Abstract: Migration is an important part of the lives of many young adults. In numerous areas around the world, and particularly in regional and remote areas, cultures have emerged where the migration of young adults is normalised and expected. While the impact of the migration of young adults on the areas they have left and have moved to has received considerable attention in both political and academic arenas, there is a need for more research that addresses the cultural meaning of migration and the importance of the migration process for young people themselves. The paper is based on two large research projects undertaken between 2000 and 2005, which focused on the experiences of migration of young adults in Tasmania, and includes data sourced from interviews and focus groups with young migrants as well as an analysis of media and policy documents. We discuss the ‘turbulent lives’ of young people in Tasmania, including the expectations and aspirations of young adults growing up in a culture in which migration is normalised and their experiences of leaving, and returning to, their childhood homes. These issues are considered in the context of recent theoretical debates surrounding the impact of mobility and attachment to place on the identities of migrants.

KEY WORDS young adults; internal migration; place attachment; culture of migration

Introduction

In many locations throughout rural and regional Australia, young people grow up in a context in which migration is expected and normalised. In this paper we examine the intersections between place, migration and culture, drawing on insights from two major studies of youth migration in Tasmania. We find that the prevalence of a culture of migration within Tasmania places the decision to stay or leave the island at the centre of young adults’ decisions about employment, education, independence and identity. Young people draw on the expectations of parents and their
wider social contexts when planning and pursuing pathways out of home. While many young people grow up with the expectation that they will one day leave Tasmania, our research indicates that class background and parental mobility influences the strength and form of these expectations. We also observe that experiences of migration and attachment to place are central to young people’s identities. Our research highlights some of the practical difficulties experienced by young people when trying to forge a ‘between homes’ or a ‘mainlander/islander’ identity, as well as the problems that young people face in their endeavours to retain links and contacts with others who have chosen fundamentally different paths. We found that young people drew on an integrated view of migration and home, positioning Tasmania as a place that is both simultaneously bounded and networked.

We begin the paper by positioning our research within the youth migration literature. The paper deals with youth migration cultures (both out-migration and return) with a particular focus on regional youth migration. This is followed by an introduction to the Tasmanian case and an overview of our research. The remainder of the paper draws from our research findings and discusses young people’s experiences of growing up in a migration culture, the influence of this culture upon their identities and a discussion of some of the consequences of such a migration culture, both for the young people themselves, and for Tasmanian society more generally.

**Migration cultures and turbulent lives**

Much youth migration research has focused on push and pull factors influencing the decision to migrate. We want to complement these studies by focusing on how growing up in a culture where migration is assumed or expected affects young people’s migration experiences. We have called this assumption that young people will leave home a ‘culture of migration’, following the work of Jones (1999a). While Jones (1999a) has used this term with specific reference to the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital within families, we are concerned with a broader set of cultural norms and expectations that are not only negotiated within the family, but also across particular geographic locales, in this instance the island community of Tasmania. A ‘culture of migration’ refers not to the actual movement of individuals and populations, but rather the ideas that people share about these movements and the material objects employed by people in the process of migrating (adapted from Johnson 1995, 68). A good illustration of this term in the Australian context is the notion of ‘cultural cringe’, which is said to have driven young creative and intellectual Australians in the post-war period to leave Australia for extended periods in order to ‘find’ and establish themselves in the more culturally sophisticated and enriching bohemian communities of Europe. These feelings of cultural inferiority reflected the prevailing view of
Australia as an isolated, colonial outpost and they provided a strong rationale for young people to migrate permanently or temporarily from Australia (Head and Walter, 1988).

This focus on ‘migration cultures’ is informed by a growing awareness among researchers of the ways in which people understand and actively negotiate their migrations (e.g. Halfacree and Boyle, 1993; Boyle, et al., 1998; Silvey and Lawson 1999; Graham and Boyle, 2001; Silvey, 2004). This has led a number of theorists to recognise that the migratory experience is a complex process, which cannot be easily extricated from understandings of home, attachment and inhabitance (Ahmed et al., 2003; Marshall and Foster, 2002; Walsh, 2006). As Hardwick (2003, 166) has noted:

Instead of viewing migration in a humanistic perspective that focuses on analyzing push-pull factors that ‘cause’ migration and settlement to happen in particular ways in particular places in one fixed moment in time, post-modern, post-positivist scholars have begun to see and to record migration processes as fluid intersections of multiplicity. In the latter view, as the experiences of individual migrants and the culture, people and place who create these experiences form, express and change, so too does migration and settlement decision-making. This change may happen through individuals or through their socially constructed communities, networks and values.

This work is broadly influenced by Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘habitus’, which attempts to resolve tensions between structure and agency through a concept that can encompass inherited social positions and everyday practices. In other words, it refers to the learned habits, cultural assumptions and rituals that bind individuals to neighbourhoods or communities. Migration researchers working in this vein have drawn more readily on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative analyses than in the past in order to understand both the cultural norms that prevail within particular communities affected by inward or outward migration, as well as the impact of such norms on migrant pathways, attitudes and practices. This focus on ‘the realm of the common sense and taken-for-granted’ (Halfacree and Boyle 1993, in McHugh 2000, 74) represents a significant shift from an earlier preoccupation within migration research on the ‘motivations and reasons actively thought about by ‘calculating’ subjects’ (McHugh 2000, 74).

Research that focuses specifically on the experiences of young people has been at the forefront of developing a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural aspects of migration, including the
intersections between migration, place and identity (Jones, 1995; 1999a; 1999b; Ní Laoire, 2000; Marshall and Foster, 2002; Molgat, 2002). Here youth migration researchers have drawn particularly (although not exclusively) upon contemporary analyses of post-modern society and post-modern lives, including the work of Bauman (1995; 2001), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991). These theorists describe the changing values over the last century in terms of the ways in which people think about themselves and their place in the world. They describe a shift from a situation in which people had ‘unambiguous priorities linked to local communities and shared goals’ (White and Wyn, 2004, 187), to the current focus on individualism, ‘self-enlightenment and self-liberation’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002 in White and Wyn, 2004, 187). These theorists point to the rise of positive attitudes towards mobility, as opposed to stability in contemporary society. They argue that individuals today are less tied to their social class and geographical origins; instead people are actively involved in constructing their own biographies. Young people are said to be growing up and making decisions in a context of unpredictability and turbulence, rather than of order and stability (Papastergiadis 2000). However, this process of individualisation has been accompanied by a realignment of risk, with individuals increasingly obliged to accept personal responsibility and to develop individual strategies to manage risk, rather than relying on support from social institutions.

Jones (1999a; 1999b) has mapped young people’s experiences of leaving home in dialogue with this growing body of work on risk and individualisation (Bauman, 1995; 2001; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). We continue Jones’ work by examining young people’s experiences of growing up in a migratory culture. Our aim is to shed some light on the extent to which young Tasmanians operate as individuals, writing their own biographies and seeking out pathways independent of the societal institutions in which they have grown up, as well as to examine the influence of these institutions on their attitudes and experiences of leaving and returning home. From the outset we note that, while theories which point to the rise of positive attitudes towards mobility fit well with our observations about the assumption of young Tasmanians that they should take the ‘risk’ of migrating away from their home towns if they are to be successful in modern society, such notions of mobility continue to compete with enduring island narratives about stability, boundedness and belonging (Stratford, 2006). Accordingly, we recognise that the quest for identity is not simply one of risk and individualisation realised through migration careers, but that an individual’s identity is also intricately tied to complicated relationships between mobility and place attachment and, in particular, through their changing relationships with the place(s) they call home (see Buttmer, 1980; Seamon, 1985; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Tuan, 2001; Casey, 2001).
Research methods

This paper is based upon the findings of two large research projects on the migrations of young Tasmanians. These research projects (Gabriel, 2004 and Easthope, 2006) explored different aspects of the phenomenon of youth migration. Gabriel’s (2004) study explored the experience of regional youth migration, particularly within communities that had been subject to substantial economic restructuring in the 1980s. The study was conducted between 2000-2002 and included interviews with 18 young people (18-30 years), 7 parents and 18 community representatives from the (regional) North West Coast of Tasmania, a place that had recently experienced high levels of unemployment and depopulation. In contrast, Easthope (2006) examined the phenomenon of return migration, including the significance of mobility and place construction in understanding young people’s decisions to leave and later to return to their home state. The fieldwork for this study was conducted between 2003 and 2005 and included interviews with 30 young people (20-38 years) in the capital city of Hobart who had grown up in Tasmania, left and then subsequently returned to the state after a period of between one and ten years. Both studies also undertook in-depth analysis of local media and policy documents. Within this paper, we draw specifically on 54 news items relating to youth migration which appeared in Tasmania’s three local newspapers, The Mercury, The Examiner and The Advocate between 1996 and 2001.

While the objectives of our studies were quite different, both studies drew attention to the prevalence of a ‘migration culture’ in Tasmania, and to the ways in which young people negotiate their sense of self in the process of moving away from their childhood home. Similar questions were asked by both researchers during the interviews. The correspondence between our research was not envisaged at the outset, but rather emerged organically through seminar presentations and extended discussions between ourselves and our colleagues. Mutual consideration and comparison of our findings enabled us to map the contours of Tasmania’s migratory culture in far greater detail than we otherwise could have on our own.

Tasmania’s migration culture

Tasmania provides a particularly rich case study for examining regional youth migration, because it has experienced extended periods of low population growth and youth out-migration since the mid-1800s (Townsley, 1991; Robson and Roe, 1997; ABS, 1999). This has been accompanied by intense coverage of the issues of population decline and Tasmania’s youth exodus within the local media, as well as the introduction of policy initiatives aimed at reversing these trends. While, in recent years, Tasmania has experienced a brief population turnaround (Figure 1), with the state
recording positive net interstate migration between 2003 and 2005 (ABS, June 1971-June 2005), the increased number of interstate arrivals have mostly been people in older age groups (a product of the so-called ‘sea-change’ trend amongst recently retired baby-boomers who are drawn to coastal regions for lifestyle factors), with a continued net loss of 15-29 year olds (Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance, 2003). In fact, ‘the median age of arrivals has been consistently above the median age of departures since at least the early 1980s’ (ibid, 14). No organization collects accurate records of return migration to Tasmania from interstate².

Insert figure 1.

The out-migration of young Tasmanians has been a persistent issue for policy makers throughout the twentieth century. As early as 1926, a report into the economic situation in Tasmania asserted that ‘the state is losing its more valuable manhood, and if the drift be not soon arrested, the result to the state may be readily appreciated’ (Lockyer, 1926, 11). Three-quarters of a century later, a community-wide consultation program identified the large proportion of young people leaving Tasmania as a key challenge facing the state (Tasmania Together Community Leaders Group, 2001, 13).

Despite some optimistic economic, population and employment figures for Tasmania in recent years, the issue of young people leaving the state has not disappeared. Instead, the out-migration of young people has been granted renewed policy attention as the outflow of young people of reproductive age is recognised as exacerbating the problem of a falling fertility rate, which in turn contributes to premature natural population decline and ageing (Felmingham, et al., 2002, 96). In response, both major political parties have released population strategies which reflect a more diverse and complex mix of policy initiatives than in the past, including an industry development plan, promotion of tourism and the arts, supporting business migration, attracting and retaining international migrants, and improving local employment conditions (Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance, 2003). What is evident in both policy approaches, however, is a primary concern over the relationship between the migrations of young people and the economic situation of the state, rather than the well-being of the young people concerned.

The public debate surrounding the migration of young adults has been overwhelmingly framed in terms of the negative impacts of this trend on the state’s future. The migration of young adults out of the state has been directly tied to economic decline through discourses surrounding population decline, an ageing population and a potential “brain drain”. In a review of 54 local media articles on
youth migration between 1996 and 2001, we found that ‘community managers’, including state politicians, local councillors, and bureaucrats, dominated the media-talk about youth migration (i.e. they were quoted in 36 articles), relative to ‘technical experts’ such as economists and demographers (quoted in 9 articles), young people (quoted in 8 articles), and parents and grandparents (quoted in 7 articles). For community managers, the exodus of youth was predominantly defined in terms of the potential effects on their community. Such priorities were illustrated by headlines such as ‘Crunch time: state exodus threat to quality of life’ (The Sunday Tasmanian, 23/7/2000, 1-2) and ‘When our kids go north: state infrastructure at risk if population decline continues’ (The Sunday Examiner, 13/12/1998, 6-7). Their concerns related to the impact of young people leaving on business investment and construction activity, a decline in the cultural vibrancy of the state, missing out on the multiplier effects of young workers and young women of child-bearing age, a reduction in Commonwealth funding, and the potential tax burden placed on those left behind (The Mercury, 7/10/1999, 7; The Sunday Examiner, 22/10/2000, 4; The Sunday Tasmanian, 23/7/2000, 1).

While media and policy debate provides some insight into the contours of Tasmania’s migratory culture, the views and prejudices of youth workers and educationists, as well as family attitudes and experiences also inform young people’s expectations about leaving home. Educationalists and youth service providers have focused more on the opportunities and life experiences available to young people who leave their regional hometowns. Gabriel (2004) found that youth workers and educationalists encouraged young people to take up opportunities elsewhere, but also spoke frankly about the barriers that deter young people from leaving the region, such as strong family networks, the lack of family friends and contacts outside the region, and the lack of personal resources. In contrast, parents were torn (to varying degrees) between wanting to keep their children close by and wanting them to take up the opportunities offered elsewhere. One parent spoke of the difficulty of living apart, especially when her daughter had her first child. Despite the difficulties associated with trying to maintain relationships over long distances, the parents to whom Gabriel (2004) spoke were proud of their children’s achievements beyond Tasmania. Through discussions with parents it became apparent that one of the key problems for Tasmanian families is not simply the high mobility of young people, but the lack of mobility among their parents. Parents cited a range of reasons as to why they could not leave and follow their children interstate, including: the high quality of life and personal friendships they enjoy in Tasmania; their commitment to their businesses or jobs; ageing and poor health; and their inability to take on a larger mortgage on the mainland.
Growing up in a migration culture

Emily: You know, turtles pop out of the sand, run to the water, go for it, you know, head out to deep sea. And it felt very much partly that, I just had to go, had to get out of town (29 year old, Hobart)

High and persistent levels of youth out-migration over the past century have meant that this generation of young Tasmanians has come to view the process of leaving their home state as a legitimate and unremarkable step in the process of growing up. Many of the young people we spoke to said that they considered it normal, natural or expected that they personally, or young people more generally, would leave the state. They were conscious that in leaving the state after high school or university they were following a well-worn path. Here they drew readily on familiar narratives about the need for the “best and brightest” young people to leave the state in order to pursue educational and employment opportunities. They also talked of having a natural curiosity about what lay beyond their small island home, including the “bright lights” of Melbourne, Sydney and other global metropolises.

Elizabeth: Why do people leave? I think it’s kind of expected that you need to go away to gain that experience because there are other things out there and I think it is a gaining experience, the thrill of the big smoke and the thrill of all the things we don’t have here that we feel we miss out on (38 year old, Hobart)

While it is difficult to quantify the impact of growing up within a culture of migration on young people’s decisions about their future pathways, in interviews with young people it was clear that leaving the state was the default position for some, rather than the relatively easier path of staying on at home. In Peter’s case he found it difficult to trace the origins of his decision to leave the state and, looking back, he wondered to what extent persistent talk about the issue of out-migration contributed to a mind-set in which young people felt they should leave.

Peter: I also think that the fact that so much gets said about all our young people are leaving, it’s such a problem, probably does generate this mind set that you have to leave, I think in my own case it never occurred to me not to, I wanted a good job
and all those things and I just left … in some cases fear of the problem creates the problem (26 year old, Hobart)

While our discussions with young people generated much talk about Tasmania’s culture of migration, we also found that this culture of migration was not experienced uniformly among young people. As Jones (1999a, 156) notes ‘a “culture of migration” forms part of the cultural capital of some families’ and ‘geographical mobility has long been associated with upward social mobility and thus with the middle class’. Our research contrasted the views of young people of varying socio-economic backgrounds: Easthope (2006) explored the experiences of young people from middle and relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, most of whom had grown up in Tasmania’s most populated urban centre Hobart, while Gabriel (2004) spoke with young people from lower and relatively disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who had grown up in and around small regional settlements along the North West Coast of Tasmania. Following Jones (1999a), we found that class background, measured in terms of parents’ occupations and educational levels, was important in shaping young people’s expectations about their future. The degree to which parents had some experience of having lived and travelled elsewhere and their exposure to other cultures was also important. In contrast to Peter’s story of having always assumed that he would leave, others observed that their parents had not travelled and had not attended university and that this made them suspicious of their children’s desire to leave the state to pursue educational and career opportunities elsewhere.

Michelle: So did your parents provide some support when you headed off?
Fiona: No they were trying to get me to stay, but I don’t think they’ve ever understood the travel thing. Like I love travelling but yeah. And you know they worry. My dad wouldn’t set a foot out of Australia. Yeah they worried about me. They were glad to have me back (28 year old, Devonport)

Other respondents downplayed the role of societal and parental expectations in influencing their chosen pathways. Some rejected the idea that they were leaving just because everyone else had; rather they felt that their decision to leave was a personal decision (Easthope, 2006). Here young people spoke about the multi-layered nature of the “to leave or to stay” decision. They noted that when talking among friends and family about their decision to leave they were likely to draw on well-accepted narratives about leaving the state, such as lack of employment and educational
opportunities. However they disclosed that their reasons for leaving the state were also tied to a range of personal issues such as feelings of unhappiness, the desire for anonymity, and the desire for adventure and personal re-invention.

Identity in a migration culture

An emerging trend across Australia has been for young people to delay leaving the family home, with some young people opting to move out temporarily but then deciding to return to the family home for extended periods (Young, 1987; ABS, 2002). However, for young Tasmanians leaving the state after high school, this option was foreclosed upon or complicated by significant life adjustments. Some of the young people we interviewed expressed frustration that they had to go through what at times seemed like a quite difficult and painful transition into adulthood while being physically isolated from their family, friends and community. In both our studies, our discussions with young people about the process of leaving home and leaving Tasmania were interwoven with accounts of self-development, personal growth and shifting identity. As Katherine explained:

**Katherine**: Coming out of a very close knit community where things are black and white and things are right and wrong and things are the way they are and [then] coming into contact with lots of different, church communities and different non-church communities and seeing different ways of life, you know, I mean I just see that whole time of life as incredibly enriching in terms of me understanding the world and incredibly frustrating in terms of me trying to understand who I was and my place in it (29 year old, Hobart)

Accordingly, in this section, we examine young people’s stories of how the culture of migration intersects with and informs their perceptions of themselves and their peers.

Within Tasmania, the culture of migration is associated with powerful narratives about those who leave and those who stay. One of the defining narratives in press coverage of youth out-migration was the loss of Tasmania’s “best and brightest”, a category that typically referred to young graduates, but was also extended to those young people who have excelled in sport, acting or other fields (Gabriel, 2002). Those who had left the island were celebrated for their successes and they were held up as examples of the way Tasmania could compete on a world stage. In this narrative the distinction between those who leave and those who stay was accentuated, since being recognised as a ‘brain’ or ‘achiever’ often entailed achieving accolades elsewhere. Within both our studies, young
people were familiar with the “best and brightest” narrative. In accordance with the logic of this narrative, young people mentioned that they felt some pressure to “make it” and to achieve something beyond their home town. While some readily supported the notion that the “brighter” young people tend to leave the state, others acknowledged that it was less to do with intelligence and more to do with the options young people were presented with as they are growing up. Beyond the stereotypes of more and less intelligent youth, young people did identify clear distinctions between those who left and those who stayed. These distinctions related primarily to lifestyle and attitude, with those who had left the state typically identified as more ambitious, more outgoing, and more independent, whereas those at home were seen as more family-orientated, less confident, more likely to be getting married and starting their own family. As Emma noted:

*Emma*: One thing that was interesting when we got back, when a group of us caught up, we went through everyone from our year 12 class — the first person’s already got married and someone’s already had kids, someone’s pregnant with twins, and some guy’s in rehab — we went through the whole list of everyone (19 year old, Burnie)

More often than not, young migrants defined themselves in opposition to those people who had not moved.

*James*: I found a lot of my old friends really annoying, um, and sort of narrow minded, that sort of struck, and you know, Canberra doesn’t exactly broaden your horizons in the same way that going to Peru would or something but…. yeah, I had a very different perspective I think (28 year old, Hobart)

The championing of particular young people in the Tasmanian press did at times also extend to those who returned home (*The Sunday Examiner*, 13/12/1998, 6; *The Sunday Examiner*, 22/10/2000, 5-6). These young people were celebrated not only for the successes achieved elsewhere but also for the skills and knowledge they brought back to the state. Yet many of the young people to whom we spoke viewed their own moves back in terms of a step backwards in their personal and career development.
**Katherine:** I always say to people that I found it very, very difficult to be back in Tassie, I felt like I was coming backwards. I felt like moving to Melbourne was a step forwards in my life, like in terms of everything it represented, in terms of me learning stuff about myself and others and learning, you know, learning about life and the world and seeing so many different perspectives and I think that consolidated in my mind that the community that I came from and the kind of ways of thinking that I was used to in Tasmania was characteristic of the wider Tasmanian community and I think I just stereotyped a lot (29 year old, Hobart)

The process of returning home also presented some young people with a kind of identity crisis in the sense that those who had previously distinguished themselves strongly from those who had stayed at home now found themselves pursuing similar pathways. While some easily integrated back into their former life and found joy in being reunited with school friends and family, others insisted that they had changed and that on their return they continued to feel like an outsider:

**Gary:** Any problems [as a result of moving back to Tasmania]? Oh yeah. Um, I wasn’t from there anymore … When I came back I looked different, I wasn’t an average Tasmanian anymore, I was, ‘oh you’re one of them mainlanders’ almost (34 year old, Hobart)

For those young people who did try to reintegrate into old circles, some found that their friends and family held tightly to a particular view of who and what the returnees were. Such young people were distressed that their family and friends had shown limited interest in their lives elsewhere, and that they failed to acknowledge the important changes that these young people had experienced during their time away from Tasmania.

**Hazel:** Did you find that you could talk to them [your family] about what you did? **Susanne:** No, I mean I guess people just don’t have the same level of interest as what you do … but that was a really big thing for me, was not being able to share with people, and it’s hard to sum up what you’ve done in close to two years in a conversation anyway but just really not feeling like anyone was interested in the experience and on a superficial level you feel like they are because they might ask what the trip was like and you can only say so many things like great, wonderful,
you know, but yeah not, really not being able to communicate to anyone, except those that had been there what the experience was like was really, really tough, that was probably the hardest thing to come to terms with and just learning not to talk about it because you bore people (28 year old, Hobart)

Migration and constructions of place

By virtue of the population ‘churn’ of young adults both out of and into the state, and the associated turbulence in the lives of young Tasmanians, we contend that they are experiencing their transition years quite differently from young people in the major mainland cities. In particular, this culture of migration has a particularly strong influence on the ways in which young Tasmanians think about Tasmania as a place, and about their place within their home state.

Constructions of place are particularly important because they offer ways of understanding the world, and people’s understandings influence their actions. In the course of our research, we came across numerous constructions of Tasmania as a place and several people commented on the implications of these understandings of Tasmania for their own migration decisions and experiences. For the purposes of analysis, we have divided these constructions into two main categories: bounded and networked constructions of place. On the one hand, people spoke about Tasmania as an ‘isolated’ and ‘insular’ place and, on the other hand, as a place with strong social, economic and political ties beyond its borders. In many cases, the same people utilised both constructions simultaneously. For example, while discourses of isolation and insularity were evident in the interviews, the idea that there is a ‘culture of migration’ in Tasmania is premised upon networked notions of place:

Sophia: You’d want to broaden your horizons and go somewhere else … you just get stuck in a rut in Tassie I think and you feel isolated being stuck on an island away from [any]where (22 year old, Hobart)

Bounded constructions of Tasmania held by some people led to frustration with the insularity of certain people and organisations in the state on the one hand, and the recognition of the uniqueness of the social and physical environment of Tasmania on the other. Bounded constructions also led to a desire to move away for economic opportunities (sometimes accompanied by guilt at moving away) on the one hand, and loyalty to the state on the other. At the same time, networked constructions on the part of our informants enabled both the recognition of opportunities elsewhere
and the recognition of the possibility of living in Tasmania and yet maintaining significant networks outside of the state. Conversely, networked constructions of place could also lead to concerns about the impact of ‘outside’ influences on the Tasmanian environment and society and the resulting loss of the distinctiveness of the place.

The experience of migration brought many of these issues to the fore for the young people we spoke with. All had struggled with attempts to reconcile their understandings of the places and people they had left with their understandings of their own identities upon their return. The mechanisms underpinning the relationship between people’s understandings of places and their understandings of their own identities have been discussed in-depth elsewhere (Easthope, 2004). However, it is vital to recognise that, while the migration experience was a challenging one, it provided many advantages for young Tasmanians who were forced into change and into experiencing difference, not only while they were away, but also when they returned. Indeed, the experience of being an outsider in one’s home town, however painful, is a valuable resource for young people. It can encourage young people to look at their home in a new light, as well as enabling them to renew and re-establish existing relationships with friends and family.

**Conclusion**

Our analysis of the experiences of migrants highlights the ways in which young people attempt to reconcile their understandings of the places and people they had left with their understandings of their own identities both when leaving their homes and upon their return. Young Tasmanians who have left and then returned to their home state have experienced two sides to the culture of migration. On the one hand, they have experienced the desire to leave and to be part of the collective movement of young people away from Tasmania, while on the other hand, they have had to construct new narratives that integrate what they have learnt from their different experiences and different positions, both while away and upon their return to Tasmania. We argue that, while this may be a difficult task, it provides advantages for young Tasmanians who are forced into change and into experiencing difference, seeing their home towns in a new light and renegotiating their identities in reaction to their changing circumstances.

Furthermore, just as the culture of youth migration in Tasmania has influenced the experiences of young Tasmanians, it has also had very real consequences for the entire Tasmanian population, beyond the well-recognised economic issues (brain drain, ageing population etc.). The high mobility of young adults in the state re-shapes local cultures and has a particularly strong influence on the ways in which residents of Tasmania in general think about Tasmania as a place. The
decision of whether to stay or leave will ultimately have a huge impact on the kind of life they live and we contend that their need to ‘make it’ creates a critical culture not only among young people, but also among the general population, in relation to the nature of Tasmania as a place.

We have pointed to the need for studies to move beyond descriptions of why young people leave, and instead to focus on the importance of the migration of young people from the point of view of the young people themselves. We found that migration was an important part of the lives of the young people we spoke with and that it had strong influences on the transformation of their own identities, as well as on their understandings of their relationships with their home towns and the people in them. We have argued that many, although not all, young Tasmanians grow up in a culture of migration, where the idea that young people, particularly the ‘best and brightest’, should leave in order to develop their careers and themselves, is normalised.

While our research has focused on those young people who have moved away from their home towns, the existence of a culture of migration also affects those young people who do not migrate. Future research that examines the impact of youth migration on those people who do not (cannot, or choose not to) migrate would provide a further depth of understanding of this phenomenon and may also enable a fuller examination of the impacts of class on the mobility of young people.

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NOTES
1 Personal contacts were used to recruit the majority of interviewees in both studies. In addition, a feature story on Gabriel’s research and the posting of an advertisement detailing Easthope’s research on the intranet of a company that is one of the major employers in Hobart generated additional contacts.
2 The ABS collect data on the numbers of Tasmanians who leave the state, but there are no reliable statistics on return moves to the state. The ABS estimate the extent of interstate return migration based on Medicare records. These, however, can be quite unreliable, not least because people may take some time to update their address with Medicare after a move. Some researchers have also attempted to estimate return migrations by using answers to census questions about place of current residence, place of residence one year prior to the census and place of residence five years prior to the census (Rumley, 2002). However, this data has shortcomings because it does not include information on the moves made in-between those three points in time. Thus, given that the numbers and characteristics of the total population are not known, it would not be possible to provide a representative sample of the total population.
3 All names are pseudonyms.
Figure 1: Net migration (annual) June 1971 - June 2005, Tasmania

Source: ABS 3101.0, June 1971-June 2005