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Rural mobilities: Connecting movement and fixity in rural places

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A B S T R A C T

Recent work within mobilities studies has pointed to the ways in which mobility shapes people's identities and everyday lives. Mobility is also inherently geographical in nature, not only in the sense that movements of people and objects transcend space but that the ubiquity of mobility within society raises important questions about the fixities of place. Much of the recent geographical scholarship on mobilities has focused on the city, with 'the urban' constructed as the archetypal space of hyper-mobility. Less attention has been given to mobilities in the context of rural spaces and places. In this paper, we suggest that mobility represents an equally important constituent of rural lifestyles and rural places. Our contention is that the stabilities of rurality, associated with senses of belonging, tradition and stasis, are both reliant on and undermined by rather complex forms of mobility. We draw on empirical materials from a recent community study in rural Wales to reveal the nature of these mobilities, including the diverse range of movements of people to, from and through rural places, the difficulties associated with practising everyday mobilities in rural settings, the increasing significance of virtual forms of mobility associated with the roll-out of digital technologies across rural spaces, and the complicated relationship between rural mobilities, immobilities and fixities.

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1. Placing mobilities

> "Mobility is just as spatial – as geographical – and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place."
>
> (Cresswell, 2006, p.3)

> "Being-on-the-move is a contemporary everyday life condition in the city and should as such be re-interpreted."
>
> (Jensen, 2009, p.149)

> "Mobility and migration hold the key to the future of the countryside."
>
> (Bracey, 1959, p.232)

Mobilities have emerged as a significant field of study within the social sciences during the last decade. This is particularly the case in sociology where it has been claimed that 'the paradigm of mobilities…is becoming increasingly central to contemporary identity formation and re-formation' (Elliot and Urry, 2010, p.7). What is also apparent within this growing body of sociological literature is an appreciation of both the temporalities and spatialities of mobility. Moving beyond the obvious observation that mobilities involve movements across space and between places, there is recognition that places and processes of place-making represent important components of mobilities. As Urry (2007) suggests, 'places are economically, politically and culturally produced through the multiple mobilities of people, but also of capital, objects, signs and information' (p.269).

The mobilities discourse has also been influential within human geography, where a distinctive body of work is now identifiable (see Cresswell, 1999, 2006; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Adey, 2006). As well as adding spatial twists to emerging mobility themes within sociology, human geographers have been at the forefront of the mobilities turn within the social sciences, pointing to the significance of spatial infrastructures, practices and imaginations to everyday and academic understandings of mobilities, as well as the importance of understanding place in more fluid terms. As Massey (1991) argued more than two decades ago, place needs to be approached less as a fixed entity and more as meeting space, as an intersection of flows of people and objects and, as such, continuously in a state of flux. More recently, she suggests that place needs to be approached as a 'constellation of processes rather than a thing' (2005, 141), emphasising its 'throwntogetherness'. Developing a relational understanding of space, Massey contends that space represents 'the sphere of a dynamic simultaneity, constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be

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determined (and therefore always undetermined) by the construction of new relations. It is always being made and always therefore, in a sense, unfinished…' (2005, 107). This approach resonates with Thrift's (1999) account of place based on 'relational materialism', within which he sees place as composed of a multitude of past associations but always dependent on 'further works of association to activate these associations, let alone make new ones. It follows that it can never be completed' (317).

More explicit engagements with ideas of mobility have also seen other geographers approaching place in more fluid terms – as in a constant state of becoming (Cresswell, 2002), as 'intersections of flows and movements' (Adey, 2006, p.88) and 'continually (re) produced through the mobile flows that course through and around them, bringing together ephemeral, contingent and relatively stable arrangements of people, energy and matter' (Edensor, 2011, p.190). As Merriman (2012) suggests, recent work on the geographies of mobility has moved beyond conventional ideas of movement happening in or across space to consider mobility as a process 'actively shaping or producing multiple, dynamic spaces…' (1). At the same time, it is recognised that 'the fluid and the fixed are relationally interdependent' (Jensen, 2009, p.146), with place providing 'spatial mooring' (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Longino, 1992) and a sense of belonging, home and fixity. While Merriman (2012) and Adey (2006) argue that these 'moorings' are themselves anything other than fluid, the relationship between mobility and place attachment has been subject to considerable discussion within the mobilities literature.

In an important intervention, Gustafson (2001) criticises the idea that place attachment and mobility are contradictory or mutual exclusive phenomena, suggesting that as well as providing freedoms and new opportunities, mobility can be associated with loss and uprootedness. Similarly, place attachment may signify 'roots, insecurity, and sense of place, but it may also…represent impoverishment and narrow-mindedness' (680; see also Fielding, 1992). Drawing on findings from qualitative research in Sweden, Gustafson states that while some of his participants perceived mobility as an ideal and particular aspects of place identity as traditional, others were able to 'combine the positive aspects of place attachment and mobility in everyday life as well as in their world views and biographical accounts' (68). As such, he suggests that researchers need to give more critical attention to the complex relations between mobility and fixity or, as he puts it, 'roots and routes'.

Others have questioned the significance of mobility within contemporary society. Hammar and Tamas (1997), for example, point to official statistics that indicate that only a minority of the population in most countries move away from their home places or regions. As such they call for increased research on immobilities, particularly the reasons that lie behind people's decision not to migrate. For Malmberg (1997), immobilities are associated with the employment of alternative time-space strategies that allow people to remain local but access more distant socio-economic opportunities. Perhaps the most obvious example is long-distance commuting, which has emerged as a substitute for migration and, for some people, an established way of life (see Green et al., 1999). Attention has also been given to the social and cultural attributes of place that may prevent out-migration, with Longino (1992) arguing that community context – involving social and cultural capital, quality of life and belonging – provides an important form of spatial mooring (see also Harner, 2001; Rowles, 1990).

The relations between mobility and place attachment have been challenged in another way by Barcus and Brunn (2010), who argue that out-migration does not necessarily diminish attachment to place. Broadening understandings of place attachment, they utilise the idea of *place elasticity* to embrace the possibilities of virtual relationships with distant places:

> "The *elasticity of place* allows individuals to maximise economic or social opportunities distant from the place to which one is attached while at the same time perpetuating engagement with that place. Elasticity is possible today because of the extensive transportation and communication networks that facilitate greater interaction among people in distant places." (281)

Their focus is on young people leaving their home places, who they suggest may have moved away from their home community but whose identity with and attachment to that place remain strong. Moreover, they contend that these mobilities have the potential to create meaningful attachments to multiple places.

An interesting feature of recent studies of mobilities is their particular geographical coverage. The dominant spatial focus of research has been very much on urban places. Indeed, the city has emerged as the archetypal space of (hyper-) mobility given its association with 'speed, movement, energy and a 24/7 economy' (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011, p.8) and the 'emergence of high-tech "e-topias" of wireless urbanism' (Hannam et al., 2006, p.11). However, as Bracey's (1959) quotation, included at the start of this section, indicates, mobility has long represented a significant research theme within rural studies, both in terms of the spatial analysis of population movements between rural and urban places, and studies of the social and cultural impacts of migration in particular places (see Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Milbourne, 2007; Phillips, 1993; Smith, 2007). Beyond these previous studies of migration, we argue that 'the rural' constitutes an extremely interesting case study of contemporary mobilities. Not only are rural places being reshaped by complex patterns of movement in similar ways to cities but rural mobilities offer new perspectives on the complex interplay between movement, fixity and place, as well as the everyday problematics of mobility.

Our intention in writing this paper is to provide critical engagement with emerging themes within the mobilities literature within the context of the everyday worlds of people living in rural places. We do this in two main ways. In the next section of the paper we provide a critical review of the ways in which the themes of migration and mobility have been approached by rural scholars. Following on from this we draw on materials from a recent research project to explore three forms of rural mobility: first, the complex movements of people to, from and through rural places; second, the everyday experiences of being on the move in rural places; and third, the problematics and potentialities of virtual forms of rural mobility.

2. From rural migration to rural mobilities

Recent years have witnessed calls for rural researchers to engage more critically with the mobilities turn within the social sciences. Rural population studies have been criticised for providing a rather narrow focus on uni-directional, long distance and permanent movements of people to rural places. What is needed, it is claimed, is a more sophisticated approach that is able to capture a broader range of spatial scales and temporalities associated with rural mobility, including:

> "…movements into, out of, within and through rural places; journeys of a few yards as well as those of many hundreds of miles; linear flows between particular locations and more complex spatial patterns of movement; stops of a few hours, days or weeks as well as many decades; journeys of necessity and choice; economic and lifestyle-based movements; hyper- and im-mobilities; conflicts and complementarities; and uneven power relations and processes of marginalisation. It is these different mobilities, present in different combinations in

different places, that produce the complexities of rural population change"

(Milbourne, 2007; pp.385–6).

It has also been suggested that rural places are characterised by a somewhat complicated interplay between mobility and fixity. Dominant cultural constructions of rurality remain heavily laden with notions of stability, rootedness, attachment to place and localism (Cloke et al., 2003). As Bell and Osti (2010, p.202) comment, 'the sense of the rural as having persistent stabilities (whether this is materially true or not) is important in shaping the symbolic use of the rural throughout contemporary culture and politics'. In this discursive sense, rural places would appear to be positioned at the opposite end of the mobilities spectrum to cities. However, we argue that these 'persistent stabilities' are themselves fluid in nature, as they are both underpinned and undermined by a complex range of mobilities being played out in rural spaces.

Mobility has long represented a prominent theme within rural studies in the UK. When we examine some key texts on rural living written in the middle decades of the twentieth century, it is clear that underneath a meta-narrative of stasis, tradition and localism, mobility constitutes an important shaper of place. For example, while Rees' (1950, p.170) seminal rural community study emphasises 'the completeness of the traditional rural society – involving the cohesion of family, kindred and neighbours – and its capacity to give the individual a sense of belonging', his research also reveals that out-migration, predominantly involving young people, had halved the size of the community's population during the previous hundred years. Other rural community studies undertaken in the immediate post-war period indicate the increasing complexity of mobility in rural areas as rising levels of car ownership and the growth of working-class tourism brought new groups into the countryside (see also Davies and Rees, 1960; Bracey, 1959). For example, in a study of a coastal town in north-west Wales, Jenkins (1960) describes the dramatic impacts of mass tourism on its physical and economic structure:

"Coastal hamlets…have doubled their population in this century; they have become secluded resorts for the industrial workers from Lancashire and the English Midlands….On the plateau overlooking the Bay, chapels and isolated farmsteads have been submerged in a sprawl of building…More recently have appeared rows of detached and semi-detached bungalows together with less permanent summer chalets and caravan sites"

(Jenkins, 1960; pp.142–143).

Bracey's (1959) study of English rural life in the early post-war period points to the symbolic significance of mobility within discourses of rurality. On the one hand, he suggests that new forms of mobility, particularly those associated with motor transport, were improving service provision and the lives of people on low income in rural areas. On the other, he constructs these new mobilities as a threat to the traditional nature of rurality and landscape, commenting that '…so much of the countryside has disappeared that the 'traditional' English village, with its houses grouped tidily around the green, church or crossroads, is fast passing' (p232; see also Merriman, 2012). Such threats were also a key motivation behind the establishment of the town and country planning system in the UK in the 1940s, with the mass incursion of working class groups from the cities viewed as endangering the natural and social order of the countryside (Sibley, 1995; Newby, 1977).

Mobility has continued to represent a prominent theme within British rural studies in more recent years but has tended to be discussed in relation to the changing geographies of migration. The prime driver of academic interest has been the so-called rural population turnaround that began to be identified in parts of the peri-urban countryside in the 1970s. By the early 1990s, it was clear that most rural districts had recorded population increases across the previous decade, with this growth resulting from the in-migration of groups from urban areas. Rural researchers sought to make sense of these 'new' processes of rural population change through analyses of official demographic data, commissioned surveys of in-moving households and place-based studies of the social and cultural impacts of in-migrants (see Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Cloke and Thrift, 1987; Hoggart, 1997; Murdoch, 1995; Phillips, 1993; Smith, 2007).

Within this body of work particular attention has been given to the class-based nature of population in-migration, particularly the significance of middle or service class groups movements from urban places. The scale of this migration has led to claims that the middle-classes have 'captured' rural spaces (Murdoch, 1995). In addition, middle-class migration has been shown to play a part in the gentrification of rural settlements (Cloke and Thrift, 1990; Cloke et al., 1998; Phillips, 1993), pricing low and middle income groups out of local property markets and leading to movements of people from rural to urban places in search of more affordable housing opportunities (Cloke et al., 2002; Commission for Rural Communities, 2008). In the context of this paper, the influx of middle-class groups to rural places has also introduced new sets of relations between fixity and mobility, with the traditional sedentary trappings of the home in the country being replaced by complex movements between rural and urban places, associated with commuting to city-based jobs, accessing retail services and enabling social networking opportunities.

These flows of people into and out of rural places have again been awarded considerable symbolic value within political and media discourse through references to tensions between locals and newcomers, the extinction of the 'authentic' countryside, and cultural and linguistic conflicts (see Cloke et al., 1998; Day, 2011; Milbourne, 2011). Research on cultural marginalisation in rural areas also highlights the value-laden nature of the migration of different groups to and from rural places (see Cloke and Little, 1997; Milbourne, 1997). For example, the movement of travellers to rural areas has been associated with considerable controversy, with this group very much constructed as 'out of place' by local residents and politicians, and national legislation introduced in the mid-1990s to prevent their future incursion into rural space (see Davis, 1997; Hetherington, 2000; Sibley, 1994). Mobility has also featured as an important component of rural welfare research. Recent studies of poverty and homelessness illustrate how out-migration is generally viewed as an accepted response to rural problems but that when the poor or homeless seek to relocate to rural places then their presence is very much contested by the local population (Cloke et al., 2002; Milbourne, 2004). Furthermore, (im)mobility represents a significant dimension of rural deprivation, with the closure of local shops, the centralisation of public and social services, and the retraction of public transport provision trapping some groups within local space and forcing others to employ complex coping strategies to access facilities and services that have relocated to other places (see Cloke et al., 1994, 1997; Commission for Rural Communities, 2008; Milbourne, 2004).

Finally, reference needs to be made to virtual forms of rural mobility. Since the late 1980s digital technology has been discussed as a potential panacea for rural problems, enabling remote rural places to connect to new global networks. Initial research attention was given to the concept of teleworking, based in the home or small

offices, with these new forms of working seen as a means of reducing commuting to distant places of employment and revitalising rural communities and economies (Clark, 2000). More recently, discussion has focused on the potential impacts of high-speed Broadband technologies in rural areas. Work has explored how the Internet provides new techno-spaces for youth culture in rural areas, expanding young people's 'repertoire of identities' in the local community and beyond (Laegran, 2002). In addition, attention has been given to the role of new generation Broadband in addressing rural disadvantage (Collins and Wellman, 2010; Kenyon et al., 2002). As England's Commission for Rural Communities (2009, p5) states in a recent report:

> "Digital technology is vital to the sustainability of rural communities and economies. Through the use of digital technology, rural communities can access services on an equitable level with their urban neighbours, thereby reducing disadvantage and social injustice…"

This report also highlights the difficulties of accessing digital technology and slower Broadband speeds in rural areas, which are exacerbating the 'rural digital divide'. While industry figures suggest that 70 per cent of homes in rural England were accessible to Broadband in 2005, five per cent were still reliant on dial-up connections in 2009 compared with only two per cent of the urban population. In addition, 30 per cent of households in 'village, hamlet and isolated dwellings' rural areas had a download speed of less than one megabit per second and 80 per cent less than five megabits per second compared with nine per cent and 27 per cent respectively in urban areas.

It is clear from this review that mobility represents a significant theme within several strands of research in rural studies across several decades. It is also apparent that researchers have largely approached mobility in a rather piecemeal manner, restricting coverage to migratory flows or to the periphery of other research themes. Our intention in this paper is to provide more critical and broader coverage of rural mobilities. We do this in three ways. First, we explore the spatial and temporal complexities of rural migration, highlighting the different scales, directions and temporalities that characterise population movement in rural areas. Second, we consider the ways in which people living in rural places practise mobilities, focussing on their complex and often problematic journeys across space and the difficulties bound up with being mobile in such places. Third, we examine the increasing importance of virtual forms of mobilities within the lives of rural residents.

The empirical focus of the paper is rural Wales and, more specifically, four small communities located in its remoter areas: Clydau in the south-west, Llangammarch Wells in mid Wales, Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa in the north-east, and Aberdaron in the north-west (see Fig. 1). Five phases of research were undertaken within these four communities over a period of 18 months between 2008 and 2010. First, a survey of all heads of households in each community was conducted in the winter of 2008–09.[1] Involving face-to-face interviewing and a questionnaire covering a broad range of themes, the survey provided a total of 845 completed responses, representing a 51 per cent completion rate. Analysis of responses confirms that the demographic profile of the survey respondents was consistent with that recorded by the 2001 Census of Population. Second, 60 in-depth interviews (15 in each place) were conducted in 2009 with a sample of respondents to explore community living in greater depth. Interviewees were selected to provide coverage of a range of situations, including gender, age, employment status, mobility, language competency and location. All interviews were sound-recorded and transcribed. Recognising the limited inclusion of young people in the survey sample, the third phase of research involved focus groups with teenagers who lived in the study areas. These group discussions were structured around similar themes to the in-depth interviews.

Fourth, 20 participants completed a written diary covering their activities in a particular week, which provided detailed accounts of their personal mobilities. Finally, further research was conducted in one of the communities – Llangammarch Wells – in 2010 to provide a more in-depth account of people's interaction with digital technology. This involved in-depth interviews with 14 survey respondents who had different levels of engagement with the Internet. In terms of analysis of the research materials, the survey data were analysed through the SPSS computer package using the key themes of the questionnaire as an analytical framework. Descriptive data were generated for the whole sample and then cross-tabulated according to several variables, including community, age, gender, income and mobility. The qualitative materials were analysed using conventional coding and sorting techniques, with the key themes of the interview and focus group schedules providing the initial framing for the analysis.

3. Mobilities in rural Wales

i. The spatial and temporal complexities of migration

Reflecting Hammar and Tamas' (1997) argument about the need to consider mobility in the context of immobility, it is possible to construct the four case-study communities as places of both demographic change and stability. In terms of change, 32 per cent of households had relocated to the local area during the 10 years prior to the survey, with this figure rising to 39 per cent in Clydau and 38 per cent in Llangammarch. However, 45 per cent had lived in the community for more than 25 years and 24 per cent of respondents had spent all their lives in the community. Indeed, in two of the communities – Aberdaron and Llanfihangel – more than half of respondents had been resident for at least a quarter of a century. It is also the case that migration to these communities involves a range of spatial scales. Local movements – people relocating from adjoining communities - accounted for 21 per cent of in-migration and a further 23 per cent of in-movers had previously lived in other parts of Wales. The dominant forms of migration, though, involved people moving from England, which accounted for 51 per cent of all in-moving households. This scale of migration from England was broadly consistent across the study communities, ranging from 47 per cent of in-migrants in Llanfihangel to 56 per cent in Aberdaron. In terms of the type of place that these in-migrants had moved from, 24 per cent had previously lived in cities, 27 per cent in towns and 47 per cent of respondents had moved from rural places. Looking across the study communities, the influence of urban migration was strongest in Aberdaron, where 31 per cent of in-migrants had moved from cities.

When we explore reasons for moving to these communities amongst those relocating from England, a rather complex mix of work, housing, social and environmental factors is apparent. Relatively few migrants cited employment (six per cent) or housing (nine per cent) as a key factor behind their move. Rather, social and environmental issues emerged as important reasons for migration to the study communities. For example, 12 per cent had moved to be closer to family and 16 per cent of migrants cited the local environment or scenery as reasons for their relocation. A further nine per cent of migrants had moved for the peace and quiet of the

[1] One consequence of undertaking the survey in winter was that almost all respondents were permanent residents.

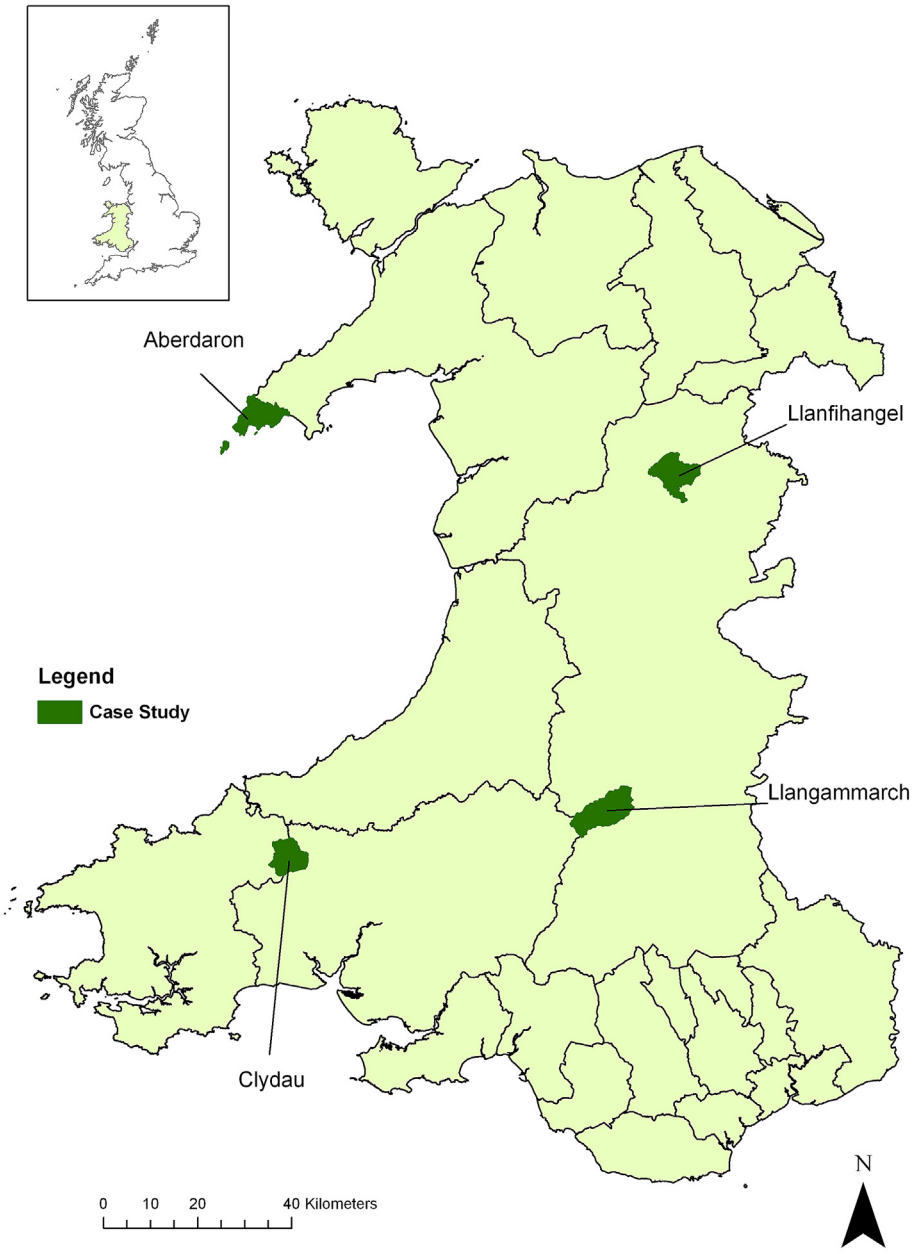

Fig. 1. The four case study communities in rural Wales.

area and 18 per cent had relocated for a different pace of life. This idea of a slower pace of rural life also represents a key theme within the interviews with migrants. For example, Heather[2] commented that she had moved to Aberdaron for a *'more laid back, no hassle life'*. In her discussion of life in Llangammarch, Maddie remarked that *'if you are not looking for a fast pace of life and you are happy to take things steady then it is lovely around here'*. Similarly, Emily, an English migrant living in Aberdaron, felt that *'I wouldn't move from the Llŷn. I love the fresh air and the leisurely pace of life here and the fact that there's just no rush, especially in the winter'*.

Mobility also exhibits a significant presence within these communities in the form of out-migration. While the research was conducted with those who were currently resident in the study areas, official statistics indicate net out-movements of young people from these areas across many decades. Interviewees and young people in the discussion groups made frequent reference to young people leaving their local area, with some pointing to the long established nature of these movements. For example, Bob commented that *'as for youngsters going away, I think Pembrokeshire has always had that problem. My father had to go [and] funnily enough, his father had done the same'*. Restricted local employment opportunities were viewed as the main factor underpinning out-migration, whether for graduates or those seeking skilled manual work. Within many of the narratives there was a sense of both inevitability and sadness about the out-migration of young people, as the following quotations reveal:

> *"This particular area…all the kids are sort of away to get a better job in Birmingham or London. Once they have gone to university they don't come back again. Very sad, but I completely understand*

[2] Names of participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

why they want to have a career… it always happens to some extent - but when it is 80 per cent of all of them!"

(Jane, Llanfihangel)

Returning to Gustafson's (2001) notion of 'roots and routes', although many of the young people involved in the focus groups recognised that the realities of local work would force them to move away, most expressed a desire to move back to their local area at some point in the future. What is evident within their narratives is a complex amalgam of 'routes' and 'roots' bound up with decision-making processes, involving the primacy of economic-led movements and the cultural significance of home and place, as the following examples illustrate:

"I do think, though, that even if I went away…I would want to come back to this area. This is where my roots are and I know everyone here, so this is where I'll end up I think".

(Llangammarch young people focus group)

"I have tried to move away, but just get drawn back, more than once…I guess being brought up on a farm, I really feel that I belong to the land, and that is the only way I can put it now as an adult, is that I belong to the land…And it is an identity thing- I have tried to escape but I can't. This is where I want to bring my children up- absolutely."

(Peter, Clydau)

Barcus and Brunn's (2010) notion of place elasticity can also be identified within some of the narratives emerging from the interviews and discussions with young people, with references made to the ways in which out-migrants remained part of their 'home' communities through the use of digital technologies – such as the Internet, email, Skype and Facebook – as well as attendance at key community and family events at different times of the year.

Another form of mobility evident within the study communities was that associated with tourism. While research participants in all areas mentioned tourism, it was in the coastal community of Aberdaron – where about one quarter of all properties are second or holiday homes – that it received most discussion. In one sense, the movement of tourists to and through these communities helps to maintain certain stabilities, particularly those related to the local economy. As Elisabeth commented in relation to Aberdaron, *'there are a lot of holiday homes here now and on the whole people realise that that's where the money comes from because, if you think about it, the main industry around here is tourism'*. In another sense, the seasonal flows of tourists to and from this community were viewed as altering the nature of place. Some interviewees talked about Aberdaron as a *'ghost village'* in the winter months. As Victoria remarked, *'there are too many empty houses in the winters, so it's very lonely here…It definitely does affect the community round here'*. Conversely, tourists were seen by others as 'taking over' communities in the summer, creating mobility problems for local residents going about their everyday lives: *'they park everywhere and take over the roads don't they…and they just don't move out of your way'* (Aberdaron young people focus group).

ii. Everyday mobilities

Living in these rural communities is bound up with a great deal of everyday mobility. With places of work, retail facilities and key services often located at considerable distances, residents are required to make journeys across space that are significant in length and complex in nature. The inadequacy of public transport provision creates additional problems. Across the four communities, 71 per cent of respondents reported the presence of a bus stop within walking distance of their property but 69 per cent rated public transport provision as 'poor' or 'very poor', with the infrequency of service the main problem cited by respondents.[3] As such, considerable reliance was placed on private transport to maintain mobility, with only 29 per cent of respondents using a bus service and 94 per cent considering a car essential to live in their area. An example of this reliance on the car relates to travelling to work, where 88 per cent used a private car, four per cent walked and none travelled by public transport. In the survey responses and interviews, residents also highlighted how they had been forced to become more mobile in recent years as local service provision had deteriorated. For example, 37 per cent of respondents considered that the provision of services in their local area had worsened during the last five years compared with 19 per cent reporting any improvement. Again, variation was evident across the four communities, with local service deterioration mentioned by 47 per cent of respondents in Llangammarch, 44 per cent in Llanfihangel, 31 per cent in Clydau and by 28 per cent of Aberdaron respondents.

Turning to travel-to-work patterns, findings from this study would appear to support Green et al. (1999) and Malmberg's (1997) argument concerning the normalisation of long-distance commuting as an alternative strategy to migration, with 21 per cent of those in employment travelling more than 40 miles to work each day and seven per cent having daily commutes of more than 100 miles. As Clive commented in relation to long-distance commuting in Clydau:

"People that live in the village tend to travel very far and really have to think about what they are doing. A classic example of that is going to Cardiff[4] every day. We have got a population that lives locally [but] works far away."

Long-distance journeys were also a feature of accessing key retail facilities and services. In terms of getting to a supermarket, Phil, a resident of Llanfihangel stated, *'[it's] Shrewsbury if you want to go to the supermarket; it is 30 miles, it's a 60 mile round trip'*. To deal with such distances, many residents adopted careful travel strategies that enabled food shopping to be combined with other activities. As another Llanfihangel resident commented, *'where we live you think, oh I need a food-shop, so you make sure you do your food-shop so you haven't got two journeys that particular week. That's why it is combined journeys…you know you combine them all.'* (Nicola). Another means of securing more distant retail facilities and services involved making use of family and friends. For example, 41 per cent of survey respondents stated that they regularly provided help to people in their local area to access services located beyond the locality and 18 per cent relied on friends, neighbours and family to secure such services. Particular mention was made of the plight of older people without access to a car, whose ability to remain living locally was being sustained by the generosity of others:

"…there are three widows living in the village and none of them drive, so they are reliant on other people. The one lady is housebound so she's got carers coming in, but the other two are reliant on other people doing their daily life things for them."

(Shirley, Clydau)

[3] It should be noted that public transport provision varied across the study communities. Two communities had one bus service per day while the other communities had at least five services each day. One of the communities also contained a train station.

[4] Cardiff is located 84 miles from Clydau.

In order to provide a more detailed account of the experiences of everyday mobilities in these communities we turn to the weekly diaries completed by some of our research participants. We present vignettes of four retired households, three of whom lived in one community, to illustrate the diverse range of experiences of mobilities in rural places. The first vignette is of Dorothy, a retired woman in her late 60s who lived by herself and had spent most of her life in the local area (Box 1). She did not have access to the Internet at home and her savings were less than £1000. Her week was based around the home with only one trip away. Not possessing a car, Dorothy was reliant on a voluntary transport scheme to take her to the nearest town, which was 17 miles away, once a week. As can be seen from Box 1, this was a multi-purpose trip to maximise her opportunities in the town, involving supermarket shopping, collecting medicine and exchanging library books. Second, we have Chris who lived with his wife Myra (Box 2). Both were retired from work and in their early 70s. They moved to the community from an English city about 15 years ago. They owned a car and had Broadband access. While we witness some use of the household car to travel to a garage and supermarket, the dominant forms of daily movement involves Chris walking to services with his dog as well as Myra's horseback-riding. What is also evident here is the informal support being offered to an elderly neighbour.

The third vignette involves Penelope who lived with her husband, Peter. Both were in their late 70s and had always lived in the local area. Their savings totalled less than £2000. They were no longer able to drive but did have access to the Internet. What is clear from this case is that Penelope and John maintained their mobility through the community bus and lifts provided by friends (Box 3). They also made extensive use of home delivery for goods provided by local traders, particularly food and domestic fuel. The Internet was used to pay household bills, keep in touch with distant friends and purchase films. The diary entries reveal that Penelope not only contrasts the different paces of life between rural village and town, but also constructs nature as an important constituent of her everyday life and mobilities. Fourth, Jenny and her husband, Peter, a couple in their late 70s, had lived in the community for four years, following a move from England (Box 4). With both of them suffering from ill-health, which restricted their physical mobility, and living away from a bus stop, frequent use was made of the household car throughout the week. Jenny's medical condition meant that they regularly travelled to the local pharmacy and more distant hospital. Walking up the hill to the post box was problematic for them and so the car was used for even the shortest of journeys.

Collectively, these vignettes illustrate the complexities of everyday mobilities in rural places. They highlight the difficulties associated with purchasing necessary goods, accessing essential services and travelling to other places, as well as the reliance placed on community transport and the private car to undertake multi-purpose journeys to towns. Indeed, without access to these forms of transport it is unlikely that our diarists would be able to remain in these places. The home delivery of retail goods provides an important response to such mobility difficulties, involving both traditional forms of local home shopping via the telephone and web-based retail purchases that allow goods to be delivered to the home from further afield. The diary entries also illustrate how everyday mobilities are being drawn in to particular discourses of rural and urban living, with the 'hurrying and scurrying' of the town contrasted with the tranquillity of rural living. Important here is the way in which mobilities extend beyond the human realm to encompass the sounds and sights of nature, as well as the role performed by animals within people's everyday lives and mobilities. A final point to make about these vignettes is that the experiences of rural place, personal mobility and travelling between rural and urban places are highly variable amongst these four older people, suggesting the need for researchers to remain sensitive to individual situations and experiences of mobility.

Box 1
Dorothy

23rd February: No journey undertaken
24th February: No journey undertaken
25th February: No journey undertaken
26th February: No journey undertaken
27th February: Weekly journey to Builth Wells for shopping and to collect repeat prescription…also to return and then choose library books from Builth library. Then to Builth Cooperative store which is the only supermarket for 17 miles. Transport courtesy of Llanwrtyd Wells and District Community Transport. Collected at my door 11.10 to 11.15 and returned at approx 13.50…This service is an absolute godsend to those of who have no transport of our own!
28th February: No journey undertaken
1st March: No journey undertaken

Box 2
Chris

24th February: Take car to Merthyr Tydfil to diagnose oil leak, two hour return trip. Myra walked the dog for me and then went for four hour ride on horse.
25th February: Walked to town and back to collect papers – total 3 miles, accompanied by Myra and the dog. Walked back in to town – friend had trouble with front door lock…Myra out on horse – 4 h.
26th February: Walked dog approx 2 miles. Short walk today. Then drove 20 miles to Llandrindod Wells for special ingredients for dinner party.
27th February: Get dressed for hill walking. Pack dog in car and drive to station (1 mile). Meet two friends and 4 dogs! Take train approx. 8 miles south then walk back to Llanwrtyd Wells via cross-country roads and hills. Picnic lunch, swift half at the local hotel…then home.
28th February: Walked dogs – we are looking after friends dog for two days. Rest of day spent in house.
1st March: Walked dog – 3 miles. Called in on elderly neighbour to set up her new TV…Myra out on horse (3½ h). Walk 3 miles to pub – swift couple of halves…Home for dinner.
2nd March: Walked in to town after breakfast with dog. Fetched paper, sorted out world and agricultural problems with local farmers. Walked back home (6 miles total).

iii. Virtual mobilities

The paper to this point has reflected what might be termed conventional forms of mobility, involving physical movements across rural spaces and between rural and urban places. We now turn to consider the virtual mobilities afforded by access to the Internet, which, it is claimed, have the potential to transform ways of rural living. Viable access to virtual mobilities clearly requires the availability of appropriate Broadband technology. The survey reveals that only 51 per cent of households had a Broadband connection, with this figure falling to 41 per cent and 43 per cent in Llangammarch and Llanfihangel respectively. It is also apparent that within individual communities, the ability to access Broadband was variable. As Lisa commented: *'we are very, very lucky because when I lived up in Cefn Coch and even some places in Llanfihangel, there…[was] no Broadband. I don't know why we get it here. I don't know why we got so lucky'*.

Box 3
Penelope

25th February: My husband John and I were picked up at the door by the Community Bus at 9.45am bound for Carmarthen…We get quite excited when we see all the displays in stores such as Marks and Spencer's, Wilkinson's and The Works, and spend more money than we should! Laden with bags, we rejoin the Community Bus at 2.00pm and head for home. We see the finest little lambs in the fields, catkins on the trees…We are deposited at our door at 4.00pm. It has been a successful day's outing and we are grateful for this service.

26th February: We are a bit tired today, after running around Carmarthen yesterday. This is not just physical – though this is part of it – but living as we do in peaceful rural Wales, among the hills, fields and rivers – woken by the dawn chorus…and hearing the breeze in the trees – a day in town or city with all the noise and bustle, busy crowds of strangers – hurrying, scurrying – with the traffic and plethora of sights all attracting attention, and decisions, can all feel quite draining (even for people born and bred to big city living)!...

27th February: This morning…the butcher delivers the meat to the house. (He had phoned as usual for the order on Monday afternoon)…He also delivers bags of potatoes and other vegetables if we want them…John joined the Community Bus, bound for Builth Wells, where he would purchase fresh bread and greens for the weekend. He also bought a mobile phone as our old one – years old – had ceased working! At 5.15pm friends collected me by car and we went to…our weekly art class.

28th February: John went as usual to the village inn with our neighbour, Tony. Peter calls…He has brought coal and bird nuts for me…

1st March: …We spend a quiet day reading the Sunday papers…

2nd March: I submitted meter readings to Eon online prior to next bill…I also sent emails to family members In Australia…

3rd March: …George, the log man, arrived during the morning and he and John uploaded and stacked them…The young woman from the village comes to the door with fresh eggs…John went with our neighbour, Bob, in his car to the nearby village of Beulah for coal and wood strips and cream paint from the builders' merchants for the bathroom…We now intend to watch a film on DVD. We get these films by post – a very good service.

Box 4
Jenny

25th February: Car journey to Carmarthen (20 miles each way) to collect bulk order of detergent from Morrisons [supermarket]. Car to local rubbish dump. Then on to Crymych to butcher (6 miles). Drove domestic help home (2 miles).

26th February: Car to Newcastle Emlyn (6 miles) for building society and prescriptions from chemist.

27th February: Car journey to Newcastle Emlyn (6 miles) for further prescriptions following visit by doctor.

28th February: Car to local shop for newspaper and small groceries (1.5 miles). This used to be the post office but that was closed last year…The range of groceries is minimal and highly priced, so we rarely make use of it. Bread can only be bought once a week.

1st March: Car to another local shop for Sunday newspaper (3 miles). This is the nearest post office. Short car trip to nearest post box. Only a quarter of a mile but involves a very steep hill, beyond the capacity of my husband or myself with our health problems.

2nd March: Car to Tesco at Cardigan (10 miles each way). Take home domestic help.

3rd March: Emergency journey by car to Carmarthen following visit by doctor. Carmarthen is 20 miles away but is our nearest hospital for any but the slightest treatment. The doctor was unwilling to involve ambulances or hospital cars, so we were forced to use our own transport.

For those households with Broadband, new opportunities were emerging to shrink the distances between their homes and service and retail providers. Home delivery had become a reality for some, involving on-line shopping for food, clothes and other items. As these two interviewees observed:

"I mean it is difficult to get to a big shop from here. You've got to go to Hereford, and if you go to Hereford, it's 50 miles so you have to spend a lot on petrol and by the time you've done that you might just as well have saved by going on the net to buy it."

(Peter, Llangammarch)

"We can have our groceries delivered here. They come up from Merthyr Tydfil of all places. But if we were to drive to Merthyr Tydfil, it would be extremely time consuming for us. We're quite a long way from any significant settlement."

(Bert, Llangammarch)

Most of the participants using the Internet in Llangammarch claimed it had increased their contact with family living beyond the local community, including children who had moved out of the area. Five of the 14 interviewees also considered that the Internet had increased contact with friends living at a distance and seven people felt that contact with friends living in the local area had increased. In some cases, the Internet had been used to renew friendships with people who had moved away. As might be expected, a variety of digital media technology was being used to communicate with family and friends, including Messenger, Skype and Facebook:

"...and the other thing that we…do it a lot, is Skype web-cam…because my partner's children are way down in Sussex."

(Mary, Llangammarch)

"….very often we can see whether they're on, you know you go on you've got messenger there and ...I think I use that more often than the email. Yes, I didn't have any contact with a friend who moved to New Zealand...and now I've found her on Facebook. I thought I'd lost touch with her altogether and I found her on Facebook and we're in regular contact now, again. And I've got another friend in Canada and we're in regular contact."

(Peter, Llangammarch)

"Skype is invaluable to a chap like me. I have a son who works in Doha as an archaeologist. I've got all of my working friends, I suppose no more than about five to seven per cent live in the UK. They either live in Europe or the States."

(John, Llangammarch)

Digital social networking was used most frequently by young people as it enabled them to keep in touch with friends who lived in the local area but were considered to be too distant to enable them to maintain face-to-face contact with them without recourse to car journeys:

"The nearest people are sort of two or three miles away and most of their friends are you know in Builth or live even beyond Builth in Llandrindod … But yeah they can't go out in the evenings to meet their friends so they go on Facebook."

(Jackie, Llangammarch)

The CRC (2009, p4) suggests that those unable to access Broadband are 'excluded from what, for a large section of the

population, are now basic services, such as applying for road tax and other Post Office services, downloading music and social networking'. Returning to the survey, 58 per cent of respondents considered a good Broadband service as essential to living in their local community and a further 33 per cent deemed it as desirable. For Ben, Broadband was constructed as essential to the sustainability of rural lifestyles:

> *"…Broadband is nowadays the heart of everything. If you want to be in business, if you want to stay on, if you're talking about social networks, that's where it's all happening especially for younger people, so Broadband is a big thing. Well unless you want this sort of area to die you've got to give people nowadays communication. You have got to give people the opportunity to be able to use that sort of communication to get into business."*
>
> (Ben, Llangammarch)

For those without Broadband access, the frustrations associated with accessing what are now taken-for-granted Internet services were very much evident. Steve remained reliant on a dial-up service, which meant that *'the most you can get is 28 KB, which is pathetic and no matter how big your computer is you can't get any more because the phone-line is so ancient'*. Others discussed the difficulties faced by their children in undertaking on-line research for her homework:

> *"We are desperate for it to be up. My daughter suffers because we don't have Broadband because of her school. Everything is computerised, absolutely everything. They want pictures to do with their projects and things like that and everything is on computer, and it's such a dinosaur age trying to wait for dial-up. It's terrible. It keeps cutting out anyway."*
>
> (Amanda, Llangammarch)

For several people with Broadband access, problems were reported with download speeds, particularly associated with services delivered through telephone lines and caused by the distance between properties and the nearest telephone exchange. As Clare commented, *'well I might as well go back to dial-up given the speed that we get. It's less than one meg [per second]'*. In other cases, Broadband access was reported to be unreliable at particular times of the day:

> *"The actual Broadband speed is very low. It's half a megabyte. So we tend to fall off the end when it gets busy. So there are certain times of day when you ...you've got a pretty good idea that you're not going to have any success at all with the connection. And that's the frustration with the system at the moment."*
>
> (Bert, Llangammarch)

4. Changing mobilities, changing places: towards new agendas for rural mobilities research

Our intention in writing this paper has been to explore mobilities in the context of the everyday worlds of people living in rural places. In doing this we have sought to position mobilities at the core of our understanding of rural places. It is clear that mobility has long been a significant driver of change in rural areas, initially through the mass out-migration of young people, then through flows of (working-class) tourists and (middle-class) holiday home owners, and, more recently, through the permanent in-movements of middle-class groups. Our exploration of migratory flows, everyday forms of mobility and virtual mobilities in the four case study communities highlights the continued importance of mobility to the constitution of rural places. Following on from this, we want to argue that these and other rural places need to be interpreted as the intersections of complex flows of people that involve different spatial scales and temporalities of movement. The arrival of ex-urban residents, the departure of young people to cities, the return of out-migrants and the seasonal flows of urban tourists to and through these places mean that rural places remain in a continual state of flux, always being remade and never completed (Massey, 2005; Thrift, 1999).

What is also apparent from our study is the reciprocal relationship between mobilities and the dynamics of rural place. The movements of different groups in to, out of and through rural spaces and places have not only altered the demographic profile of the study communities but also impacted on their local sociocultural and linguistic composition. Indeed, some long-term residents discussed these migratory processes as destroying place, undermining community cohesion and damaging long established cultural norms. At the same time, it is clear that the shifting structures of rural places have impacted on mobilities. The withdrawal of jobs, food shops, smaller hospitals, bus services and primary schools from the study communities has necessitated more frequent, longer and more complex journeys across rural space and between rural and urban places. In some cases, people with mobility problems have been forced to rely on friends and family to make these journeys, while for others, the complexity and costs associated with travelling has led them to relocate to urban places where a broader range of retail facilities and services exists. Furthermore, this declining local service base is likely to shape futures rounds of migration as households without cars, on lower incomes and with school age children are effectively being barred from living within places lacking key facilities. As Phil, a long-term resident of Llanfihangel remarked:

> *"You are restricting the people coming in- right – and you're just saying to people well sorry it's only for people who have got a car, who have probably got a job away. And then the social structure is just going to go because what are they going to do when they leave at 6.30, 7 o'clock in the morning and they get back at 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock at night. They are not going to go around and turn around and say I'm going to go to a meeting – they are knackered. How you're going to get people to come into the community if you haven't got services? It's a village that has a kind of terminal disease and it is very, very slow and nobody knows what the cure is".*

It is important to stress that some of the taken-for-granted aspects of mobility in the city are either absent from, or more problematic to practise in rural places. The inadequacy of public transport provision means that increased reliance is placed on the household car to travel between places. The absence of local retail facilities and other essential services necessitates long and complicated journeys, and the patchy provision and slow speeds of Broadband in rural areas severely constrains virtual forms of mobility. It is also the case that some of the key forms of spatial infrastructure associated with urban mobility, such as public transport routes, dual carriageways, petrol stations, and even pavements remain largely absent in smaller and remoter rural places,[5] meaning that the experience of mobility is, in many ways, different to that in the city. Moreover, we want to suggest that not

[5] This is not to deny that Britain's motorways mostly pass through rural spaces but we would argue that their primary purpose was and remains to create fast routes between urban places (see also Merriman, 2007).

only is being on the move more difficult in rural spaces, it is associated more with necessity than choice. Rural mobility is something that has to be endured and carefully planned when a bottle of milk, loaf of bread or a hospital appointment can take the best part of a day to secure for those without cars.

Our research also highlights the rather complex and contradictory relationship between mobility, immobility and fixity that exists in rural places. Although (hyper-)mobility represents a key requirement of contemporary rural lifestyles, it is clear that rural places provide important spatial moorings[6] for residents, offering spaces of rest, community, cultural belonging, stability, home and connections with nature. Indeed, one of the main reasons why people remain in these types of rural locality in the face of the withdrawal of local services is their attachment to place. However, as Barcus and Brunn (2010) and Gustafson (2006) have noted, we need to develop more sophisticated accounts of the relationship between mobility and place-based attachment. Our study points to strong associations with place developed by incomers and young people maintaining contact with their communities after moving out as well expressing a desire to return at some point in the future. In addition, the everyday mobilities associated with long-distance commuting have, for some, enabled stability and maintained long-term connections with place. Amongst our participants, cultural and linguistic identity, the sociality of close-knit community living and the aesthetics of landscape and nature were very much constructed as compensating for the everyday inconveniences of travelling to distant locations. However, these socio-cultural and natural belongings and stabilities are themselves being undermined by the increasingly mobile nature of rurality, with the cultural and linguistic composition of these places threatened by the in- and out-flows of migrants described earlier, and the requirement for hyper-mobility and being away from home for significant periods of time undermining processes of community-making. This is the paradox apparent in many rural places: on the one hand, they require mobilities to remain sustainable – in the widest sense of the term – while, on the other, these same mobilities have the power to destroy the essence of rural place.

We recognise that any one paper can only go so far in progressing the mobilities agenda within rural studies. As such, we want to end with a call for further research on rural mobilities, proposing five themes that we see as worthy of future study. First, it would be interesting to provide some detailed ethnographies of travelling across rural spaces, as has been done in relation to urban commuting (Edensor, 2011), to explore the experiences of, *inter alia*, driving along winding lanes, negotiating inadequate public transport services, walking along roads without pavements, travelling through nature, and journeying in the dark. Everyday, mundane and forced mobilities constitute a second future research theme. We have highlighted the significance of these types of mobility to experiences of rural living and conceptions of place and identity but it would be useful to explore these relationships in more detail amongst specific groups – for example, young people, older residents, families with young children, low income households, and people with restricted personal mobility – as well as in a broader range of rural places.

Third, we feel there is a need to consider the relations between human and non-human forms of mobility, particularly the ways in which seasonal changes to the rural landscape impact on people's senses of identity and how micro-climate and local weather inhibit mobility at particular times of the year. Fourth, the linkages between rural mobilities and poverty require further investigation. What are the financial costs of mobility in rural areas and to what extent are these costs excluding those on low (and middle) incomes from rural places? Finally, the proposed rollout of high-speed Broadband to rural areas should create an exciting theme for future research on rural mobilities. Such provision could potentially reduce the need for physical travel between rural and urban places for work and shopping, but it may also initiate new rounds of in-migration as rural home-working becomes a more attractive package for the urban middle-classes.

[6] We agree with Adey (2006) and Merriman (2012) that these moorings are themselves changing but perhaps at a slower pace than other aspects of life, thus providing the impression of stability and security.

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