migrated from. However, many women ended up living in an unstable state of liminality because any structural privileges that they experienced were ultimately predicated on racial and/or class-based 'othering', which of necessity then precluded them from the kind of social integration they sought in their new locale (Croucher, 2014:23). Similarly, Lundström and Twine (2011) outline the way that Swedish women who had moved to North America negotiated the racial and class-based privilege that allowed them to opt-out of (especially domestic) labour, but which in the process forced them to become economically dependent on their husbands (Lundström and Twine, 2011:76).

Far from being the kind of idealised individuals referred to above, the potential identitarian liberation that lifestyle migration was supposed to offer was instead 'mediated through gendered and heterosexual forms of dependency' which emphasised 'the simultaneous production of privilege and subordination' amongst them (Lundström and Twine, 2011:71). Indeed, this was very much the

case for a sizable number of married heterosexual women I met in Sitges, many of whom had moved due to their husbands taking up lucrative job opportunities in Barcelona, which as for so many female migrants, meant relinquishing their own careers (and therefore, their economic self-sufficiency) in the process (Arieli, 2007; Lundström and Twine, 2011:71). Danni, for example, had previously had a successful career as a model but had given up her job to become a full-time mother three years ago, when the family moved to Sitges after her husband had gained employment in Barcelona:

‘It’s hard sometimes, I do get bored, but then I feel bad because you know, it’s Spain, it’s sunny, the beach...And I know you shouldn’t idealise places, here and back home, they both have their advantages and disadvantages, but I just think that for the kids it’s a no brainer. I mean, who wouldn’t want their kids to grow up here?’

After three years, Danni had begun to find living in Sitges difficult, she had little to do to occupy her time while her husband worked and her children were at school. It was clear that Danni felt a sense of guilt, particularly when comparing her experiences to the imaginings she thought people back in the UK held about her life in Spain. Yet, she felt forced to put up with the less positive aspects of her life in the town, because in common with many lifestyle migrants, she felt like this was a place that would afford her children an idyllic childhood (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009:615). This was a shared theme amongst British women in the town and one often compounded by a sense of social isolation that has been found to be typical of women who in following their husbands abroad, often ‘experience dramatic narrowing of networks’, without the ready-made connections employment offers (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014:254). Emma, for example, left a career in teaching to move to Sitges over ten years ago, but found a sense of loneliness once her children had left school, in stark contrast to that of her husband:

‘It’s easier for Tom [her husband] of course, because he’s off into Barcelona every day and he’s got his friends at work and he’s picked up the language, so he has more access to more people. When the kids were at school it was a bit, I mean, it was fine, you’d wave to the other mums in the playground and what not, have a little chat maybe. My youngest, he was sporty, in all the teams, so we’d meet people then, mix a bit...But as soon as the kids left school that was it, everyone just drifted off. If I bumped into one of them in the street now, I doubt they’d even recognise me!’

In common with other migrant mothers, Emma’s children had afforded her a level of sociality whilst they were at school, but now they had grown older and left school, she realised that she had been

dependent on them for the opportunity to mix with other mothers – women, presumably in a similar situation as her own (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014:260). It was clear that for the majority of British women who had become housewives in Sitges, their key emphasis lay in an explicitly articulated desire to give their children a ‘better way of life’, with their own needs and wants beyond that being very much secondary (Arieli, 2007; Benson & O’Reilly, 2009:615). It seemed strange then, that these social bonds British women forged through their children were often unable to extend beyond the forced interactions that schooling provided. One possible explanation perhaps lay in the fact that migrant groupings are often defined by transience; people come and people go, making it difficult to invest - and continually reinvest - in forming relationships (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014:259). And yet although all social networks change through time, these British women’s experiences make clear that simply sharing an ethnicity in a particular time and place ‘does not give automatic access to a given constituency of social relationships’ (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014:260). In fact within Sitges, this particular group of women were, somewhat surprisingly, often very negatively defined by other members of the British migrant community. Interestingly, this was more often than not explained in terms of social class, which as highlighted by the quotes from Paul above, underwrote British migrants’ understandings of cosmopolitanism:

‘I don’t think there are many working class people here, it’s not a place for that kind of thing, it isn’t like Benidorm. Although, I suppose you do get the ‘ladies who lunch’. They move here with their husbands who go off working and they’re left...They come here to try to give their families a better life but end up getting the balance wrong because...well, just because they have a big house in the Hills [*Sitges Hills*] doesn’t mean they’re not still, you know, common as muck!’ Martha, independently wealthy, lived in Sitges for over 35 years.

‘You get these groups, 30-55 year old ladies who lunch, they don’t do much except gossip! I see them as being perhaps one class level below their husbands, working class, kind of desperately wanting to climb the social ladder’ Roger, mature student, lived in Sitges for 2 years.

As Martha and Roger both highlight, this group of British women were understood only in relation to their husbands and/or children. More often than not, their assumed economic dependence meant that they were understood to be far from the ideal-typical individualised ‘citizen of the world’ (Robbins, 1998:248). Instead, they were rendered as being decidedly non-cosmopolitan, which to British migrants in Sitges meant that they were defined as being the ‘wrong’ social class and ultimately therefore, in the ‘wrong’ location – ‘common as muck’ or ‘social climbers’. This was despite the fact that the vast majority of this group of British women had given up successful

professional careers to enable their families' migration abroad in the first place (Arieli, 2007; Lundström and Twine, 2011:71).

As other similar research has shown, when objective socio-economic class differences are hard to establish, migrants lose 'some of their sense of place, and distance' (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010:57). Whilst simultaneously highlighting the structural constraints that touristic stereotypes held over *all* of their identities, these class-based judgements nonetheless offered Brits a means to regain a sense of themselves by fulfilling 'deep-seated and embodied tendencies both to behave and to see others in distinctive ways' (Oliver and O'Reilly, 2010:55). So although part of a broader international community that operated on a macro-level to externally exemplify a highly-valued difference within Sitges' cosmopolitan narrative, as Martha and Roger highlight, British women's roles were tightly defined by other Brits. As a result, the 'two terrains of economic dependency and gender were blurred' through the lens of (cosmopolitan-informed) class-based distinction (Lundström and Twine, 2011:76).

On an experiential level, far from being liberated from normative gender roles that they had experienced previously, in many ways their lives were prescribed in relation to those same norms (Croucher, 2013:18). British lesbians on the other hand, had a fundamentally distinct experience in relation to these structural categorisations. In a very real sense, their non-normative sexual identity enabled them to enjoy freedom from normative gender roles, not least because they experienced an economic autonomy that many other British women in the town did not. Pam for example, was a British woman who had had come out (albeit only to a small circle of people she knew) in later life as a lesbian. In the UK, she still maintained a home and financial ties with a man she had married many years previously, but having visited Sitges first on holiday with some friends around four years ago, she had enjoyed the sense of liberation it had permitted her so much that she had almost immediately bought an apartment there. And yet, during the course of the time I spent in the town, she had decided to sell her apartment and live back in the UK full-time, not least because she had never felt accepted – by locals, or other British migrants:

'I feel isolated here, lonely I suppose...you learn pretty quickly that you'll never fit in. At first that was ok, because I could slip in and out of it and in the UK, when I'm there, I have to be a 'wife' (she mimed quotation marks) and a mother and a grandmother. I have all of these roles and all of these demands. So coming over here meant I could get away, even the isolation was a good thing for a

while, because it felt like I could just...be me. But now, I think, it's just too much. I could never live here now.'

Living in Sitges allowed Pam, like other lesbians I spoke to, freedom from normative gender roles in opposition to the way that many married British women, like Danni and Emma, found their lives post-relocation to be highly restrictive (Croucher, 2013:15). And yet, this structural freedom came at a high price because to be a British lesbian in Sitges was ultimately to experience a very fundamental form of structurally-determined social isolation. This was not least because as soon became apparent, lesbians were conceived by many other British migrants according to pernicious stereotypes that were disparaging and often highly offensive:

'I never like lesbians really. I never understand why they spend all their [sic] time trying to be men, they're so ugly! The thing is, they hate men, they're always wanting to, you know, go snip snip! [He mimed a scissor-cutting hand gesture, indicating symbolic castration] But what's sad is, when it comes down to it, it's because they're jealous, they all just want to be men anyway!'

This observation made by Antony, a married gay man, was far from a one-off observation; lesbians were generally understood by the majority of British migrants (both hetero- and homosexual, and recognised by lesbians themselves – See: Dixon, 2015) as being structurally problematic:

"I had two friends [lesbians] who came over to visit me, one we used to called 'Big Pam'. She was, you know, you'd look at her and think she was going to thump you! She listens to the cricket, she, well, she *doesn't do anything for herself*, as my mother would say! Richard, retired, in Sitges for 5 years.

To be socially legible as a lesbian was to be disliked and unattractive and consequently the word 'lesbian' constituted a form of insult (see: Dixon, 2015). At the same time, lesbianism was constructed as being definitively working-class (Faderman, 1991:126; Jennings, 2007:140-141). This precluded it from being able to articulate or make cosmopolitanism legible within Sitges, as Matt, for example, made clear:

'You do get some lesbians here...but then, they have their own places don't they, like Lesbos or wherever? Ok, there are less of those places, sure, but that's because they [lesbians] have a different mind-set, they live their lives differently. I had two lesbian friends come here and stay with me and they moaned that the cutlery smelt of spices because the spice rack was below the cutlery drawer, I mean, come on! Who cares or even notices what the cutlery smells like!? They didn't like it because

there wasn't [sic] any egg and chips here. Well, they should have gone to Benidorm if they wanted egg and chips! You've got to want to travel to enjoy differences, not just for the cheap beer and the sun!'

For Matt, lesbians did not have the requisite 'mind set' that would enable them to fully appreciate the kind of cosmopolitan lifestyle that Sitges represented. As a result, lesbians were considered to be in the 'wrong place' and more suited to 'Benidorm' instead. Unlike the married heterosexual women referred to above, this key structural difference was realised not through a gendered economic dependence, but through the intersection of their gender and sexual identity instead (Croucher, 2013:18). This tied directly into a wider belief that gay men were at least middle-class and above, whilst (necessarily masculine) lesbians were working-class, which emerged across Euro-America from the 1950s onwards (Faderman, 1991:126; Jennings, 2007:140-141). Previously within Anglo-American popular culture, lesbianism – where it had been recognised at all - had been conceived of as being a decidedly privileged pursuit, often in the guise of feminised and therefore supposedly non-sexual 'Boston Marriages' (Faderman, 1991:2; Halberstam, 1998:50; Jennings, 2007:39). Within the context of Sitges however, lesbianism was constructed in opposition to a specific understanding of male homosexuality that had come to stand as the defining subjective identity around which cosmopolitanism was built by British migrants:

'I think it's safe here, quaint...It's very cosmopolitan, you can tell, it's very designer, the little shops. I think the gays here really create that feeling because having so many of them around, it sort of shows all of that, that freedom of choice, like you can be who you are without any negativity, or being threatened, given abuse. And from a woman's point of view it's great because gay guys are always so in touch with their feminine side, they're always safe to chat to' Marnie, teacher, lived in Sitges for just over a year.

'With the gays you get a very clean kind of tourism, they look good, they're clean. They look after themselves, wear nice clothes and oh, they always smell so lovely! It's true isn't it? They're always so good looking! And they create such a nice atmosphere. It's always nice having them in the restaurants and the bars, they're just so funny!' Julie, housewife, lived in Sitges for three years.

This is, of course, a stereotypical male homosexuality in which gay men are rendered as effeminate, yet able to retain an elemental gloss of transgression (Halberstam, 1998). As such, it could function as an example of cosmopolitan difference (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004:40. See: Brown, 2006:133;

Ghaziani, 2014:3; Rushbrook, 2002:183). Nonetheless, male homosexuality became a critical site of agency as gay men came to occupy the powerful role of conferring positively valued representation on to other people and particular places – as Marnie put it, simply by being in Sitges, gay men created cosmopolitanism through (feminised and therefore safe) ‘designer’ difference. At the same time, with its roots in social class, the supposedly subversive element of male homosexuality constituted what was ultimately a highly conservative mode of distinction, which played out in opposition to a lesbianism that ultimately could not (Faderman, 1991:126; Jennings, 2007:140-141).

## Conclusion

It seems clear that contemporary social relations have changed significantly, and increasingly it has been suggested that whilst for some people, forces of contemporary globalisation can indeed offer liberty from previously normative processes of social identification, for many the situation is of course, far more complicated (Savage, 2000). And yet the idea that the privileged can and do disregard collectivised class-based identities to make the most of such individualised lifestyle-based identity opportunities available is too easily taken for granted as exemplified not least, perhaps, in lifestyle migration literature to-date (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2016). Yet, for the group of British migrants I worked with in Sitges, their post-migratory social identities were tightly constrained by the way that the same cosmopolitan discourses that had attracted them to live in the town, then simultaneously defined acceptable modes of being, whilst excluding other ways of identity-making. Cosmopolitanism, as implicitly exemplified in the way that the destination was marketed, was explicitly used in everyday discourse by Brits as a kind of ‘short-hand’ way to articulate specific understandings of class, gender and sexuality.

In the first instance, their Britishness and relative wealth operated as markers of macro-level, cosmopolitan difference, conferring a privileged social position within the town’s overarching place-marketing narrative. Yet, in common with other examples of British migrants in Spain, living in a context in which economic status was not necessarily apparent, British people nonetheless soon discovered that their social identities were both highly – and in class terms, highly normatively – prescribed (Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010). This clearly intersected with gender as heterosexual British women in particular, often found themselves socially isolated through being understood to be dependent on their husbands/partners.

As a result, these women were subsequently categorised against a backdrop of class-based stereotypes, which posited them as working class and therefore *non-cosmopolitan* by default. British lesbian migrants were deemed to be equally categorically aberrant. But rather than being defined through an economic dependence, they were instead understood via a classed-based conception of



cosmopolitanism that provided the lens through which a cross-section of gender and sexuality was explained, to both delimit and define the lives of British lesbians who had undertaken to move to Sitges seeking 'a better way of life'. Far from being able to enact an individualised, reflexive, cosmopolitan lifestyle based on their choice of migration destination, instead, they soon discovered the opposite to be true instead.

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