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Using Mobility to Gain Stability: Rural Household Strategies and Outcomes in Long-Distance Labour Mobility

Author: Deatra Walsh

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Deatra Walsh
Postdoctoral Research Fellow
York University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
deatraw@yahoo.com

Abstract

Current rural studies literature is making the call for more attention to mobilities as a means to understand contemporary rurality. Mobility, envisioned broadly and inclusive of the movement of people, things and ideas, promises to position rural communities in a more active stance, rather than passive, reactive, and in receivership. Contextualized within a larger research project of 37 young women (aged 25-34) living in a rural area of central Newfoundland, Canada, and drawing specifically upon the narratives of nine return migrants with partners who engage in long-distance labour mobility, I explore how mobility is a mechanism through which these women, and their households, achieve both economic and familial stability. My research contributes to a theoretical understanding of mobility that is inclusive of, rather than juxtaposed to, stability. It also contributes to the literature on long-distance labour mobility suggesting that it is not necessarily detrimental to family life. I argue that a household mobility perspective reduces the notion of static rural society and raises new considerations for rural futures. Policy implications for a mobilities perspective are briefly discussed.

Keywords: Mobility, stability, long-distance, Newfoundland, women

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1.0 Introduction

Mobilities is the new mantra for the 21st Century. Globalization, international trade, the Internet, international migration, migrant labour, and travel/tourism are all aspects of our contemporary existence, whether we experience them in person or on the sidelines as spectators. Never before has a sedendarist imagination, argued to have pervaded western thought and scholarship for the past 100 years (Cresswell, 2006), been so intellectually, materially and experientially challenged.

Rural scholarship has risen to the mobilities challenge. Determined to shed light on the notion of mobile rural societies, authors such as Bell and Osti (2010) argue that given a slight bend in our perspective, we can and should explore dimensions of what Halfacree (1993, 1995) has termed "the rural" that are beyond its historically constructed static existence. For a long time rural areas have viewed to be in receivership (Bell et al., 2010)—passive accepters of and reactors to predominantly urban whims and follies, whether economic, social, cultural or political.

Studies of rural migration are no exception to this construction. Outflows of individuals through the process of urbanization have attuned our demographic ears to outmigration, and exodus (see Hiller, 2009), despite the fact that rural

population turnarounds have occurred throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s in Canada, the United States, and other western countries (Champion, 1987; Fuguitt, 1985; Joseph, Keddie & Smit, 1988; Keddie & Joseph, 1991). Examples of return migration are plentiful and in-migration, either as counterurbanization or amenity migration, is a common occurrence. Still, outmigration seems to dominate the rural airwaves.

Linked to this overemphasis on outmigration is a tendency to focus on community, and rural communities in this case, as the unit of analysis. Underlying these investigations is seemingly always a concern about the future of rural areas because migration is so often contextualized, both in reality and representation, through an economic lens. These concerns along with rural futures and rural economies – highlight an essential tension in the migration literature. This tension is between individual interests/behaviours and community outcomes. As Stockdale's work (2004) points out, individual trajectories (e.g. youth outmigration) to leave rural areas for educational and employment opportunities elsewhere counter community-level aspirations to maintain population and combat brain drain. Individuals who "stay behind" are often looked down upon (Gabriel, 2002). Furthermore, those who stay are not always considered to possess the human capital desired by rural leaders and planners (Gabriel, 2002). And, those who return do not always stimulate local economic regeneration (Sinclair, 2003; Stockdale, 2006). The move back, or the choice to stay, may also not always benefit the individual and his/her family. Ni Laoire's (2001) work demonstrates increased emotional and relational strain on young men who stayed behind in rural Ireland. Her work also shows that expectations of nostalgic places are not always met for returners (Ni Laoire, 2007). In short, individual circumstances and aspirations with respect to mobility may not always run in tandem with community goals set by rural leaders and policy makers. Perhaps more importantly for the topic of this paper, what represents stability for the community may not always mean stability for the individual or the household within which the individual is located or vice versa.

The purpose of this article is to examine more closely the subject of stability and instability as it relates to individuals, their households, and the community, within the context of long-distance labour mobility (LDLM). This form of travel includes patterned, sporadic, and prolonged absences away from one's place of residence for the purposes of employment, for at least one night and involves travelling distances greater than 100 km[1]. LDLM is on the rise in Canada (Sharpe 2009; Statistics Canada, 2008; Storey, 2010), and in other industrial countries such as the UK (Green, Hogarth, & Shackleton, 1999) and Australia (Houghton, 1993). Long-distance commuting, as it is sometimes named when referring to more patterned work journeys, is an increasingly viable option for individuals because of access to relatively affordable means of transportation and the fact that in some cases, employers pay to transport commuters (Storey, 2010).

LDLM does challenge notions of stability at the community level. It is true that mobile individuals may contribute to the economic stability of their communities of residence. For example, estimates by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador regarding

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[1] In McNiven, Purderer and Jane's (2000) methodological account of developing the Metropolitan Influenced Zone (MIZ) classification for Canadian commuting across rural and urban geographies, they extrapolate that less than 6% of commuters travel more than 100 km and spend more than 60 minutes for their daily commute.

those who maintain residences in Newfoundland but work in Alberta suggest that this employment arrangement infuses millions of dollars into local areas (CBC News Online, 2007). Despite these economic boosts, other areas of social and civic life may suffer as a result of the mobile workforce (MacDonald, Sinclair, & Walsh, 2012; Storey, 2010). And, while LDLM may offer economic stability to the household, it may also be associated with other dimensions of familial instability such as the poor performance of children in school (Vincent & Neis, 2011), substance abuse, domestic violence, and marital breakups (Newhook et al., 2011).

My argument here is that mobility contributes to community, household, and individual stability *and* instability, however mobility is increasingly the chosen mechanism through which stability is negotiated at the individual and household level. As a result, rural communities must be increasingly prepared for mobile populations; and policies should be put in place to support mobile workers, their families, and the communities in which they live.

I begin this paper with an introduction to the new mobilities literature, arguing that the discussions found within are more fruitful to understand the complexities and representations of rural population change than that those found in the literature which focuses only on migration in its more permanent sense. I then discuss mobility in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, a province with one of the most current and historically mobile populations in the country. Following this, I introduce the comparative research I conducted with female returners, stayers and in-migrants living in a rural area of central Newfoundland. This work assumes a gendered biographical and household approach (Halfacree & Boyle, 1993) to mobility via women's narratives. Using materials from nine interviews with women who have partners travelling long-distances to go to work, I explore mobility using the lenses of stability and instability. Here, I focus predominantly on economic and familial stability, which are achieved through LDLM. I also focus on dimensions of community stability and instability. I then compare these mobile households to several others where there has been a choice by both partners to stay and work in the local area, rather than migrate or engage in LDLM. Findings indicate that the choice to stay is also guided by dimensions of economic and familial stability, but these are of a slightly different order.

LDLM is not necessarily something new within a household context. In fact, most of the nine LDLM households exhibit a history of mobility, in terms of interprovincial outmigration, multiple relocations and male involvement in varying forms of employment-related geographical mobility and other mobile work. Furthermore, for the women who remain at home while their partners are away at work, their involvement in the community is related to the presence of children in the household, the age of these children and their own employment situations, rather than simply the absence of their working partners. This pattern of community involvement holds for non-mobile households, suggesting that levels of civic engagement are impacted by larger societal shifts rather than just by mobility. My work contributes to a more holistic understanding the "Big Commute" and furthers our understanding of a longstanding mobile rural society that is gendered. I provide conclusions and policy implications concerning the shifting dynamics of rural communities with mobile populations and the future of rural communities more generally.

2.0 Mobilities and Stability – Some Conceptual Considerations

Since the publication of sociologist's John Urry's (2000a) *Sociology Beyond Society*, the concept of mobility and, more accurately, mobilities has entered academic discourse with fervor. Urry's book and companion article (Urry, 2000b) established a place for sociological theory to go beyond its relatively static upbringing. Migration theory has not been exempt from this process. Sociological approaches to migration have focused on static notions of place, via (via research conducted in sender and receiver societies for example) (Brettell & Hollifield, 2000; Castles, 2007; McHugh, 2000) and, related to this, they have contributed to the impression that movement into and out of places is permanent, despite the fact that Zelinksy's (1971) earlier research on circular migration contended otherwise.

Mobilities scholarship has reinvigorated Zelinsky's scholarship by dismantling the conceptual divide between types of movement, such as migration on the one hand and temporary mobility on the other (Bell & Ward, 2000; Green, 2004). It has provided a means to overcome the compartmentalization of migration that has occurred through disciplinary divides (see Brettell & Hollifield, 2000) and has made it possible to open up new spaces for the discussion of movement across human and non-human dimensions (Urry, 2000b).

The new mobilities paradigm, as it is now known (Hannam et al. 2006; Sheller & Urry 2006), envisions a social science that puts mobility, rather than stasis, at the heart of its inquiry. As Büscher and Urry write:

> The term 'mobilities' refers to this broad project of establishing a 'movement-driven' social science in which movement, potential movement and blocked movement, as well as voluntary/temporary immobilities, practices of dwelling and 'nomadic' place-making are all conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social and political relations (2009, p. 100).

The paradigm does not however, suggest that everything is mobile and nothing is static. As Hannam, Sheller, & Urry. (2006) and Adey (2006) point out, mobility requires points of fixity, or moorings, as well as infrastructure (which is also often static). Furthermore, as Imrie (2000) argues, not everyone is able to be mobile. He challenges "hegemonic discourses" associated with the normalcy of mobility. Immobility can come as a result of physical disability, or the inability to access mobility enabling infrastructure (Imrie, 2000).

In short, mobility is not synonymous with motility, which Kaufmann, Bergman and Joyce (2004, p.750) define as the capacity "to be mobile in social and geographic space" (see also Bauman, 2000). Research shows, for example, that women's mobility in rural areas is often hindered by their lack of access to private transport; and that their ability to experience economic inclusion is enhanced when they can and do drive (Dobbs, 2005). Motility, however, is not limited to the material conditions that make mobility possible, but also to individuals' desires, motivations, and relationships to spaces (Flamm & Kaufmann, 2006). There are therefore many dimensions of stasis.

Although stasis and stability are not one in the same, the static aspect of mobilities suggests that mobility does require aspects of stability (Sheller et al., 2006). Likewise, stability requires mobility (Bell et al., 2010). Bell et al. write that the point of mobility research is to "bring together a balanced appreciation of both [mobility and stability],

and their mutual constitution, in social life" (2010, p. 200). They argue that this is particularly true and apt in rural contexts, where, as indicated in the introduction, stasis has been overemphasized (see also Bell, Lloyd, & Vatovec, 2010).

This paper takes the position that rural society *is* mobile; and that its mobility is comprised of human geographical movement, as well as other dimensions of the mobilities paradigm, including the movement of information, ideas and capital. The focus here, however, is on its human dimension. In the following section, I review different forms of geographical movement that have been part of the Newfoundland and Labrador mobilities story, and focus finally on the rise of long-distance labour mobility from that province, and in particular its rural areas.

3.0 Mobilities in Newfoundland and Labrador

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has a long history of geographical mobility, particularly into and out of the island portion of Newfoundland. As a seafaring people, mobility has always been a normal aspect of local life with fish harvesters and crew away for extended periods of time throughout the fishing season, and then away again in mining and logging work camps across the island in the offseason. Noted historical patterns of geographic mobility off of the island included the temporary movement of male migrant labourers to the United States (Reeves, 1990); the permanent movement of individuals to Cape Breton, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto (Crawley, 1988), as well as the permanent relocation of war brides to the United States and elsewhere across Canada (Thorne, 2007). After the province's 1949 confederation with Canada, mobility patterns were more horizontal in nature. Migrants either permanently or temporarily relocated to various other parts of the country and to Ontario in particular. In many cases, the permanent relocation of households was often linked to men's work, thus supporting what has been known as the trailing wife hypothesis (see Cooke, 2001), although this was and is not always the case (Hiller & McCaig, 2007; Martin-Matthews, 1977).

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, attention to mobility focused on resettlement within the island (Copes, 1972; Matthews, 1976), although continued flows of individuals outside of the island still occurred (Sinclair, 2002). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, population turnarounds were occurring, mirroring trends in other areas across Canada (Joseph et al., 1988; Keddie et al., 1991) and the United States (Fuguitt, 1985). Investigations into why Newfoundlanders would want to return to a place with fewer economic opportunities than elsewhere ensued (Richling, 1985). Not surprisingly, Newfoundlanders were returning for reasons associated with family and culture (Gmelch, 1983; Gmelch & Richling, 1988; Richling, 1985) and these reasons for return continued throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (House, 1989; Sinclair & Felt, 1993).

In the 1990s, research on youth migration intentions (Hamilton & Seyfrit, 1994; Palmer & Sinclair, 2000; Sinclair, 2002) signaled potential population outflows. Following the collapse and closure of the Northern Cod Fishery in 1992, mass numbers of people of all ages living in the province did, in fact, leave. This event solidified, or perhaps reinvigorated, a mobile imagination that was based on exodus (CBC News Online, 2006). This occurred despite the fact that many people also stayed, relying upon state transfers, employment insurance, informal subsistence and seasonal migration to do so (MacDonald, Neis, & Grzetic, 2006; Sinclair, 2002).

In more recent times, attention has shifted to the temporary movement of Newfoundlanders and Labrador that occurring as part of the "long commute" (CBC News Online, 2007) or the "big commute" (CBC News Online Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007; Storey 2011). This form of work journey, which is often referred to as long-distance commuting, actually represents a multitude of mobility scenarios encompassing varying periods of time away from home as well as distances travelled. This includes both seasonal migration and temporary migrant labour. As noted in the introduction, I refer to this umbrella of scenarios as long-distance labour mobility and I define it as including patterned, sporadic and prolonged absences away from one's place of residence for at least one night, and spanning distances greater than 100 km.

While not new, this set of employment arrangements are distinguishable from those of the past simply because of the number of people engaged in them. It is estimated that nearly 7 to 8 percent of working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, or approximately 10,000 people, maintain a residence in the province but work in Alberta (CBC News Online, 2007; Storey, 2010, 2011). A further 13.5 percent of the provincial workforce reported having had no fixed place of work in the 2006 Census. This includes fish harvesters, construction workers and truckers, for example, who may or may not travel long distances to get to work.

Anecdotal evidence and media coverage suggests that many of those engaged in LDLM to other areas of the province or outside of the province are from rural communities (Brautigam, 2008; Porter, 2006; Wells, 2007). Downturns in the fishery, the closure of fish plants, and the closure of several pulp and paper mills across the island have reduced the availability of local employment at reasonable wages. This, coupled with increasing lucrative opportunities in western and northern Canada and in the offshore oil and gas sector, has meant that many individuals, predominantly men, seek work elsewhere. In the following sections, I explore the incidence of LDLM among nine households in the Lewisporte area, a rural service area in the central North coastal portion of Newfoundland, with a total population of 8800 people spread across a multitude of towns and villages. The area includes the larger service town of Lewisporte (population 3300) and the rural surround within about 35 km driving distance. Lewisporte is in turn located approximate 60 km from the larger service communities of Gander to the East and Grand-Falls Windsor to the West.

4.0 Long-Distance Labour Mobility in Rural Newfoundland: Research from the Lewisporte Area

I spent a year working and living in the community of Lewisporte in 2007. When I entered the field, the subject of long-distance labour mobility in Newfoundland and Labrador was increasingly gaining attention. News coverage and discussions about the lure of big money out West, and the continued pull of lucrative work in the North were aspects of local discourse on potential job opportunities for people who did not want to or could not relocate.

In terms of general geographic mobility associated with labour, nearly 44% of the total work force in the Lewisporte area (aged 15+) engaged in some form of journey to reach their usual place of work in 2006 (Table 1). Of those, 3.2 % worked in a different province and 0.4 % worked outside the country. A further 15.7 % reported having had no fixed workplace. While we are unable to know for sure, some of these individuals may also be travelling long distances to engage in work.

As Table 1 also shows, higher proportions of the male workforce engaged in long-distance work journeys when compared with the female workforce. According to Census data, no women in the study area reported working out of province or out of country. Of the male workforce, 7.2% worked out of province and 24.7% had no fixed work place address. The proportion of women with no fixed workplace was much smaller.

Table 1. *Place of Work, Lewisporte Area, 2006*

Place of Work	Total	Male	Female
Different census subdivision	26.5%	19.6%	34.7%
Different census division	13.5%	17.5%	8.1%
Different province	3.2%	7.2%	0.0%
Outside Canada	0.4%	1.4%	0.0%
No fixed workplace address	15.7%	24.7%	4.6%
Total	**59.3%**	**70.4%**	**47.5%**

Source. Statistics Canada, Community Profiles, 2006

The interview material used in this article is drawn from a larger comparative piece on female return migrants, stayers and in-migrants aged 25 to 34 living in the Lewisporte area. Recruitment of respondents occurred through snowball sampling using various employment and friendship networks in the area. Respondents were asked if they knew of other women living in the study area within the target age-range. As interviewing continued, similar migration narratives emerged (many of these women were professionals). To ensure a greater diversity of perspectives, non-professional women working in the service sector were targeted using convenience sampling. These women were approached in person.

Among the respondents, most were married, had children, were educated at the post-secondary level, and were employed. They are not representative of all women living in this area. Consistent with the Census data however, none of these women travelled long distances for work. Most worked in the study area and a few commuted to the adjacent towns of Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander. This article focuses on the narratives of nine return migrants with partners who engaged in LDLM of varying degrees (rotationally for weeks at a time; or for months at a time) to Alberta, Northern Canada, Newfoundland's West Coast and to Labrador. These narratives are then compared to several from women in households who have chosen not to relocate or engagement in LDLM.

In the analysis of interview material which follows, I examine dimensions of stability and instability within households as it relates to employment journeys. Here, I extract aspects of their migration biographies leading up to the decision for their partners to engage in long-distance employment travel and for them to remain in Newfoundland, and focus on their description of their lives as a result of this reality. I also draw upon themes associated with community stability, both economic and social. As a means to approach the subject of this paper and the themes found within the mobilities literature, I organize the discussion along three analytic foci: 1. Fluidity; 2. Familial stability; and 3. Community in(stability). The third is more of a speculative analysis, as it is unclear to what degree long-distance employment travel scenarios contribute to community stability.

5.0 Fluidity

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the message that has predominantly emerged from LDLM is that this is a recent phenomenon, and that it has emerged as a result of poor economic circumstances in commuters' "home" communities (to use the migration language). These work arrangements, whether commuting through rotations, seasonal or temporary work, are therefore viewed as the result of a *necessary* choice on the part of the male partner of the household. There is obviously merit in this position. Local economies across the province have ebbed and flowed. Fish plant closures, mill shut downs and shipyard stagnancies have led people with established lives (i.e. they own homes and have raised families in these areas) to pursue employment opportunities elsewhere. Storey's (2011) work demonstrates that many of these individuals are over the age of 35 and married, thus suggesting that the choice to be mobile is part of a necessary second career. Anecdotal evidence also supports these claims.

Problematic economic circumstances in rural home communities is not, however, the only circumstance to prompt LDLM. Furthermore, long-distance mobility is not disconnected from migration. In other words, the choice to travel long distances is not necessarily juxtaposed to relocation, as past approaches would suggest (Bell & Ward, 2000: Green, 2004). These two dimensions of mobility, which actually exist on a continuum, often go hand-in-hand weaving together to create household mobility outcomes.

5.1 Living with Long-Distance Employment Travel?

For three of the nine mobile couples, LDLM was related to unstable local economic circumstances, and was a recent arrangement at the time of interviewing. In 2007, the local economy was significantly affected by the closure of the Atlantic Wholesalers Lewisporte Division. The closure of the business, which stored and distributed materials to communities in Labrador via ferry (Lewisporte is also the site of a ferry terminal), directly displaced over 70 full and part-time workers and affected workers in other sectors throughout the area (e.g. transportation). Referring to the study area, one respondent explained that there is "not a whole lot here" particularly for young people. She said that her partner decided to try working in Alberta because he wanted a "bit more". There is, she said, "money to be made up there" (I16).

Another respondent said that her partner, who was working in construction and transportation, took a local job that he thought was only going to last a few weeks as he did not have anything else at the time. He was able to stay on there for a couple of months, she explained, but he has been "stuck ever since". "He'll be leaving," she said, "There's just no work here …he got a chance to go to Alberta. So, he's gonna take that" (I29). In yet another case, a respondent cited that her partner's inability to find work locally was a big factor in the decision for him to work for a week at a time on the West coast of the Island.

For these three women, familial relocation was not initially considered as an option. For one of the women, moving did not seem like something she would consider. She said that she is used to her partner being away, and to doing things on her own during his absence. She welcomed the break, expressing that she found it harder, and more hectic, when he was home (I29). The other two women did say that they would relocate – but for different reasons – should their partners continue

to travel long distances for work and/or be away for extended periods of time. One respondent said that she simply could not handle it if her husband was away for long periods of time and that it was stressful to feel like a "single parent" (I31). Her sentiments were much more tied to her desire for both of them to contribute to the household responsibilities and to raising the children together. For the other woman, her desire to accompany her partner was more associated with a sense of adventure and opportunity. She said:

> You know if he kept on doin' this, in Fort McMurray, I'd like to give it a try, not sayin' I would like it … But it's definitely something I'm going to consider if he decides to go back. I don't want to live down here and he's up there (I16).

She said that she is not even sure whether she would continue in her field of work if she moved: "I don't know if I would or if I'd try something else. The thing about it up there is it's so much opportunity…it's more opportunity than it is down here" (I16).

Clearly the prospect of moving also offers her a chance to potentially pursue something different. Despite this interest though, she admits that he may not go back, largely because he knows that she will also want to go. She said that he does not want to uproot their daughter to another location and that she has concerns about raising children "up there", given the perception that crime is high and it is not as safe for small kids.

A familial theme emerges as an important dimension as to where households choose to raise their families. Consistent with the literature, rural areas are perceived as safer, more appropriate places to raise children (Valentine, 1997). This, along with the close proximity that these couples have to extended family, means that the optimal choice for raising children is in the rural area in which they were raised. Many of the female migrants in the larger study did cite being close to family as one of the main reasons for returning to the Lewisporte area (Author 2009). As such, relocation is not always the desired option, no matter what the greener grass of urban lifestyles has to offer.

5.2 Returning to Travel Long Distances

Four of the nine couples moved back to the rural study area with the knowledge that the male partner would be travelling long-distances to go to work. Another couple moved back and the long-distance work travel ensued shortly afterward. For most of these couples, the decision to return was strongly associated with children and is thus consistent with much of the return migration literature. As one respondent said:

> Well I was living in Calgary, and after [my son] was born, I decided I didn't what to raise him in the city so I wanted him to grow up in a small town like myself and my husband. So that's why we moved back here (I15).

For several of the couples, housing also emerged as an important dimension of the decision to return. Housing is, as the literature shows, a critical consideration in migration and commuting decision-making (Green et al., 1999). Often, couples will relocate to other areas in spite of longer work journeys because housing is more affordable, property taxes are lower, and neighbourhoods are more amenable to raising children (Turcotte, 2005). For two couples, housing was a key element in

the decision to return. Both couples had relocated to Alberta between 5 and 10 years before returning. During this time, they also decided to invest in real estate there. With the upsurge in the Alberta housing market, both couples were able to profit from the sale of their houses. As one of these returners said: "when the housing market went up, we … sold our house and we made enough off of it to come back and build this house and own it" (I15). The other returner said that the profit from their house sale, which was over $100,000, enabled them to pay off debts and build back in the Lewisporte Area. They were also able to build on family land that was given to them.

Not all of the returning couples were, however, fortunate enough to have benefited from the booming western housing market. In fact, in the case of one returning couple who were renting, local housing prices proved to be a deterrent to buying real estate.

> We were going to buy back here last year, last March when we were looking and there just wasn't much on the market … right I mean I wants something I move into, put my furniture there, put my feet up. I don't want to renovate it and when we looked last year, there was a few houses, I mean they're overpriced and that's the thing…and there's a lot of houses that are cheap and they need a lot of work. (I11).

5.3 Mobile Lifestyles

Mobile lifestyles have always been an aspect of the Newfoundland and Labrador socio-economic landscape. The degree of this mobility does, however, vary. The nine mobile households had either moved together or relocated as a result of the male partner's employment. In all instances, these moves were outside of Newfoundland. This is in contrast to most of the other couples in the larger study that moved within Newfoundland but not outside of it (Walsh, 2009).

Mobile lifestyles are also connected to and occur as a result of working in particular sectors. Eight of the nine male partners were engaged in LDLM were working in the trades sector. Over the course of their lives, all eight had a history of mobile work either as construction workers, truckers, tree-planters, or landscapers.

6.0 Familial Stability

Much of the literature demonstrates that LDLM which involves prolonged or rotational absences away from home can be detrimental for family members, particularly children (see Ferguson, 2011; Vincent & Neis, 2011), although this is not always the case. The work of Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008) comparing the psychosocial well-being of children with fathers employed in fly in/fly out (FIFO) mining operations and military fathers with a community sample of children with fathers not absent from home for prolonged periods did not indicate significant differences among the children. Rather, their work showed that it was the mothers who expressed more distress and negative outcomes as a result of the fathers' absences. In the case of Taylor and Simmons (2009) work, also on FIFO families, results show that a high degree of flexibility, cohesion and the ability to cope are the factors that influence familial outcomes, not necessarily the commute itself. Long-standing relationships have been shown to be able to withstand commuting, (Gross, 1980), particularly when both members of the couple are career oriented (Anderson, 1992; Rotter, Barnett & Fawcett, 1998). In some cases, couples choose

to engage in commuting (Van der Klis, 2008, Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008) to postpone or avoid family relocation, or to facilitate their own their own professional and personal desires.

In much the same way that migration decision-making is associated with non-economic factors (Blunt, 2007; Halfacree, 2004), there are non-economic dimensions that weigh heavily into the decision to travel long distances for work. In this research, these decisions were associated with increasing family stability, rather than detracting from it. In the case of one couple, I asked the respondent why her husband had to begin travelling a long distance for employment. She replied that it was not because he had no other choice.

> It's just that he was workin' at one job and this one was better, more money and like more time at home…he used to work till late in the night and then when he'd get home, he'd be tired so I never really seen much of him then anyway (I31).

She went on to explain that prior to commuting, the demands of his seasonal work meant that even though he was home every night, he was unable to spend large amounts of time with the family. With a new arrangement of working away throughout the week and returning on the weekends, she said they figured they would have family time on Saturdays and Sundays.

Another respondent said that she and her daughter did not see much of her partner when they were living in Alberta with him. He would leave at five in the morning and then not return until ten at night. She said that:

> Even though we were there, he'd be like three days in a row where he wouldn't see [her] because she'd be in bed when he came home and she'd be sleeping when he left. It's not a good situation for us to be in, like, we could have been home and he could have seen her on the web cam more than he seen her in Alberta and that was his whole reason for wanting us up there because he's such a big family man too (I7).

Through these examples, we see that familial stability is believed to be strengthened by the new working arrangement. This demonstrates that employment that occurs in close proximity to one's place of residence does not always mean shorter working hours, more quality time with family, and thus familial stability.

While these working arrangements can be beneficial to the family from the point of view of more family quality time, most of the women admitted that it is difficult when their partner is away. But, as one woman said, it is not unmanageable. With the help of extended family members for things such as childcare, they are able to cope with prolonged and regular spousal absences.

The picture painted here is that LDLM does not always lead to negative impacts for familial relations, and that couples are highly adaptive in these situations. Further, and perhaps more importantly in several of these cases, the decision to engage in long-distance travel was a conscious choice by the couple to *improve* family relations and therefore household stability.

6.1 Choosing Not to be Mobile: Stability in "Staying Put"

Hype surrounding the "Big Commute" might suggest that nearly every man in rural Newfoundland is "working away". It is true that compared to the rest of the province, there are communities, and areas, with more men engaged in LDLM. And, although booming western economies and northern opportunities do offer many men the option to commute, as well as the option for households to relocate, many choose not to. Returning to a rural area is often a concerted choice by households to avail of local employment opportunities, be close to family, and to "make a go of it". The same is often true of those who choose not to migrate at all. In the larger study, four women did not leave the area, choosing instead to stay and take advantage of local post-secondary educational opportunities (colleges are located in the adjacent towns of Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander. Lewisporte was also home to both a technical and community college until the late 1990s). Although there were households for which LDLM was a choice, and in some instances a necessity, several women were clear about why they and their partners did not incorporate this form of mobility into their lives.

One women who returned to the Lewisporte area and eventually married a high school friend, said she and her husband have no reason to move because they both have jobs, and both of their extended families live there. When asked if she would have moved out of province, she replied:

> Every now and then like when it started off you think, you know, how about if I go up there. But, you got to think going off, people going off up to Alberta, [it's] alright if you got a camp job. Now if you're going to go off and get an apartment, rent; the cost of living up there is a lot more, you're wasting your money. But if you're down here and you got a good job, [the] cost of living is not half as much (i6).

She said that every now and then her husband contemplates going to Alberta on a rotational work schedule largely, she explains, because he sees the gains his friends are making as a result of working away. But, she noted that underneath their new purchases and expensive lifestyles is mounting debt.

> All this going on like these camp jobs and this job and that – that's not going to last forever up there and they come home, our friends who's away making all this money and they come home and they don't have a cent. You ask them to do something, oh I got no money, I'm paying off this I'm paying off that, right (i6).

Her comments suggest that while LDLM can offer economic stability to some, it can also lead to forms of financial instability because money made is also money spent to pay down debt, both previously and newly acquired. As another returner explained, when she and her boyfriend worked in Alberta they were able to pay off his truck and his snowmobile, as well as any loans that they had but when they returned and filed their income taxes, the payoffs of working away did not seem so great. She said it "was pointless to even have paid off the truck and the bike and that, cause what we paid, we paid back again" (i37). While the employment opportunities were arguably not as lucrative in the Lewisporte area, moving back ensured that they could lead a more leisurely life close to both of their families, and where they could

raise their child. As she explains, "the money was great but he worked every day. There was no time for, you know, for us to go and do anything" (i37).

In short, the lure of big money does not appeal to everyone, and the lifestyles that often accompany increased incomes are also not always sustainable. This can be the downside of LDLM. This is, of course, dependent upon the individuals and households engaged in it. For many people , local opportunities, if available, at comparably lower wages are enough. One woman who did not leave the study area after high school, chose to attend a local post-secondary institution, and married locally said:

> I know some people got to go away cause they can't find work here, but I mean like me I've always had a job here. And to me, like I said, the money wasn't worth it to go up there and leave everybody and leave all my family and everything to go up there to make big money …I always had what I want so that always, you know, so that's fine with me. I don't need to be makin a big amount of money to stay happy so I didn't really need to go away (i8).

For these women, staying home and doing well through locally available work has been the key to their financial and familial stability, and to their decision to remain in the community.

7.0 Whither Community? Stability or Instability through LDLM

The attraction and retention of human capital in rural areas is often believed to lead to increased capacity for development. In other words those who stay, and in particular those who return or in-migrate, are viewed as individuals who can improve economic circumstances in the area, while also contributing to a rural civic sector plagued by a dwindling volunteers. The influx of new and returning people into rural areas has been known to contribute to social, cultural and economic life. For example, Bosworth's (2010) work in the North East of England indicates that in-migrant entrepreneurs have contributed significantly to local economic growth. In spite of this and other evidence, return migration, as Stockdale (2006) points out, is not by default a recipe for economic regeneration nor does it necessarily translate into a renewed and vibrant civic sector. In the context of the current study, it should be carefully considered to what extent return migration will civically benefit rural areas if the choice to return and stay is coupled with the LDLM of one of the partners. Both the work of MacDonald et al. (2012) and that of Storey (2010) point out this type of work-related travel does have impacts on communities, though more empirical evidence is required.

My research shows that for all but two of the 12 women featured in this article, community involvement—defined here as regular involvement in local community organizations—is not a part of their everyday lives. As one woman said, she would like to get involved, but with her shift work and the absence of her spouse, she simply does not have the mental energy. Similarly, another woman said she does not have the time, the commitment or anyone to call on to provide childcare when her husband is gone. She went on to explain that she felt that it was unfair to commit to a group that could not rely upon her all the time.

The age of the children living at home impacts the ability of these women to participate, which is consistent with the broader literature on women's volunteerism, particularly those who are also employed (see Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). One woman said that when her son gets a little older, she might get involved with community

groups but "I can't really right now with him because if they had any meetings or stuff like that, I've got to find a babysitter for him" (I15). The availability of childcare to facilitate community involvement emerges as an issue and while many of these women do have extended family in the area that can provide childcare, they are not always available on a regular basis nor do all of these women feel comfortable in asking for childcare for these purposes. As one woman said, "I'm not going to be the type of person that's relying on my parents all the time" (I15).

Despite the fact that these women are not involved in organized community groups, several of them say they would volunteer short-term for events or activities if it worked with their schedules or if they were asked. As one woman said, she will be able to volunteer with the school for a teacher assistant and morning program when her daughter begins to attend school because "I can do that when [he] is home and when he's gone, somebody else can take their turn" (I11).

The fact that these women are not highly involved in community organizations can also be contextualized in terms of larger trends associated with civic engagement. Robert Putnam's well-known work on civic engagement, or people's "involvement in the life of their communities", indicates that it has been on the decline since the 1970s and reflects an ideological shift and generational shift in terms of what people value doing with their time. Moreover, he argues, the advent of television as a time replacer is one of the main culprits in eroding social capital, and thus a vibrant civic life (Putnam. 1996). While Canada's Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating indicates that the number of volunteers and volunteer hours have increased across the country, 78% of these hours are contributed by only 25% of volunteers (Statistics Canada et al., 2009). In Newfoundland and Labrador, 10% of volunteers contribute to 52% of all volunteer hours (Volunteering in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2004). Two of the main reasons cited for not volunteering were a lack of time, and the inability to commit over the long-term; however, these reasons are not specific to Newfoundland and Labrador (Statistics Canada et al., 2009; Volunteering in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2004).

It is thus likely that while LDLM may contribute to the inability of both women *and* men to engage civically, it may not be the main force behind their lack of participation. Employment and children, particularly the age of their children, impact these women's ability to participate in rural community organizational life. This holds true for women who do not have partners working away. More importantly, it is their concern over their inability to commit to these organizations that also impede their involvement. It is also probable that as their children age and are involved in increasingly more activities, these women will also become involved. However, whether this involvement is the desired type of civic engagement aimed at enhancing particular dimensions of rural social and economic development remains to be seen.

8.0 Conclusions

I began this paper with an attempt to address the link between mobilities and ruralities, to soften the divides between understandings of migration and temporary mobility, and to provide evidence to support Bell et al.'s (2010) contention that we must consider rural society as a mobile society, rather than stagnant. I chose to engage this discussion through the lens of long-distance labour mobility in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador. In an attempt also to bridge the divide between individualistic and community-based approaches to the outcomes and

impacts of geographic mobility, I focused on the household through young women's narratives of their lives as women with partners who travel long distances to go to work, and are thus absent from home for extended periods of time. I chose three analytic paths with which to investigate whether LDLM is associated with stability and instability in both families and communities, and to what extent these arrangements represent fluidity in a rural context. I then provided some comparative evidence to suggest that choosing not to be mobile, is also fuelled by the desire for familial stability and the perceived economic instability that LDLM can introduce into households.

First, the results from this investigation indicate the historical and current presence of a mobile rural, and a great degree of fluidity among individuals and their households in terms of their mobility. Furthermore, LDLM is not always associated with problematic economic circumstances in rural areas. As shown, four of the couples moved back to rural Newfoundland knowing that their partners would continue to travel long distances to get to work and be away from home for extended periods of time. This research also shows that these couples exhibit biographical mobility trends, both in terms of relocation and employment travel on the part of these couples and their working male partners. They are, and have been, a mobile group of individuals, perhaps more mobile than others in their age cohort, and certainly more mobile than most others in the larger study from which they came.

Second, discussions with these women also indicate that while the monetary gains from long-distance employment travel are important, this is not the only dimension related to this work arrangement nor is it always the deciding factor. In several cases, these work arrangements were specifically chosen to add to familial stability via increased family quality time. This challenges the notion that long-distance travel is almost always detrimental to family relations.

Third, while these work arrangements lead to increased household income, and thus may contribute to local community economic and population stability, the returns do not necessarily equate to increased stability in the civic sector. The presence of LDLM within the household affects these women's ability to participate in organized community groups. However, this inability to participate is couched within larger societal declines in civic engagement. In general, women's own employment obligations and the age of their children impedes their ability to contribute on an ongoing basis.

In sum, the findings here lend support to Bell et al.'s (2010) argument for the mobile rural and are congruent with arguments made within the new mobilities literature, as well as that of it geographic predecessors (Bell & Ward, 2000; Zelinsky, 1971) that mobility operates on a continuum, is often circular and is dynamic. Even for those couples who choose to return and stay, or simply stay, the contemplation of mobility and its potential impacts on the stability or instability of their lives is never far from their minds. Mobile households, either real or anticipated, continue to comprise the fabric of rural lives. Rural communities are mobile communities, yet they offer enough stability to individuals and households. They are, in Adey's (2006) terms, also the moorings that enable mobility. These fine balances of rural mobility and stability cannot be ignored in the development of programs and policies that affect rural people. Policies for rural community development, and larger economic and social policies need to take into consideration a perspective more attentive to the mobile reality that most people face, while also recognizing that rural infrastructure remains important to making this possible.

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