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Broken Storylines: How the Economics of Flexibility is affecting International Migration Discourse

by

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Dedicated ... 

To George Marcus
for never giving up,

To Stephen Tyler,
for never giving in,

and

To Regis Drevet
for taking care of 'the whole' of me.
ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is about shifts in narrative conventions. During the nineteenth century, at the height of industrial capitalism, certain rhetorical conventions were established in migration discourse, which were borrowed from neoclassical economics. Europeans who emigrated to the colonies sought a better life, the prospect of land, and better opportunities. Others who faced religious or political persecution experienced immigration as a condition of exile. In both cases, however, the migrants’ reasons for coming and going were borrowed from neoclassical economics. More recently, the rhetoric of ‘intentionality’ and ‘place’ can be seen as shifting in stories told by international labor migrants. As the demands of temporary work contracts rapidly change, the where, when, and why of international migration becomes problematic in comparison with the rhetoric of neoclassical liberalism. This dissertation argues that the economics of flexibility and the flexible organization of work hinders the production of future-oriented narratives that inscribe economic rationalism, planning, and individual intention.

‘Broken storylines’ are examined in three sites: the stories told by temporary labor migrants, the planning structures of multinational corporations (managing the international transfer of employees), and the policies designed by state immigration
bureaus (designing visa programs for the entry of skilled laborers). In each case, rational technologies are shown to be short-lasting and/or ineffective. Research was conducted among temporary labor migrants living in Australia and the United States between 2001 and 2005. The theoretical framework for the thesis is borrowed from Max Weber’s comparative sociology of economic actions, which stresses the importance of state regulatory mechanisms to the predictability of economic behavior and the construction of substantive rationality. Following the deregulation of state regimes in the 1970s and the 1980s, I argue that a lack of economic stability hampers the production of new ideological narratives by economic institutions. Notably, a deconstructionist approach is adopted whereby historical narratives are viewed as inherently unstable. Tools of analysis are borrowed from literary criticism. The project contributes to the theorization of the relationship between historical narratives and the operations of state market capitalism. It also argues against the claims being made about the rise of a new transnational capitalist class.
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INTRODUCTION

Tracing ‘Intentionality’ & ‘Nationhood’ in International Migration Discourse

I was riding in the train the other day, when I overheard a woman in her thirties, from Aberdeen, talking to her friend about what she’d like to do over the next few years. We were passing through Melbourne, Australia at the time; but I’ve heard similar discussions in France, Canada, and the United States. This woman dreamed of traveling some more, maybe working on a cruise ship. But she also wanted to settle down and she bemoaned the fact that she simply didn’t have the $20,000 needed for a down payment. Maybe she and her sister would buy a house together. They got along really well. “It seems like it could work.” But still . . . it was too risky to make that kind of commitment. “You never know when one of us could lose our job, and then wouldn’t be able to pay back the mortgage.” Or, as her mother pointed out, they could buy a house and then a year later, one of them might meet Mr. Right, then he’d want to move in and things would get complicated. So she didn’t buy a house. Instead she thought about traveling some more – to places where the weather was warm and she could earn enough money to visit her parents once a year.

“You never know what’s going to happen,” I hear people saying day in and day out. The line of historical intentionality appears broken. This dissertation is about shifts in narrative conventions. Ideological frameworks that were once established with state
market capitalism are now shifting in the contemporary climate of economic flexibility and short-term planning. As states yield to the global exchange of commodities, processes of modernization that were once nation-specific have lost their driving force and their direction.

Amidst broken storylines and broken narratives of purpose, there is a scholarly discourse about the rise of a new ‘transnational elite’ (e.g. Sklair 2001, van der Pijl 1998). Ostensibly, these elites are the counterparts to a new ‘global order.’ But this ethnography highlights a gap between the theoretician’s understanding of ‘globalization’ and the way globalization is lived by international professionals who move, live, and work in foreign countries. Fieldwork was conducted among international migrants in Australia and the United States between 2001 and 2005. Oftentimes these migrants were information technology specialists, contract workers and employees of multinational corporations. The dissertation presents an argument against macro-structural frameworks that forecast the reproduction of class hegemony on a global scale. While governments and corporations continue to produce ideological planning structures,¹ the instabilities of the global marketplace make their policies short-lasting and ineffective. The economics of flexibility renders day-to-day living a series of makeshift maneuvers. It is the abandonment of future-oriented narratives in the everyday negotiations of the individual, the state and the corporation that this thesis seeks to illustrate.

The project is historically comparative. The baseline of comparison is the singular collective history that developed in late eighteenth-century Europe (cf. Koselleck 1985). This was history constructed as an entity of philosophy and speculation.

¹ An example of ‘virtualism’ (cf. Carrier & Miller 1998).
Geschichte is formal knowledge that became separated from nature. It involved the 'doubling of the subject': the voice of the narrator as the historical subject (cf. Foucault 1970: 312-14). And a plane of ‘self-transcending temporality’ which had the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from the past with which it was identified (Osborne 1995: 13-14). Later it was distinguished as ‘national history’ told in the name of the people and characterized by unique folkways and traditions. The abstract temporalization of history and the narration of individual agency developed together with the emergence of liberal democracies. As Elie Kedourie (1966) has pointed out, nationalism is a doctrine that inscribes the voice of the people in its political agendas. Hence, the development of the individual and the nation’s historical progress might ideally follow the same course. The migration narratives that emerged in the nineteenth century were a type of historical discourse that made use of abstract temporalization to inscribe individual intention. In the nineteenth century, more than 52 million people left Europe to come to the Americas, Australia and New Zealand (Moch 2003: 147). It is often called the first period of ‘voluntary migration.’ Prior to this, transatlantic movements were characterized by the transportation of slaves and indentured laborers. The new emigrants ‘freely chose’ to go to the colonies and they gave reasons for coming and going borrowed from neoclassical economics. Research by Hasia Diner (1998) demonstrates that migration was seen as either an ‘opportunity’ or as a ‘constraint.’ As an opportunity, the move abroad could offer a better life in the host country: a better job,
better living conditions, a better political system. Perceived as a constraint, migration could be likened to involuntary exile.

The analysis used to compare historical conventions found in nineteenth-century migration narratives to contemporary migration discourse is drawn from literary criticism. What I’ll be doing is unraveling the construction of migration discourse to illustrate both the contingency of its rhetorical figures and the conditions that made its stabilization possible. Reminiscent of the deconstructionist approach (esp. de Man 1979, 1983), this project views historical conventions as inherently unstable. I argue that the reproduction of intention depends upon the regulation of credit mechanisms found in state market economies. The invention of ‘public credit’ in the eighteenth century coincided with the narration of personal ‘intention’ in diaries and letters. By the nineteenth century, the production of temporarily-bound, coherent narratives were taken to be a sign of the speaker’s ‘good health.’ The negotiability of credit mechanisms assured the stabilization of intentionality as a figure of good authorship and reliable narration, as outlined below.

Credit & Credibility in Reliable Narration:

In seventeenth-century England, almost all buying and selling involved the use of credit. Artisans, shopkeepers, and nobles alike were indebted to one another through intricate chains of credit-lending (cf. Muldrew 1998; Earle 1989, section 2). Domestic

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4 Freud, in fact, interpreted his patients’ inability to tell coherent stories as a sign of neurosis (Brooks 1984: 282-83). Even today, psychotherapists continue to use narrative therapy as a means of improving their patients’ mental health. The psychotherapist attempts to make latent narratives manifest, to help mend breaks in narratives, and to construct a more coherent interpretation of past events and future projects (Polkinghorne 1988: 178).
purchases were often tallied until a sizeable sum was reached that allowed repayment by coin. But the shortage of coinage, exacerbated by a depression in the 1620s, increased the reliance on credit. Tradesmen worked on credit and shopkeepers sold on credit. Oftentimes farmers took advances in goods or cash in return for a specified volume of their produce after harvesting. Many aristocrats were indebted to laborers and servants for wages and small purchases.\(^5\) According to Craig Muldrew (1998: 100, 117) at least 90 percent of household transactions were conducted by credit. With the expansion of credit-lending came the need for \textit{double entry accounting}.\(^6\) Records of transactions kept in account-books could serve as proof that certain amounts were due.\(^7\) Already, the mechanisms of double-entry accounting were widely used among merchants to manage the consignment of goods. But now, the use of credit instruments spread to the general public, and so did the rhetoric of credibility.

Among merchants, ‘good credit’ was a sign of a person’s honesty and good character. Advice given to young apprentices underscored the importance of establishing an honest reputation. “Credit,” said Nicholas Barbon (1690: 27), was “the value raised

\(^5\) When the estate holder Richard Cholmeley, of Brandsby in Workshire, paid wages of 20s to his servant Alice Crawthorne, he noted: “That I had borrowed on her xxxix.” Samuel Pepys fretted over the £1000 he lent to his patron, the Earl of Sandwich, because of his lord’s indebtedness (cf. Muldrew 1998: 97). The dukes of Norfolk and Sussex, the earls of Shrewsbury and Essex, as well as many other noblemen in Elizabethan England, were known to pledge their plate and jewels in order to raise cash (Parker 1977: 530).

\(^6\) Books on accounting and arithmetic appeared in England as early as the mid-sixteenth century (cf. Fogo 1968).

\(^7\) There is an amusing anecdote about a baker’s widow in Kent who tried to claim the debts due to her husband for the sale of loaves of bread after his death. Her claim was denied because the sums were only written up on a chalkboard in the baker’s shop (cf. Spufford 1995: 230).
by opinion” or “reputation.” Merchants seeking to consign their goods to commission agents wanted to find reliable men with whom to do business. Merchant letters were full of requests for what amounted to informal character references. A man named Haitswell was recommended for being honest, sober, “very diligent and capable to do business” (Zahedie1999: 153). Dutch ship masters were especially reputed for being honest and reliable. Bishop Huet (1717: 41) said, they had “une grande fidelité & exactitude a rendre bon compte de tout ce qu’on leur confie.” If a man established a precedent as being reliable and honest, this, in turn, served him with ‘good credit.’ People were more likely to entrust him with their goods and to lend him money.

The account books kept by merchants helped to monitor the activities of commission agents. If an agent over-charged certain fees or under-reported the prices received, it was likely that the resident merchant would not give him another consignment, and more importantly that the agent’s reputation would suffer. Hence, good character, credibility and the proper form of book-keeping were mutually implied in seventeenth-century business dealings. Credit became synonymous with ‘life’ itself, that is, an individual’s public persona. Henry Wilkinson (1625) claimed that without the casual debts incurred in buying and selling, ‘the life of man doth not consist.’ Thomas Tusser wrote:

Who Living but lends? And be lent to they must; else buieng and selling might lie in the dust.11

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Good book-keeping was developed as a technique of self-writing. If we return to English diaries, we find that details were added were day by day, month by month, as if to provide a running ‘account’ of an individual life. Details such as births, changes of residence, and marriages were documented alongside rents and purchases in the format of double-entry accounting (e.g. Josselin 1976).\(^{12}\)

Crucial to the stabilization of ‘credibility’ (or individual ‘intention’) is the invention of public credit in the early eighteenth century. Up until then, the negotiability of credit instruments relied upon perceived credit-worthiness. The promissary note had narrative closure, but until the debt was actually paid off, the credibility of the borrower would remain uncertain. A large proportion of working capital remained in the form of unpaid debts. In accounts kept by merchants and shopkeepers, loans were actually divided into three categories: good (i.e. secure), sperate (likely to be recovered) and desperate (not likely to be recovered).\(^{13}\) Many debts remained unpaid long after they were due.\(^{14}\) As Sharon Sherman (1996) pointed out, this type of long-term credit implied a particular ‘narrativity.’ She writes (1996: 5): “The crucial object for all such texts, literary and financial, was to remain in suspension, never disclosing their value or their provenance, forcing the reader to suspend his disbelief . . . and wait.” There was a potential fictionality to these credit instruments until the waiting period was over.

\(^{12}\) Notably, the same choice of details was used in the documentation of paupers in London’s settlement examination records. As Beata Piatek (2003: 20-22) observed, both literates and non-literatures were accounted for on the basis of where they lived, the employment found, the wages earned, etc.

\(^{13}\) Muldrew (1998: 176).

Then, in the early eighteenth century, England introduced a structure of public credit that eventually guaranteed the solvency of credit instruments. A debt crisis in the 1680s prompted several money-making experiments.\(^{15}\) The Bank of England was created in 1694. During the financial crisis of 1696, the government’s deficient tallies were incorporated into the bank’s running capital. In 1711, the South Sea Company was created to transfer short-term loans into long-term debts. Money that was owed to creditors was converted into stocks in the company.\(^{16}\) Already by 1693, people were being encouraged to lend money to the government (McVeagh 2000: 9). As England waged war with France, investors acquired a stake in the preservation of the English regime (Carruthers 1996: 22). The language of credit was then used to speak about the viability of England’s government. Defoe wrote in 1706:

\[
\text{Funds perhaps may fail,}
\text{And streams may stop, but Credit must prevail.}^{17}\]

Arguably, the invention of public credit provided the frame for narrating national history. With regards to personal credit, the rhetoric of credibility and authorship was stabilized.

England’s unique path to nationhood is said to have provided a model that was adopted by other nations. They were “a polite and commercial people,” wrote William

\(^{15}\) The period between the 1690s and the 1720s has come to be known as a ‘Financial Revolution’ (cf. Dickson 1993). It began in England and spread to other states.

\(^{16}\) The company was given special trading privileges that made it attractive to investors. The amount of stock given to the government’s lenders was equivalent to the value of what they were owed. Hence, debts were ‘erased’ without money actually changing hands (cf. McVeagh 2000: 18).

\(^{17}\) From a poem published in Book XII of Defoe’s Jure Divino. See Nicolson (1994) on the use of Lady Credit in Defoe’s writings.
Blackstone (1765-69). Not long after, the rhetoric of honesty was used to describe German and American character as well.\textsuperscript{18} By the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, the government of England had lowered its interest rates in order to attract investors (following the Dutch model). As these rates were regulated, the state operated as an instrument of long-term debt management. Also by the end of the eighteenth century, litigation was introduced that made the collection of debts more reliable. The predictability of the judicial system was usually sufficient to ensure that the creditor could recover any debts owing. Thus, the language of credit was applied irrespective of an individual's personal reliability and good character.

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The interdependency between the state regulation of credit and the metaphor of credibility (or 'intentionality') in historical narratives is a presupposition that operates throughout this thesis. With regards to 'broken storylines,' the lack of intentionality depicted in stories told by international labor migrants is interpreted as a result of the deregulation of state regimes that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s after the fall of the Bretton Woods agreement. Since national currencies lost the backing of the international gold standard, they have been left to 'float' against one another, their values to be determined by market traders. Without the standards set by state laws and the creation of a reliable marketplace setting fixed values, costs, and allowing for predictable economic behavior; there can be no effective planning, nor can there be the production of new ideological narratives by economic institutions. In light of these changes, this

dissertation examines disruptions in the management of corporate and state policies, as well as the narration of intentionality in stories told by contemporary labor migrants. The final chapter examines the shifting poetics of nostalgia away from a representation of ‘nationhood’ in contemporary migration discourse.

Before giving an outline of the chapters, it would be helpful to introduce the major concepts and terms I will be using, sometimes in unconventional ways. Rather than view history in terms of a reinscription of Christian eschatology, a philosophy of liberalism or a rational ethos, my approach attempts to work against philosophical notions of history, ideology and narrative.

**History, Ideology & Narrative:**

I forward an examination of history that stresses the importance of double entry accounting and the rhetoric of ‘intentionality’ in historical narratives. Although only intimated in the pages that follow, I claim that techniques of authorship and self-expression were stabilized with *the invention of public credit* as early as the eighteenth century in England. I often use examples from early modern newspapers, literature and immigrant letters in order to talk about the conventions of self-expression in historical and ideological narratives. Some scholars might argue that we are presently witnessing a resurgence of eighteenth-century ‘world history’ in the sense that people sometimes talk about a ‘global future,’ a future shared by all of humanity. But this discourse does not pertain to the narration of ‘intentionality’ and ‘nationhood,’ using an abstract representation of historical time, which is the subject of this thesis.19

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19 Once again, I am trying to produce a counter-discourse to ‘philosophies of history.’
Ideologies are forms of thought motivated by social interests or directed towards sets of belief. Ideological representations hide imperfections, unruly behaviors, and other elements not easily categorized. As Terry Eagleton (1991: 3) explains:

To claim in ordinary conversation that someone is speaking ideologically is surely to hold that they are judging a particular issue through some rigid framework of preconceived ideas which distorts their understanding . . . to speak or judge ‘ideologically’ is to do so schematically, stereotypically, and perhaps with the faintest hint of fanaticism.

Ideologies offer a simplified version of the world. They pretend to be ‘realistic’ when, in fact, they are politically-motivated representations made to appear ‘natural.’

Historical narratives, like ideologies, involve the narration of economic actions motivated by ideas. The distinction I make between history and ideology roughly corresponds to Max Weber’s treatment of formal rationality and substantive rationality, discussed in chapter 3. According to Weber, whose project of comparative sociology aimed to historicize capitalist behavior, ideologies were an eventual outcome of rationally pursued capitalist acquisition. The systematic renewal of profit-making in the rational economic enterprise leads to the articulation of ideologies. In the same way as the South Seas Company (mentioned above) was invented to manage long-term debt, capitalist institutions can be regarded as credit-borrowing and credit-lending mechanisms. The mythology of the corporate form is held constant by the perpetual renewal of profit-

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20 As will become evident in the reading of the chapters, I treat ideological narratives and historical narratives as almost synonymous. History *tout court*, however, I equate with the metaphor of credit and credibility.

21 But Weber did not employ the term ‘ideology,’ instead he used the notion ‘substantive rationality’ defined as rational action directed towards some substantive end (value or belief). His notion of substantive rationality closely corresponds to my use of ‘ideology.’
making. The idea of the enterprise, the corporation or the nation becomes a value in itself, serving as the metaphoric frame in which ideological objectives are articulated. What I call ‘narrative conventions’ are the rhetorical techniques used in these rational ideologies.  

The poetics of ideological narratives is what makes ideologies effective. 

Ideological narratives imply the transformation of social subjects. The Protestant bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century Europe developed ‘true histories’ that employed allegories of religious conversion. William Turner (1697: 6-7) wrote: “to Record Providences seems to be one of the best Methods that can be pursued, against the abounding Atheism of this Age: For by Works of Providence, the Confession of a God, and the Truth of his Word, have been extorted from those very persons who have boldly denied it” (italics added). Rules for representing ‘the universal’ in the daily occurrences of common individuals found their way onto the English stage in the late seventeenth century. Moral reformers supported the idea of ‘Poetic Justice,’ according to which stories were shaped by ‘artistic probability’ and ‘moral end.’ George Farquhar (1702) wrote that comedy is a “well-framed Tale handsomely told, as an agreeable vehicle for

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22 In the Romantic imagination, myths were treated as a mode of thought, more than just a collection of old stories. The rise of metaphor and the concomitant decline of rhetoric has been the object of studies by Roland Barthes (1970), Gérard Genette (1970), Paul Ricoeur (1977), and Tzvetan Todorov (1982).

23 When Weber (1958) spoke of ‘the spirit’ of economic capitalism he resorted to an explanation of rational ethics derived from Christian asceticism. However, I believe the poetics of an ideological narrative is much more important than its metaphorical structure.

24 Krutch (1949: 78), citing Tacitus. Aristotle’s Poetics had provided writers and critics with a set of criteria for judging the felicity of poetic forms by the sixteenth century. Aristotle (1965: 119) argued that “the poet’s job is not to report what has happened but what is likely to happen: that is, what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity” (italics added).
Counsel or Reproof." The moral ending of the story could be discovered by *reason*, where every ending was announced in its beginning. So the man of 'good sense' became both the subject and the audience for morality plays. During the eighteenth century, the idea of 'Poetic Justice,' aimed at representing universal truths, shifted its concern from religious prescription to public credibility and justice.

In migration discourse of the nineteenth century, the event of migration evoked feelings of nostalgia for imaginary utopias. The notion of 'settlement' whereby people were tied to a particular place was thematized in poetic verse. Suddenly, if a person was to move from her natural birthplace, this became an important event in the individual's biography. Migration narratives also illustrated the convention of 'intentionality' whereby the migrant gave reasons for the move away from her/his home country. But since the 1970s, this rhetoric of intentionality – or 'good credit' – has gone unregulated. In light of these economic changes, this dissertation asks how the ideological conventions of 'place' and 'intentionality' are shifting in narratives told by contemporary labor migrants.

**Outline of the Chapters:**

Chapter 1 introduces 'broken storylines' as a problem of intentionality in the narratives told by international labor migrants.

Chapter 2 gives an introduction to the debates on the rise of 'global culture' and the 'transnational elite.' This is put in relief against an account of the economics of

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flexibility and the flexible organization of labor that does not allow for the reproduction of class relations.

Chapter 3 diagnoses 'disorganized capitalism' as resulting from fluctuating currency values and the lack of state regulation. This argument is used to explain why we are not seeing the production of new historical or ideological narratives today.

Chapter 4 identifies 'broken storylines' in the operations of the multinational corporation. Multinationals have developed human resources policies specially devoted to organizing the transfer of employees from one subsidiary to another in a foreign country. The career narratives of expatriate migrants do not fit the institutional roles and stereotypes created within the corporate setting.

Chapter 5 locates 'broken storylines' in the execution of state immigration policies designed to facilitate the entry of foreign workers during the high-tech boom from 1998 to 2001. In the global race to improve national competitiveness, the calculation of workforce shortages fell to the wayside. National immigration bureaus ended up benchmarking their policies without any concern for rational calculation.

Chapter 6 examines the shifting poetics of international migration narratives in terms of the placement of the pastoral motif. The imaginary Golden Age or Garden of Eden was a popular convention used to idealize a life without pain or toil. In nineteenth century migration discourse, we see the combination of economic motives ('intentionality') with these pastoral images of home and away. In contrast, in the stories told by contemporary labor migrants, we see that the object of idealization is shifting. Rather than romanticizing ideas of nationhood, some migrants express a sense of belonging ascribed to small events such as 'fitting in' with locals.
CHAPTER 1

A Lack of Intentionality: The Problem of Exchanging Life Stories with Temporary Labor Migrants

This chapter is about the stories told by migrant professionals moving, working, and living temporarily in foreign countries. Oftentimes these migrants are information technology workers, contract laborers and employees of multinational corporations, who are never quite sure of how long they will be staying in one place or where they will be going next. The where, when and why of their international moves becomes problematic in comparison with the ideological conventions that script individual agency and intentionality. For those who move in response to rapidly changing job demands, the intangibles of what will happen next – whether their working visa will be granted or denied, whether their project will receive its funding, whether a corporate merger will make them redundant, etc. – make it impossible for them to plan for the future or to talk about an imaginary future that goes according to plan.

This lack of agency or intentionality runs squarely against the tenets of classical liberalism that guarantee the freedom to act by choice. In liberal democracies, an equality of agency among individuals is supposed to be protected as a natural right.¹

¹ As Daniel Bell (1972: 29) pointed out, “the purpose of societal arrangements is to allow the individual the freedom to fulfill his own purposes.” Locke stated, humans are in “a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions . . . as they think fit . . . without asking leave, or depending on the Will of any other Man.” (1960 [1689]: 287).
Following the linguistic turn in the 1960s, however, researchers have been led to think critically about taken-for-granted notions such as ‘agency,’ ‘intentionality,’ and ‘selfhood.’ As Myerhoff and Ruby (1982: 8) explain:

Slowly, then, it became apparent that we do not dwell in a world that continues without our attention or active participation. As a socially-made arrangement, it is a story in which citizens find themselves to be among the chief actors.

This project adopts an argument made in poststructuralist criticism, according to which the figure of the author – and the narration of intentionality as a figure of authorship – is simply a textual device or an act of representation. To Roland Barthes (1977: 145) the author is “empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it.” The rhetoric of intentionality is located on par with the text, not standing outside of it. Barthes also said that the author is “a modern figure, a product of our society” that emerged with “English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation” (Ibid, p.143). In the narratives told by contemporary labor migrants, we’ll be asking how this construction of intentionality may have changed.

**Metaphors of History:**

When we tell stories, we are reproducing many of the discursive forms that were previously invented by others. Oftentimes, these are frames borrowed from official reports of historical events, that is, events considered to be of national importance. When Maurice Halbwachs (1980: 51) speaks of collective memory, he writes, “my national society has been a theater for a number of events that I say I ‘remember,’ events that I know about only from newspapers or the testimony of those directly involved.”
Autobiographical memory takes part in 'history' as we make use of its discursive devices to narrate our lives. For example, people become members of institutions as they take on institutional goals to frame their own life stories (cf. Linde 2001; Mills 1959). Thus, history is not simply a way of talking about the past; it is a way of using the past to frame the present.²

History also has narrativity – it is a mode of narration that presents events as if they happened for a reason. According to Hayden White, history-writing can be analyzed in the same manner as fictional texts.³ “Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories,” he writes, “with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends and a coherence that permits us to see ‘the end’ in every beginning?” (White 1980: 23). Of course not. But historical events are presented in this way. The continuity of historical action-frames is a Western convention, as Hans Kellner (1989: 1) pointed out:

Why do we intuit and represent and defend the continuity and essential unity of history? The assumptions do not come from the documentary sources, from existing historical texts, or from our own lives. Rather, the source of the assumption that the past is in some sense continuous is a literary one. What is continuous is not so much reality, or the form in which reality exists (as artifact) in its obvious discontinuity, but the form in which our culture represents reality.

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³ Hayden White’s Metahistory and The Tropics of Discourse revolutionized the way in which twentieth-century scholars think about the writing of history. White takes his cue from Northrop Frey’s Anatomy of Criticism (1957) where specific Classical and Judaeo-Christian mythoi are identified as the source of plot-structures for all Western fictions. Likewise, White argues that the historian uses tragic, comic, romantic, and ironic master tropes for the emplotment of historical events.
In the autobiographical voice, we give reasons for the things we do, we talk about what we meant to do and the things that happened accidentally to us. It is surprisingly difficult to have a conversation with someone who does not frame their actions historically — as I soon discovered.

**Metaphors in Polite Conversation:**

Early on in my graduate studies, I had a conversation with Theresa — the woman I shared an office with at Rice University — that showed me just how ‘different’ our life stories were. Theresa was in the midst of applying for an academic position in Chicago. She was in the last stages of writing her doctoral dissertation. I had just begun attending graduate courses in the anthropology department. We sat in our little office for days on end, facing two desks, one computer and no window. Then one day, Theresa began telling me about she was prepared to move across country and to do whatever it takes to launch her career. She turned to me and asked,

“What other universities did you apply to before coming to Rice?”
“Well, there was just Rice,” I said.
“That’s all?” Her eyes spread wide.
“Well . . . You see,” I stammered.
“My husband’s company transferred us to Houston. I’m here because of him.
Of course, I found out about Rice before I left France — ”

It was too late, however, the damage was done. I was a failure of sorts for not having a better reason for coming to this school, for not choosing where I wanted to live, for putting my husband’s career before my own.

“So where do you think you’ll go after you graduate?” she asked.
“I don’t know.”
“Do you want to teach?”
“I’m not sure.”
“Where do you think you’ll end up living?”
“I really have no idea.”

I knew that we would be staying in Houston for approximately five years. Regis was issued a five-year working visa. After this, if he wanted to apply for another visa, he’d have to leave the United States for a year. Alternatively, if he wanted to stay longer, he could quit his job and become my dependent because I was given legal status to be a graduate student in the US. Most of the other foreign workers we knew in Houston did not have this luxury. If their companies decided they were no longer needed or if their immigration visas expired, they had no choice but to pack their bags and leave the country. As I spoke with Theresa, I realized that my narratives were ominously lacking a sense of personal direction. Where was the struggle, the sense of achievement, the heroic tale of overcoming adversity? I could listen, but I could not share similar stories about having a career, having a life, becoming a success. The conversation was a very difficult one for me to sustain.

Then another experience made me realize that my situation was not totally alien. In a neighborhood newspaper that got thrown onto our lawn every week, I came across an ad for “International Connections of Houston.” The advertisement said that a meeting would be held for anyone who had previously lived abroad or who was currently living in Houston as a temporary foreign resident. I decided to check it out. At the meeting, I met mostly women twice my age, but with whom I felt the most immediate bond of knowing just what you mean, when very few words are spoken. One of the more potent instances of this occurred when a woman told the story about how her husband came home from
work one day to tell her about they would be moving to Houston. Her husband said that
"Ralph – his boss – had called him into the office . . . "

"He had that look on his face."
"I just knew," she said.

A chill went up and down my spine. I was taken back to the time Regis came home from
work with that strange smile on his face. It was a nervous twitch that turned up like a
smile he couldn’t hold down because his lips were quivering. "Sit down," he said, and I
sat in the armchair that he had re-upholstered as a university student. It was a souvenir
his grandfather brought back with him from World War II, now covered with bright pink
flowers and mint green leaves. The spring cushion wouldn’t lie down flat, so I sat there
balanced on the upper rise of the seat, arms and legs tensed. A feeling of nausea swept
over me. I had just started course work for my Maîtrise at the University of Bordeaux. I
was also teaching French classes at the Alliance Française. The next year of my life was
planned out now. Then he said that we’d be moving next month. We were married just
two months before. We thought we’d be staying at least another year in Bordeaux. The
company told Regis that we would have two or three years there, until he was transferred
to headquarters in the United States. But we ended up staying in Bordeaux for just the
one year.

These stories of events that occur unexpectedly and that change everything: I
heard them over and over again while I was getting to know temporary migrants living in
Houston. They grew to mark the poetics of the conversations I had with people who
moved internationally at the whim of the company or their changing visa status with
regards to state legislation. As I looked for ways to talk about my experiences as an
international migrant, having lived and worked in three different countries (Canada, France, and the US) in less than three years, my broken success story became the object of a research project, which culminated in this dissertation.

**Metaphors of ‘History’:**

In my discussion with Theresa, I could not appeal to an historical frame with which to compare our life experiences for planning a career and an imaginary future. This lack of intentionality proved to be a problem when my narratives were used as ‘tools for living.’⁴ In face-to-face interactions, discursive metaphors provide frames within which interlocutors can respond to one another. As Chilton and Ilyin (1993: 12) explain: “the desire of conversants to cooperatively maintain conversational and social cohesion may constitute pressure to remain within a metaphorical frame that has been established in discourse.” It is as if there were rules of ‘polite conversation’ that dictate we should respond to interlocutors in one of the frames they evoke. In fact, in the eighteenth century new rules in the art of speaking were the object of cultivated study among members of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. “The ability to engage in pleasant and informal, ‘polite’ argument,” involved rules of good taste that shaped social behavior (Struever 1985: 80).

The metaphor of history is so pervasive in everyday western discourse that its use may often go unnoticed. In the 1970s, however, the linguistic turn in the social sciences rendered the constructiveness of ‘self,’ ‘knowledge,’ and ‘history’ into the objects of reflexive study (cf. Ruby 1982; Woolgar 1988). In this project, I focus on the historical

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⁴ The phrase is from Kenneth Burke’s essay, “Literature as Equipment for Living” (1967).
actions frames that provide a linear framework to personal narratives. The relationship between the narrator’s voice and the narrative’s linear coherence is historically and culturally defined.

The life history approach is an especially suitable way of collecting personal narratives and questioning whether or not they conform to historical action plans. This method of research began with the collection of case studies of individual lives; but in the 1980s, attention was drawn toward the segments of a life narrated as life stories. In life story interviews, individuals are asked to recall particular aspects of their lives in any order of occurrence (Tagg 1985). Analytical attention is drawn to ‘episodes’ that have “beginnings, causes, developments and endings” (Ibid, p.174). In this study, narratives were collected in group discussions, using the model of the ‘focus group’ as a guide (cf. Knodel 1993; Kitzinger 1994; Morgan 1993). A group setting is especially appropriate for revealing shared and variable perspectives (Frey & Fontana 1993: 82).

The location for these group discussions was Melbourne, Victoria; a particularly propitious site for studying temporary skilled labor migration. The state of Victoria, where Melbourne is located, has a Skilled Migration Unit that works with employers, recruitment agents, and industry associations to find migrants with suitable skills and to facilitate their entry into the country. Melbourne serves as regional headquarters to more than 820 foreign-owned corporate subsidiaries. For three years in a row, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in London ranked Melbourne the top destination for expatriate migrants in a survey of 130 cities. Melbourne’s international business district, its cultural

\[5\text{ Cf. Bertain (1981); Myerhoff (1982) and Crapanzano (1984).}\]
activities and beaches, make it a highly competitive destination for foreign corporations and labor migrants.

Conversations about 'Moving to a Foreign Country':

In Melbourne, I set up a bi-weekly discussion group for foreigners who were temporary residents and for Australians who had temporarily resided abroad. I printed up brochures and distributed them to gyms, coffee shops, doctors offices and any other businesses I could think of that foreign professionals would be likely to visit. I targeted some of the nicer neighborhoods in Melbourne where they would most likely be directed to by consultants, including: South Yarra, Brighton, and Port Melbourne. An entire service sector has mushroomed over the past decade in order to assist corporations with the temporary living arrangements of their foreign employees and contract workers. Relocation agents specialize in finding accommodations for temporary workers, international schools for their children, and listings of doctors and specialists who speak several languages. They assist migrants in obtaining driver’s licences, bank accounts, utilities, and furniture. Cultural trainers introduce them to foreign customs, as well as linguistic conventions, etc.

I contacted a number of these service providers and sent them brochures to be distributed to their clients as they saw fit. The meetings I hosted were advertised as social gatherings. The brochures gave biographical information about myself as a graduate student and a temporary migrant, who had now lived and worked in four countries, before the tender age of thirty. It also told interested parties that the conversations were to be recorded, but absolutely informal, where the primary interest
was to meet and share stories with other people who knew what it was like to live in a foreign country. In the cover letter that went with the brochures sent to relocation agents, I wrote:

Lots of people don’t know what it’s like to be working temporarily in a foreign country, as one woman put it, “What an exciting, topsy-turvy way to live!” But the years spent abroad are not one long vacation. Sometimes it helps to talk to local Australians or fellow compatriots. And sometimes it really helps to talk to someone who knows what it’s like to pack up all your belongings and unpack them in a new place.

The gatherings took place in my living room, where I provided tea, coffee, wine and snacks. The participants had my contact details on the brochure, they would contact me first by phone or email, then I would give them further details and my address. I was careful to never have more than six people come together at once. Four people at one time turned out to be the optimum number, so that everyone shared in the same conversation and there was not a tendency to divide off into smaller groups of two and three people talking together.

On Tuesday afternoons, from 2pm onwards, spouses, always women, came to see me. On Thursday evenings, from 7pm onwards, there were men and women who worked during the day who came. The afternoons and evenings would rotate, so that one week I would host an afternoon tea and cookies, and the following week it would be an evening meeting. In general, this worked out very well. The people who came I think enjoyed themselves. There was no need for me to ask for biographical details as no one knew each other and this would be done in the initial greetings as a customary way of introducing oneself to a group of strangers. The only thing I had some control over was
the fact that the people who came to my apartment had lived abroad or had come from overseas as temporary migrants. It made no difference to me whether they were male or female, what nationality or age they were, whether or not they had kids. I thought that because everyone would have this international experience in common, they would eventually talk about how they came to Melbourne or how they had lived overseas to come back here. In the end, this proved to be a very effective way of stimulating conversation about temporary migration.

**Broken Storylines:**

Lauren came to Melbourne following her partner who works for Kraft. She worked as an actress in New York and had just finished courses to become a wholistic health counsellor. She felt like it was time for something new, so she decided to follow her boyfriend who was on his way to Australia. Five days after they arrived in Melbourne, her partner’s company told them they would be moving to Singapore.

Hi, I’m Lauren. And I’m here with my partner — I guess, is the right word. We’re from New York — well, he’s from Connecticut, I’m from New York. We’re living together for the first time, so it’s a big experiment. Aaaah... (Everyone laughs.) We’ll be married at some point, we just haven’t gotten there yet. Um... we’re off to Singapore in six months, to live there, that’s the latest news. We thought we were going to be here for a few years.

Johanna Fisher moved to Australia with her husband who was a contract worker for IBM. She was three months pregnant when she learned the news that he’d been offered a temporary contract with the National Australian Bank. “It was okay” with her to leave for Melbourne because they thought they would be back in the UK to have the
baby, once the contract was over. So off they went. A couple of weeks before they were supposed to come home, the plan changed.

When we actually, originally came out, we was only here for three months, and then, two weeks before we went back to the UK, they said that they want us back for two years. So we had to find a house in a day. Um... Because I needed to have the baby somewhere — I didn’t know where I’d be living, so we looked at five houses and had to pick one.

Johanna and her husband went back to the UK, according to the original plan, and then came back to Melbourne in October 2003.

J: I must have been about five months pregnant when we went back to the U.K., and then I came back and I was nearly six months pregnant, 'cause I had to get a medical certificate to fly.
T: Oh, did you?
J: Yeah, so... And, I didn’t... I didn’t know where I was having the baby. Had no hospital, nothing. Um, we live by the Cabrini — don’t know whether you’ve heard of that?
T: No...
J: It’s aah... down Glenferrie Road, just one of the roads through there, and it’s quite a popular hospital, and we actually found a house to move into. ‘Cause they said, the Cendant said, “You need to find a house, you need to find an area, ‘cause you need to get yourself in a hospital to have your baby, so...”
T: I laugh-gasp.
J: And, we had half an hour to pick furniture from a rental store, you know, Guest Rentals, so we had half an hour in there to pick the furniture. And then the next day we flew back to England and while I was in England, the relocation agent rung me up and said, “I can’t get you in the Cabrini, it’s fill-up.”
T: Ohhh.
J: Um, you need to book in when you actually found out you were pregnant. And I said, “Oh right,” (she giggles) “I’m a bit late now.” Cause I’ll be nearly 6 months when I come back, so... They run around and a week later she come back and she said, “We got you in the Masada hospital.” So I got in there,
T: Good.
J: Um... But there were loads of problems with Masada hospital...
T: That’s where Erin had her baby.
J: Yeah, it was, it’s not really nice actually in there. Um... And they got me an obstetrician and stuff like that, and the — his wife’s a receptionist, and she was like horrified that I was flying back, nearly 6 months pregnant. And... I’ve — I’ve been checked here by doctors, so I knew everything was ok.
T: Yeah.
J: So we eventually got back and I got checked and got booked in there. But then about four days before the baby was due, we got a phone call to say that IBM had not booked me – had paid some paperwork – not paid for me or signed some paperwork, so I couldn’t have the baby there.
T: Get out!
J: And my partner had to sort it all out and said, “Look, my wife’s due in like four days, you need to – she’s got to come in and have the baby there.” This was, like, IBM relocation people.
T: HR people.
J: Yeah, there’s so many people that you go through . . .
T: Yeah.
J: . . . that all the paperwork gets messed up or missed. Or someone says that they’ve posted something and they haven’t . . . and something got missed, so . . . Um, there was a big panic for, like, a half a day, and eventually it got sorted out.

Johanna looks back on the experience of being pregnant while moving to Australia as six months of ‘mad panic.’ Since then, her husband has left IBM to become a permanent employee of the National Australian Bank.

Cathy’s husband was also a contract laborer. She came to Melbourne because she was sick and tired of seeing him go away for weeks on end and coming home to an empty house. In the UK she worked as a human resources manager and a schoolteacher. But she warned her employers that she couldn’t continue to live this way.

C: I’ve always, always lived in the UK. And what we’ve done before was Ryan would go off on different assignments and he would spend three months in Chicago or three months in Washington. And he’s been to Dublin, he’s been all over the UK. And I just said, “We’ve been together for 10 years, we’ve been married for 6 years, we don’t even live together.”
T: (I laugh.)
C: “This is ridiculous.” (Her speaking to him.) He said, “Well, what do you want to do?” “Well either you give up your job or I come with you on your next assignment.” He goes, “Okay, my assignment’s coming to an end, where do you want to go?” And I went, “I don’t care.” And then on the Wednesday, he went, “How about Australia?” And I went, “Oh right, yeah,” thinking it was a joke. And he went, “Okay, we leave on Sunday.” And I went, “ohhh...” (lips trembling).
T: Get out!
C: Yes. *(She's laughing.)*
T: Get out!
C: We got the choice on the Wednesday and we left on Sunday.
T: No you didn't.
C: We did.
T: Oh my gosh.
C: We really did.
T: *(I scream.)* That's awesome.
C: And he was like, "Oh my God."
T: Then you had to say goodbye to everybody.
C: Yeah.
T: You had to pack a bag. You had to pack some clothes.
C: Umm . . . We were allowed, because we were coming via Singapore and not via the States, we were only allowed 20 kilos each.
T: *(Gasp.)*
C: And because Ryan was going with a windsurfer and a kitesurfer and he was going to work, I had about *that* much space in the suitcase. *(Showing me with her hands.)*

... 

T: Why did he have to be here so quickly? *(Very long pause.)*
Or was it just that he could be? *(Still another long pause.)*
C: Um, to cut a long story short, Coles Myer needed somebody *now.*
T: *(I laugh.)*
C: Yesterday.
T: Yeah.
C: And it took them . . . four years to find someone.
T: And then they decided they needed them *that week?*
C: They had – it was really bizarre because Ryan was looking for a project, he knew his project was coming to an end. And, he met some of the board in London when they came over for a visit to see how things were done in the UK. And he met them. And he apparently, he really impressed them. But they didn't *tell* him. Because what they were trying to do was like, okay, we need someone *like* Ryan that we met in London, who works from Australia for a little bit cheaper. Or someone from the States who's going to be cheaper.
T: Ohhh.
C: So then they got to a situation where they – the project was losing millions and they needed someone desperately. And Ryan's project finished, on the Friday . . .
T: Hmm.
C: And Ryan's Australian boss said, "Well, he's finishing that project on Friday, he could be with you on Monday," and signed the contract.
T: No way. *(I laugh.)*
C: He went, "Oh my God." But the idea was that if your wife would stay in the UK for six weeks and sort everything out . . .
T: Ahhh . . . Gotcha.
C: Why the fucking hell should I?
T: Yeah.
C: If you’re going then I’m coming.
T: I’m sick and tired of that.
C: But also, they would have been a bit of a pain about my flight. So what we did was, Ryan was entitled to a business class flight,
T: Hm-mm.
C: We actually paid – got two economy flights – they’re cheaper than the business class flights, so they could not complain about me coming.
T: That’s awesome.

Then there was the story told by Henri, who worked for Shell, but found out that his contract in Melbourne was ending prematurely and he was being sent back to France. He had a few weeks to pack all his furniture, sell his things, and leave – whereas he would’ve liked to have found a new job and stay in Australia. When we heard the news, there was myself (T), Regis (R), and Sonya (S), who is from Germany, chatting together. Henri had just come back from traveling on business: five weeks in Houston, back to Melbourne for two weeks, and then on to London for a short trip – where he also looked for work.

H: Because I’m leaving actually in ahh, in ahh, June.
T: Ohhh.
H: So, yeah. And ahh, now I’m supposed to be in Amsterdam in one week.
S: Gosh. *(She laughs.)*
H: So, ahhh, I have to pack.
T: Oh my gosh, you have to pack.
H: Yeah. I’ve got . . .
R: So you know where you’re going back to? Or . . . ?
H: Berre.
R: Berre? So you’ll be in Marseille?
H: Well it’s . . . I don’t – I still don’t know. I still have to work that out. Where I want to live, and etc . . . If I want to buy it or rent, to –
S: Are you going to be living there for awhile then?
H: I’m not sure actually.
R: *(Regis laughs.)*
S: Stay there 3 weeks and then ahh . . . Hamburg? *(She’s joking.)*
H: Um, well um, actually it could have been the Hamburg area, actually. And ahh, actually my . . . At first I had two options: either in France or maybe the Hague.
But because of the new policy about expatriates with Shell — it means no expatriates. Ahhh. Actually there is a total mess in the HR because on one hand you are a foreigner so you are entitled that you have to be an expatriate. If I want to work [in] Netherlands for some team in Shell, I have to be an expatriate; on the other hand, since maybe a few months, there’s a new policy “no expatriates.” (He laughs.)

Basically, the company had introduced a new policy whereby employees on international assignments should be localized, that is, they should no longer get paid premiums for living overseas, instead they should be working on local contracts. None of us expected this policy to last very long. The complaint about the high price of expatriates sounded familiar, but the realities of the workplace seemed to demand this kind of international movement. Henri worked on a multi-national team of software developers that sought to optimize the refining process for Shell. He participated in teleconferences with some eight different nationalities: Malaysian, Indian, English, Dutch, American, French, and Australian workers. If he moved back to France, he would still be working on the same project, with the same team — only now, he’d be expected to move around more often. Henri was told to expect traveling fifty to sixty percent of his time, once back in France.

S: You’re not actually enthusiastic about going back?
H: Let’s say, I’m not at all at the moment.
S: Not at all?
H: But I have no choice. Because of my project, I’m tied till the end of June and I have to find a new job before the end of June.

In the meantime, Henri was expected to participate in a meeting scheduled in Amsterdam for the month of May — as if he didn’t already have enough to do.

T: So are you going to Amsterdam and then you come back here and then you pack your things and then you leave?
H: Mmm. (Nodding.)
T: Really? So you have how long to pack up? You have a week or two weeks?
H: Well ahh, they said they want me by the end of June, and there’s a meeting that’s been postponed until the second week in Amsterdam, so it means I don’t – I don’t think I can be back before the fifth of June,
T: Yeah.
H: and if I have to leave, let’s say, around the fifteenth, aaahhh, and apart from that, I have to work as well.
T: Yeah.
H: Which is real fun at the moment. *(Pure sarcasm.)*
T: Il va pÂter un plomb.
H: Je vais tout casser, je vais tout casser.
T: Aaaah. *(I give a soft scream like a crazy person and laugh.)*

R: Well, that sucks.
H: Correct.
T: When did you find out again?
H: . . . where I had to go, etc., I found out last week.
T: Last week. *(I sort of laugh.)*
S: That’s what they call, you have to be ‘flexible’ these days.
H: I am – very flexible.
S: Be mobile and flexible, meaning you have to have no life. *(She laughs.)* Only for the company.
T: Yeah, it does mean that.
S: It’s hard to have a private life as well.
H: Aaah, ya well sure.
S: Mmm.

As a young girl, Jennifer moved with her family every two years or so. When she married, she settled in Peoria, Illinois and got stuck there, so to speak, for some twenty years. Her husband worked for Caterpillar. Then they got transferred to San Francisco and she really didn’t want to leave. She was working as an elementary school teacher and they put her in charge of a learning centre, where she taught students and teachers how to use technology. She also had a science discovery room, where she carried out messy science projects that couldn’t be done in regular class time. Jennifer was ‘blooming,’ as she put it.
J: We were in California and I loved California and I didn’t want to go, and I told him to find anything he could, so we didn’t have to leave.
T: Where were you in California?
J: Ah, San Francisco Bay area.
T: Were you really?
J: Yeah, so, I didn’t want to leave California, the boys didn’t want to leave California, they weren’t going to move back with us. That’s all . . . they’re still there.
T: Hm-mm. Hm-mm.

Jennifer’s boys had been in high school. While she and her husband were in Melbourne, they started university.

J: So um, he said, “I just got a call from ‘mining’ and they want to hire me in mining.” I go, “mining?” See he’s had so many career changes.
T: Hm-mm?
J: I mean, it’s just really bizarre because Caterpillar’s so huge. He figures he’s had five different careers within one company. He’s been there 35 years.

Her husband was first been hired as a sweeper by Caterpillar – using a real broom, she pointed out, not an electric one. Then he went back to school to get his bachelor’s degree, and then his Master’s . . . (The whole family used to go with him to the library on weekends.) And this way, he worked his way up in the company. When they came to Melbourne – she thought it was much better than going back to Illinois – he was assigned to a project that was meant to take six years to complete. As it turns out, they went back to Peoria after only a year and a half.

J: Six years.
T: Six years.
J: Possibly. Yeah. But he finished everything he was supposed to do in that short amount of time. You know, everything has gone so smooth, I always look at everything as, you know, I don’t let little things, you know [get you down].
T: Yeah.
J: The worst thing is just waiting for the company to decide what they’re going to do with you.
Yeah.
I find that the most difficult, you know, they call ya and tell ya, “Be ready to go.” *(She laughs.)* And you get, I get already to go and I get everything done and then I’m waiting. And waiting, and waiting. And because right now, they still have not announced it because they’re doing these negotiations with the company that Dan has. He finished what he was supposed to do in a year and a half. See this is the problem with this man, he does everything

He’s way to efficient.

He is.

*(I laugh.)*

and he gets everything done too fast.

Yeah. Yeah.

Then we have to move. And I told him, “Quit doing that!”

Yeah. Yeah.

***

For those of us – myself included – who have moved to different foreign countries every few years; we know that our moves don’t go as planned. And we don’t expect them to. For instance, here’s a conversation I had with Shampa, who is from India and whose husband works in information technology (IT):

I’ve gotten pretty used to packing and unpacking. *(We both laugh.)*
My husband and I – my husband’s from France and I’m from Canada – we moved to

four countries in seven years.

Okay.

So yeah.

So, do you like it?

Ah, I’m getting a little bit tired of moving. I’ll be glad to settle down. *(She laughs.)*
To tell you the truth. *(She laughs.)* It’s been exciting, it’s been great to come to Australia, but um...

So when did you come here?

Ah, it’s been a year now.

Okay.

How about for you?

Ah, we came here last year in the month of March.

In the month of March.

Ah, well, more than a year.

Hm-hm.

And before that we were in New Zealand.
T: Mmm?
S: First in Wellington, and then Auckland.
T: Mmm...
S: After every one and a half to two years we keep moving. (*She laughs quietly.*)
T: Every one and a half to two years?
S: There's no particular time period, but generally that's what we've been seeing lately.
T: Yeah?
S: We moved to New Zealand in Wellington in 2000. In 2002, we moved to Auckland. And then again, Melbourne, 2003. So we keep moving. (*She laughs.*) Actually my husband joined this company in 1999 and since then we've been moving around. Before that he had to go on tour, but within India itself.
T: Ohhh.
S: So after he changed his company, this is like a start-up consultancy services. So they have ahh, throughout the world they have their offices.
T: It's a consultancy service?
S: Yeah, it's a consultancy service.
T: Is he in IT?
S: Yeah.
T: So is he – is he hired out for separate contracts and then he ends up physically working for a different company each time?
S: Ah, it's not a contract. Actually, he does not want to change his company, right now. And this is not actually a contract, he's actually looking after the business development in New Zealand and Melbourne.
T: Oh, I see, okay.
S: So... For that he has been sent here. So as long as they want him to stay here, we'll stay.
T: Mmm.
S: And then we will move to some other place. Or maybe back to India.
T: Where do you think it will be next? Do you have any idea?
S: Oh, I have no idea.
T: No idea?
S: No idea.
T: Yeah. (*I cough.*) That's a bit like us.

This condition of moving, without knowing the 'when' and 'where' of the next move, leads to uncomfortable moments in conversations with people who would like to know what our plans are. *How long do you think you'll be in Melbourne?* I get asked constantly. Even our friends who are temporary migrants ask us the question, what
Tammy calls, *the question that every expatriate dreads.* Here Regis and I are talking with Tammy and her husband Jeremy, and their son Anthony:

Tam: So how long are you here for? The question every expat dreads.
R: Exactly.
T: Mmm. And it’s always a vague answer, *Well, we’re supposed to be ... hypothetically speaking.*
R: If I said I don’t know would you be surprised?
Tam: No I wouldn’t be surprised. We don’t know either.
A: Yeah, it’s the whole, *it’s very likely that this will happen, there’s a chance that it won’t,* you might say, *I don’t really know anything.*
J: Mmm. I’ve got no idea.
R: Supposedly two or three years, but, you know, we’re all – most expats are coming for projects, so [if] for some reason the project doesn’t go anywhere . . .
T: This is what I’ve been telling people, this two or three years, and then the other night I was planning on getting a gym membership and it was an *annual membership.* *(I start to laugh.)*
R: *(Then Regis starts to laugh.)* And I was starting . . .
T: It was just for one year . . .
R: . . . to calculate.
T: He’s going, “Oh, I don’t know if we’re going to be here that long.” *(I’m laughing and everyone else starts to laugh.)* I mean, *one year?*
R: “I just arrived,” well . . .
T: I can’t commit to that?
Tam: Yeah, we know, exactly. *(Responding to Regis.)*
J: Yeah, I mean I didn’t expect our first one [international assignment] to be four years at all, I expected that to be maybe two. And I expected our last one to be much longer.
A: And it wasn’t, which was too bad.
J: Well . . .
R: We were supposed, for instance, to stay, what, six years in Houston. And after four years we were gone, so . . .
Tam: *(Laughing.)*
T: I’m glad you understand.
*(We all laugh.)*

The same way, when I first met Cathy I asked her:

T: How long are you going to be here for?
C: Well, we’ve got a four-year visa.
T: Four-year visa?
C: So . . .
T: So we might be here for four years too. But we don’t know.
C: We don’t know. It’s one of those things, you know, the last project Ryan did was for six weeks and he was there for three and a half years.

T: (I gasp – laugh.) Ohh, welcome to my world. I know all about it.

C: (She laughs.) Finally, someone that says I know.

T: (I laugh.)

C: A lot of people at home are like, what are you talking about?

T: Ahhh.

In these conversations, the continuity of the historical narrative gets broken. After so many ‘moves’ that do not go as planned, the historical frame no longer serves as a point of reference. Seasoned migrants give up trying to measure what does or doesn’t go according to plan.

**Unmaking History:**

How are we to talk about the *unmaking* of history? Jean-Luc Nancy (1990) once made the observation that our time recognizes the past as no longer part of history, but history itself. Our time is no longer the time of history, he writes:

... history is suspended, or even finished, *as sense*, as the directional and teleological path that it has been considered to be since the beginning of modern historical thinking.

... our time is no longer a time able to feel and represent itself as a time making history, as a time producing the greatness of History as such. Our time is conscious of itself as a nonhistorical time.6

The present task is to write about history as we have become self-conscious of history. In this perspective, I endeavor to examine how historical narratives are becoming *undone* in terms of the economic processes and political conditions that underpin their construction.

A very strange thing happened in the nineteenth century. As state market capitalism

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6 Nancy (1990: 150, 151).
emerged, so did state histories – a philosophy of history – that shared the same logic of
d progress as capitalist accumulation. Terms such as ‘development,’ ‘epoch,’ ‘progress,’
and ‘Zeitgeist’ all acquired increasingly qualitative and projective dimensions in western
European lexicons of the late eighteenth-century onwards (Koselleck 1985: 249). The
narration of history shares the same linear causality as capitalist profit-making
imperatives. As Karl Polanyi (1957) famously demonstrated, the emergence self-
regulated markets led to the institutionalization of the motive of economic gain. This
dissertation explores what happens when the narration of capitalist action – i.e. economic
behavior – can no longer be used to frame events that take place. In the case of
temporary labor migrants, the international move falls outside of the linear frame of
history. These ahistorical narratives also relate to changes in the management of
economic behavior in corporate and state institutions, as we shall look at next.
CHAPTER TWO

Learning from the Contemporary Migration of Labor: How Flexibility is putting an End to the Production of Ideological Narratives

The number of individuals leaving their home countries to accept temporary work assignments rose substantially over the course of the 1990s.\(^1\) Several governments report that migrants are providing key skills for new economic growth. "Talent is a passport that is nationality-blind," announced Singapore’s Minister of Communications and Information Technology in 2001.\(^2\) Co-directors of the American Migration Policy Institute agreed, "Individual initiative and talent are now the most valuable global resource."\(^3\)

The new geographic mobility of labor is affecting workers in a number of different industries. Migrants are being hired as private consultants or through subcontracting firms or they could be the employees of multinational companies, transferred to a corporation’s various national subsidiaries. In government reports, these coveted migrants are knowledge workers, essential to national competitiveness in the new knowledge economy.\(^4\) Yet the kind of labor being recruited is always changing to meet the needs of flexible demands. Immigration bureaus make use of flexible policies in

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\(^1\) OECD (2000, 2002).

\(^2\) Quoted in McKinsey (2001).

\(^3\) Papademetriou & Yale-Loehr (1995).

\(^4\) Cf. Sheehan et al. (1995); OECD 1996.
order to adjust the levels and quality of workers accordingly (McLaughlan & Salt 2002). Still, many countries complain of a persistent ‘mismatch’ between labor supply and labor demand that appears endemic to flexible workplaces. Since the 1980s, corporations have reduced their workforces to favor the use of contract labor and work-teams that can be easily assembled and disassembled. Replacing the hierarchies of bureaucratic organizations, there are now ‘network organizations’ that engage in intercorporate alliances and ‘knowledge organizations’ that encourage employees to be more entrepreneurial. All in all, the organization a worker belongs to has become increasingly irrelevant. How, then, is this lack of institutional belonging affecting the migration of skilled workers? What does it imply for the production of identity on a global scale?

In recent years, social theorists have begun to examine shifts in the production of identity brought about by an increasingly global flow of capital (cf. Watts 1992; Appadurai 1992; Marcus 1995). Yet these shifts in identity formation have not changed the way researchers talk about the emergence of a transnational elite. Sociologists and cultural theorists like to portray international migrant professionals as if their movements were determined by capital flows, that is, by the demands of companies and states that use their intellectual capital. But what if states and corporations were not able to structure their demands in a way to produce interpretative frameworks that articulate a transnational identity? What if we, as theorists, are simply making up ideas about the new global elite?5

This paper adopts a meso-level inquiry into how recent changes in business structures are affecting the production of ideological narratives. An unexamined

5 Adrian Favell (2001, 2003) has repeatedly voiced scepticism over the rise of a new transnational elite. He asks that researchers put a human face on globalization.
assumption that often gets repeated is about how multinational corporations are driving
the creation of a new international class. Against this proposition, I will focus on how
corporate strategies have been affected by ‘flexibility’ in ways that do not allow for the
institutionalization of long-term plans. The lack of institutional agendas does not allow
for the reproduction of ideological narratives, as I shall demonstrate. This chapter begins
by reviewing some of the claims that have been made about the rise of ‘third cultures’
(Featherstone 1990, 1995), ‘flexible transnationalism’ (Ong 1999), and the rise of a new
‘transnational elite’ (Sklair 2001). Against this framework, I’ll reintroduce the rational
theory of bureaucratic organizations, as these created institutional narratives and were
headed by corporate elites. With an historically-sensitive model of identity formation in
an era of state market capitalism, we might assess whether the conditions of flexibility
lend themselves to similar productions on a global scale. The remainder of the paper
demonstrates how flexible accumulation and flexible organizations of labor have
contributed to the demand for temporary foreign workers. To produce new ideological
frameworks there must be an institutional basis that is simply not available with the new
economic realities of contemporary labor migration.

Third Cultures, Transnational Ideologies & Transnational Elites:

Among the many cultural shifts and new forms that have arisen with the onset of
globalization, Mike Featherstone (1990, 1995) identifies the development of ‘third
cultures.’ In a limited sense, third cultures are “sets of practices, bodies of knowledge,
conventions and lifestyles” that have developed independently of nation-states

6 The term ‘globalization’ is used haphazardly in the academic literature. In this
dissertation, it refers to the deregulation of state regimes since the 1980s.
(Featherstone 1995: 114). He gives two examples issuing (1) from international communication and (2) among international professionals who create their own rules for working across borders. In the first instance, where people are communicating with different cultural backgrounds, the need arises to investigate problems of misunderstanding brought about by cultural biases. In the 1960s, private agencies developed in order to mediate these practical problems, both on a personal level and as a function of international law (Featherstone 1990: 8; 1995: 114). This was also the decade when Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem produced their research on ‘third culture’ businessmen and children who purportedly mediate the differences between two cultures and come up with their own framework of meaningful communication (cf. Useem et al. 1963; Useem & Useem 1967; Useem & Downie 1976). In relation to global finance, Featherstone argues that professionals who work between national legal systems also develop a new kind of ‘third culture.’ Featherstone (1995: 115) explains:

The deregulation of markets and capital flows can be seen to produce a degree of homogenization in procedures, working practices and organizational cultures. In addition there are some convergences in the lifestyle, habitus and demeanour of these various sets of professionals.

Evidence of homogenized working procedures have never been demonstrated to my knowledge. According to Featherstone, professionals working in international sectors of finance, commerce and industry have created a more ‘meritocratic ethos’ based on technical competence. These producers of ‘third culture’ include international lawyers, corporate tax accountants, financial advisers and management consultants.

The notion of ‘third culture’ was adopted by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (1997: 11) to study new “cultural discourses, practices, and subjectivities” that have
arisen with Chinese transnationalism. Aihwa Ong develops this argument in her book, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationalism* (1999) in a number of ways I find quite problematic. On the one hand, Ong seeks to show how strategies of flexible accumulation have led to the emergence of new domains of cultural distinction.\(^7\) On the other hand, she wishes to argue that flexible accumulation is articulated in new modalities of “translocal governmentality” (Ong 1999: 6). “Flexible citizenship,” she writes, “refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that *induce subjects* to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions (*Ibid.*, italics added). I find this assessment quite upsetting. Flexibility is about breaking up rigidified norms and strategies. In the business enterprise, it entails reducing a firm’s response time to fluctuating currency rates, product designs, and moves made by competitors. Flexibility is not an ethos, it is the *rejection* of an ethos in favor of ‘just-in-time’ decision-making. But Aihwa Ong proposes that flexible accumulation is accompanied by “flexible personal discipline, disposition, and orientation” (*Ibid*, p.136). Her attempt to translate flexibility into ‘translocal governmentality’ is, in fact, an anachronism.\(^8\)

In Ong’s model, there are no ‘cultural producers’ of new cultural logics. People are determined by macro-economic processes, as is so common in the globalization literature. Ong writes (1999: 20): “The requirements of capital accumulation compel

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7 Ong uses David Harvey’s notion of ‘flexible accumulation,’ defined as a greater emphasis on “flexible responses in labor markets, labor processes, and consumer markets” (Harvey 1990: 159, Ong 1999: 94).

8 When Michel Foucault coined the term ‘governmentality’ he clearly stated that it is a science of government that emerged in the nineteenth century, which makes use of statistics to adjust and reformulate agendas according to aggregate effects on the population (cf. Foucault 1991). The effective use of statistical calculation and policy-making is no longer feasible in economies geared towards flexibility.
behavior and plans that privilege business-driven travel, family relocation, and the manipulation of state controls.” At best she finds ‘carriers’ for these new cultural logics, who are members of Hong Kong’s social elite.⁹ These individuals are multiple-passport holders who use their citizenship, just as companies use tax havens, to escape regimes of state control and to benefit from using different sites for investments, work, and family relocation (Ibid, p.112). Ong provides examples of wealthy families from Hong Kong living in California, where children benefit from the advantages of a US education system, wives take care of upholding their residency requirements, and husbands spend most of their time in airplanes traveling for business. Notably, these families do not articulate an ideology of flexibility – they do not get a kick out of being geographically dispersed. Chances are if you ask businessmen who travel constantly whether they enjoy it – as I have done, they will tell you how tiring it is and how they wish they didn’t have to travel so often.¹⁰ If elitism is associated with international mobility and flexibility, then Ong convincingly demonstrates this through the use of cultural images – not cultural logics or ideologies. Ong argues that there is a triumphant celebration of Chinese entrepreneurs, which feeds the production and sustenance of this new transnational identity. From the media she reproduces images of “the business traveler as an ‘astronaut’ who is continually in the air, while his wife and children are located in Australia, Canada, or the United States, earning rights of residence” (Ibid, p.127). Teenagers dropped off in southern California are ‘parachute kids’ (Ibid, p.128). Although Ong treats transnational business travelers as members of the Chinese ‘elite,’

⁹ Not surprisingly, the role of elites in producing ‘culture’ is often asserted in conditions of state market capitalism.

¹⁰ See Alain Tarius’ work on the global mobility of professionals.
they do not wield the power of corporate elites or intelligentsia traditionally associated with state market capitalism. The distinction is an important one to make. Ong's transnational elites do not determine the social roles and categories ascribed to other citizens. Their power is based on appearance and ceremony, more than the actual exercise of authority.

A different kind of transnational elite is depicted in Leslie Sklair's book, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (2001). The dominant leaders of Sklair's transnational class are the executives of transnational corporations. His analysis rests upon the belief that a 'group' of people who are pursuing resources, labor power, and the means of production across the globe are making capitalism into a globalizing project. Once again, the social categories used are associated with industrial capitalism and a Fordist model of production and consumption. Sklair emphasizes how the ideology of consumerism is necessary for the survival of capitalism. Globalization "does not just happen," he writes (2001: x):

> It is thought out, organized, managed, promoted, and defended against its opponents by identifiable groups of people working in identifiable organizations. These make up the transnational capitalist class.

This book can read as a continuation of Sklair's *Sociology of the Global System* (1991), whereby the description of the transnational capitalist class is meant to corroborate how his 'global system theory' really works. Sklair purportedly tests his theory by asking if the world's most profitable firms are adopting globalizing practices. In other words, he attempts to trace the shift from state-centric business practices to transnational business practices in order to substantiate his claim that a 'transnational capitalist class' truly
exists. Sklair interviewed middle-managers and executives from over 80 firms listed in *Fortune* magazine’s Global 500. The results showed that yes, indeed, globalization figures strongly in the articulation of these firms’ business strategies. Ironically, this is where his theory breaks down, in my view. Sklair locates “the institutional form of the transnational capitalist class within and around the TNCs” (*Ibid*, p.36). But as I demonstrate below, flexible accumulation is affecting business practices in such a way so as *not to allow* for the institutionalization of corporate forms, nor the articulation of ‘class’ as a separate form of ideological hegemony.

Before delving any further, let us consider how the production of ideologies relates to economic processes in terms of *institutionalization*. If we can historicize the production of identity narratives, then we’ll be in a better position to assess how flexibility is affecting their sustainability. In the next section, we shall examine the production of ideologies through the means of bureaucratic organizations and the power exerted by a corporate management class.

**Bureaucratic Organizations, Ideological Narratives & Corporate Elites:**

Bureaucracies are a mode of administration that define routinized tasks and hierarchical relations between officials and subordinates. European states adopted this method of government in order to centralize and homogenize the rule of power across their territories (*cf. Kamenka 1989*). Bureaucracies depend upon centralized decision-making and information-gathering. Max Weber (1946: 233) once argued that proprietary knowledge is what gives officials their superordinate status. By keeping knowledge and intentions secret, officials are able to protect and advance their positions of authority.
The formal separation of offices is characteristic of bureaucratic organizations. These are maintained through the observation of closely defined privileges and duties, as Merton (1968: 249) noted: "prescribed relations between the various offices involves a considerable degree of formality . . . manifested by means of a more or less complicated social ritual which symbolizes and supports the pecking order of the various offices."

Authority inheres in the office, not in the person. These offices are permanent and bureaucrats often have continuous careers. Citizens and workers in subordinate positions usually perform repetitive tasks that assure the bureaucracy's technological efficiency.

By optimizing on speed and precision, knowledge (news and information), subordination, and the reduction of costs; the bureaucracy is a highly developed means of wielding power for the people who control it (cf. Weber 1946: 232). Harold Laski (1930) described its 'passion for routine' as a "sacrifice of flexibility to rule, delay in the making of decisions and a refusal to embark upon experiment."

The administrative tasks performed within a bureaucracy are methodically integrated by means of an organizational goal. A bureaucracy's policies are made public, while its proprietary knowledge (such as costs, clients, technical procedures and plans) are kept private. According to Robert Merton (1968: 253), the organization's explicitly stated aims help to keep its members hardworking and diligent. He argued that conformity to rules is buttressed by a strong commitment to organizational purpose. Notably, this is the essence of ideology, whereby a unique identity serves the purpose of social mobilization. The integrity of an organization is achieved when its "particular orientation becomes so firmly a part of group life that it colors and directs a wide variety of attitudes" (Selznick 1957: 138-9). The 'organization man' as described in William
Whyte's (1956) bestseller is someone who not only works for an organization, but who makes its corporate goals his own. Whyte traces a social ethic that "rationalizes the organization's demands for fealty and gives those who offer it wholeheartedly a sense of dedication in doing so" (Ibid, p.6). The bureaucrat is often said to adhere to rules in a manner that makes conformity an end-in-itself.

After World War II and into the early 1970s, there was a growing recognition that corporate managers wielded tremendous power. Academic theories of managerialism depicted managers as strategically positioned to shape a firm's policies and to direct the accumulation of capital (cf. Burnham 1962; Galbraith 1967; Mace 1971). In Britain, for instance, in 1967, there were about 1,200 men directing the hundred-odd largest industrial firms. The majority of these men were full-time executives controlling a gigantic proportion of the nation's wealth (Heller 1967: 62). Some academics viewed the leadership of corporate officers as untrammeled by the dictates of shareholders and financial institutions (e.g. Mizruchi 1987: 8). In popular media, a new cast of villains appeared on television and in Hollywood films. Omnipotent corporations were represented as running rife, headed by corrupt managers who have insatiable wants. The futuristic organization is "greedy, malevolent and all powerful," comment Hassard and Holliday (1998: 11), its corporate leaders are "self-obsessed, insane, immoral or deviant." In these popular portrayals, the employee is either de-humanized as a cog in the corporate machine or his underworld becomes a new haven where personal relationships, above and against the managerial elite, are allowed to thrive.11

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11 We might think of M.A.S.H., Taxi, and WKRP in Cincinnati as examples of television dramas where the medical unit, a taxi company and a radio show breed familial ties.
This bureaucratic framework of hierarchy, ideology, and managerialism has lent itself to the analysis of social phenomena for as long as we care to remember. But signs of change have begun to appear in academic literature. To take just one example, Bronwyn Parry, professor of geography at Queen Mary, University of London, has found herself on a ‘hunt’ for corporate elites, believed to be controlling the trade of genetic material, whom she never found. Parry’s doctoral research aimed at mapping the global trade of genetic resources and interviewing elites who controlled the bioprospecting industry. But she soon discovered that “a completely disparate group of individuals ranging from corporate executives, lawyers, brokers, research scientists and academics” were formalizing the relations of exchange (Parry 1998: 2149). What these actors were missing was an institutional framework. Brokers were private entrepreneurs, researchers and academics who prided themselves on being untainted by corporate motives, and even those participants with institutional affiliations could not be said to take part in a homogenous framework, since they held several positions in an array of institutions. Parry had to accept that her assumptions about finding a ‘corporate elite’ were unhelpful. She opted to replace conventional notions of a corporate elite, understood as formally constituted and institutionally-based, by an informal and hybridized concept of invisible ‘elite networks’ (Ibid, p.2148). Changes made to institutions in recent years need to be acknowledged. The move towards flexible strategies of accumulation disrupts the stability of social categories and the institutionalization of narrative conventions.
Flexible Accumulation & Flexible Workforces:

The 1970s were years of economic stagnation and depression. By the 1980s, many advanced nations had begun shifting their focus away from attempting to manage economic crisis to accepting the need for structural change. The notion of flexibility permeated these discussions (Jessop et al. 1991). In the corporate realm, the need for flexibility affected production processes and the organization of labor. Whereas Fordist firms relied on economies of scale and standardized mass production, the new production lines born of the 1970s and 1980s shifted product designs flexibly and quickly. As David Harvey (1990) has noted, the "capacity for instantaneous response to changes in exchange rates, fashions and tastes, and moves by competitors is more essential to corporate survival than it ever was under Fordism."\(^{12}\) ‘Flexible specialization’ results from an emphasis on product innovation and small-scale niche markets (cf. Sabel 1994). It involves ‘just-in-time’ methods of inventory control and products with an above-average turnover time. The strategy is one of “permanent innovation,” write Piore and Sabel (1984: 17), “accommodation to ceaseless change, rather than an effort to control it.” Coinciding with the emergence of flexible product designs came changes to the workplace that favored flexible labor. An organization with flexible labor can readily adjust its employment levels and the way in which labor is utilized. ‘Numerical flexibility’ refers to variations in employment levels, whereas ‘functional flexibility’ describes the variations in tasks performed, as well as the skills required to perform these tasks (cf. National Economic Development Office 1986: 3-4).

\(^{12}\) Harvey (1990: 159). Fordism relates to the production and consumption patterns that developed simultaneously after World War II.
The shift toward flexible workforces appears to do away with regular employment structures. While flexibility has reduced job security and pensions, it has also led to the creation of new independent businesses and more self-employment (Harvey 1990: 155; Gome & James 2005). More interesting, I find, is that flexibility has brought about changes in the management style of organizations that affects full-time employees. Shorter hierarchies and more decentralized authority have been found to increase profit margins. When the CEO of Chubb Corporation, John Finnegan, was asked to test the improved productivity of workplace flexibility he was leery at first, but encouraged by the results. For the duration of the pilot project, Finnegan allowed 17 employees in the insurance company’s claims service center in Phoenix to take charge of their own schedules and performance goals. Over the course of a 90-day program, the company saw an increase of 18 per cent in the number of claims handled and an increase of 4 per cent in the number of claims payments processed (Schoeff 2005). Greater workplace flexibility has therefore favored more entrepreneurialism and independent problem-solving on behalf of employees.

The core workers that belong to an organization are also affected by flexibility in ways that should put into question our conventional notions of status and authority. Full-time employees gain employment security, but only at the cost of incessantly renewing their skills and being able to harness multiple repertoires of technical knowledge. In the manufacturing industries, firms need employees that are “capable of responding quickly to substantial changes in either product lines or production methods” (Atkinson 1984: 29). In the information technology (IT) industries, technical expertise can lead directly to the creation of new products, so workers need not only update their skills, but also
innovate. Within companies that make profits based on the application of knowledge and the development of knowledge technologies, employees are not given direction; they are simply redeployed onto specific tasks. Hence, the status and hierarchy that come from job-specific categories are no longer applicable to the knowledge worker. As Hirsh and Shanley (1996: 233) explain, “which employees are designated as core employees will depend on the particular strategy the firm is following at a given time. As strategies shift, due to new-market entry, innovation, and regulatory change, whole groups of core employees may suddenly become dispensable.” The status of core workers will keep shifting in relation to which skills are deemed important to the project at hand.

Flexible Demands & the International Migration of Workers:

In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released a report entitled, *A New Economy? The Changing Role of Innovation and Information Technology in Growth*. In this report are recommendations for how to design policies that promote the education and recruitment of skilled workers. While governments attempt to train young people and design immigration policies that provide employers with needed skills; more importantly, the weight of responsibility is being placed on individual workers to update their own qualifications. Since the 1990s, indicators have shown that:

First, initial levels of education are no longer sufficient in an economy in which demands change continuously; lifelong learning is increasingly important. Second, the skills required by an economy more based on innovation and technological change – creativity, working in teams and cognitive skills – were less needed in the past (Stiglitz 1999). Third, in some countries, shortages of specific categories of highly skilled personnel, such as ICT workers and scientists and engineers, have
emerged in recent years, a potential sign of specific rigidities in these areas. Fourth, owing to the growing importance of personnel mobility for innovation, barriers to mobility and rigidities in education and training systems may inadvertently reduce knowledge flows within an economy. (OECD 2000: 45)

Industry demands keep fluctuating, making it difficult for state education systems to design programs that can ensure a skilled domestic workforce. Skills involving the use of information technologies (IT) grow outdated more quickly, due to the rapid pace of innovations in this industry. Moreover, employers are seeking individuals with multiple skill-sets that do not fit existing job categories. If governments cannot meet these demands through domestic labor markets, the only other option is to increase the inflows of skilled labor migration. This has been the strategy of choice since the 1990s.

Faced with persistent shortages of skilled workers, governments have opted to increase their inputs of foreign workers. The OECD report cited above noted that the United States may have sustained its rapid growth in IT due to increased levels of foreign labor. Other countries quickly adjusted their policies to do the same. From 1987 to 1999, the net immigration of scientists and engineers coming to Australia was about 55,000, a number equivalent to the output of engineers and scientists graduating from five to six Australian universities within the same period (OECD 2000: 46-47). In 1999, Japan’s economic outlook was heavily weighted toward the importation of skilled labor (Iguchi 2002: 1999). In 2000, Germany introduced a new ‘green card’ program to expedite the processing of visas for high-tech workers. The catchphrase that spread about

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13 Joel Kotkin of the Pepperdine University Institute for Public Policy in Los Angeles said there has been a profound mismatch between what employers are looking for and what the domestic labor market has to offer (Greengard 1998: 46). Anne-Marie Gaillard (12001: 237) echoes this concern, “In Sweden, as in many other countries, an emerging shortage of skilled manpower is blamed on a mismatch in the labor market between job offers and available skills.”
Europe, the United States, and Asia was that there was a global war for talent. Nations were at war in the game of attracting skilled labor.

Lest it be thought that international labor migration is only providing benefits to advanced economies, it might come a surprise to learn that developing nations are also successfully attracting foreign skills. A trend that has been growing since the early 1990s reverses the conventional patterns of south-to-north and east-to-west migrations (e.g. Williams & Baláz 2002). Less developed nations are seeking to benefit from the transfer of skills and technologies (Kritz & Caces 1992). They are clamoring – along with more advanced nations – to attract foreign investment and to establish links with the global economy (Koser & Salt 1997: 290-94). In 2001, Nigeria announced its initiative to bring in foreign professionals so as to train the local workforce and provide better quality labor for overseas investors (Omofoma & Ojebuohob 2001). A similar approach was adopted in Indonesia, where the number of skilled foreigners was raised in order to assist in the training of locals (Schuman & Mapes 2001). Researchers, Khalid Koser and John Salt (1997: 296), conclude:

In contrast to the early literature which focused on the concept of ‘brain drain,’ the majority of recent literature reveals a far more complex geography, characterized by currents and counter-currents on a truly global scale.

While developed countries want to improve their competitive edge and boost their economies, developing countries are using comparable policies to enter into the global economy and improve their chances of development. Skills and technology are important elements in this growing interdependence.
Flexible Labor Migrants without Social Categories:

The new global mobility of labor has much to teach us about the trends affecting the future regulation of populations. Whereas governments depend on census reports and statistics to formulate population policies, the new migration of labor remains recalcitrantly 'invisible' to such methods of data collection. John Salt, director of the Migration Research Unit (UCL) in London, has pointed out how "there is little statistical information on either the numbers or characteristics of highly skilled migrants" (Salt 1997: 4). They occupy positions in the labor force that are notoriously difficult to define or quantify. Despite the economic importance of their skills, few data are available on the nature or scale of their cross-border movements (Ibid, p.3). This is largely due to a lack of standardization across state immigration bureaus. Skilled professionals enter foreign countries under disparate categories such as 'business visitor,' 'temporary worker,' 'treaty trader,' and 'intracompany transferee,' etc.\textsuperscript{14} Without a standardized definition, it is impossible to tabulate their numbers on a global scale. In respect to this, these migrants remain 'invisible' (cf. Findlay 1995). Skilled international migrants "tend to be middle class, well paid and invisible," writes John Salt (1997: 4); "For the most part their presence as immigrants rarely gives rise to even the mildest political debate."

Rather than attempt to characterize contemporary labor migrants in terms of their country of origin or occupational category, I suggest we examine these movements as being determined by fluctuating and transitory skills in demand. Sought-after labor migrants are not restricted to certain job categories, tertiary-level education or equivalent

\textsuperscript{14} These four categories are used in US immigration procedures, all of which would satisfy the description of 'highly skilled worker.' The 'intracompany transferee' is an employee of a multinational firm that is transferred to another country where the firm has operations.
experience – as John Salt (1997: 3) suggests. The experience of many countries shows that skilled *tradespeople* are also being brought in to meet workforce demands. That is, blue-collar workers are using the same legal frameworks as white-collar professionals. In 1998, the United States was experiencing a shortage of 300,000 to 400,000 truck drivers and shipbuilding companies scrambled to find marine-grade welders and electricians (Greengard 1998: 50). The Bank of Canada reported an acute demand for workers in construction trades, engineering, truck transportation, food services, and accommodations (Thompson 2001: A1). Australia just added hairdressers, chefs, refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics to its list of ‘occupations in demand.’¹⁵ Thus, the migration of foreigners does not just apply to ‘knowledge workers,’ it applies to a more general mismatch between employer demands and the skills available-for-hire in domestic labor markets.

Finally, these temporary labor migrants remain vulnerable to the possibility that one day their skills will no longer be needed and that their status as temporary residents can be revoked. Vered Amit (1997) refers to this situation as *precarious motion*. As an anthropologist, Amit conducted fieldwork in the Grand Cayman during intermittent visits between 1993 and 1996. When the Caymans developed its offshore banking center in the 1970s, the tourism industry started to boom and a large influx of foreign workers soon followed. By 1994 more than 40 per cent of the Caymanian workforce was made up of foreigners without the legal right to permanent residence. Most of them came from Jamaica, Honduras, North America, Britain and Ireland (Amit 1998: 46). They filled

¹⁵ See the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) posted on the website for Australia’s Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, which included in their booklet entitled *General Skilled Migration.*
every sector of the labor force, from construction and civil service to offshore finance. In Amit’s transcribed interviews with mostly North American and European expatriates, we get the sense that these migrants are trapped between two geopolitical systems. On the one hand, they express the sentiment that they cannot return to their home countries, due to lack of employment opportunities; on the other hand, they cannot become permanent residents in the Caymans either. So they live month-to-month and year-to-year, in the expectation that their work contracts will be renewed. As I learned from my interviews with temporary labor migrants, oftentimes one work contract is followed by another in a different country. Heather Hindman (2003) calls this ‘stability in motion.’ Temporariness lived in a permanent state of motion.

**Conclusion: The Lack of New Ideological Frameworks**

Against the claims being made about the rise of a new transnational elite, this paper has argued that contemporary employment structures do not offer the institutional basis needed for the emergence of a transnational class or transnational ideology. One of the great ironies of global economic transactions is that migrants accepting temporary work contracts are generously compensated for their international moves, while they sacrifice control over how long they will be staying in a particular job position or foreign country. In my interviews with temporary foreign workers, there was a conspicuous *lack of planning* for what will come next – a lack of goal or ideological purpose. This ‘lack of control’ combined with greater spending power is not leading to the rise of a transnational class: not for managers and executives, any more than for skilled
tradespeople and IT workers. The new ironies emerging with globalization were eloquently addressed by reputed migration scholar Alejandro Portes (1997: 18):

*The long-term* potential of the transnationalization of labor runs against growing international inequalities of wealth and power as well as intra-national ones in the countries of out-migration. What the process does, above all, is to weaken a fundamental premise of the hegemony of corporate economic elites and domestic ruling classes. That premise . . . that labor and subordinate classes remain ‘local,’ while dominant elites are able to range ‘global.’

If anything, the contemporary assessments about the rise of a new global elite and global finance seem to be repeating claims that were made in the 1960s and 1970s when firms first began relocating their manufacturing facilities overseas. Bitter criticism of corporate domination flourished during the 1960s and 1970s. Wage earners and union leaders were in uproar against immigrant workers who ‘stole their jobs’ and the corporations that relocated their plants to Third World countries so as to profit from ‘cheap labor.’ In many ways, the polemics born of these decades continue to be reproduced in the late 1990s or at least until the events of September 11, 2001.

Without jumping to any conclusions about how globalization spells the triumph of global capitalism or state market capitalism writ large, this paper has examined recent changes made to business institutions that are affecting the organization and the mobility of labor. As one personnel director explained, “British firms don’t have manpower strategies; they just have manpower tactics writ large” (Atkinson 1984: italics added).

The statement encapsulates the new conditions of flexibility:

On the one hand, it implies that manpower policies are often the unplanned outcome of business initiatives which have been taken without serious consideration of their manpower implications. But, on the other
hand, it also implies that such policies are subordinate to business needs and do not have any independent rationale.  

(Atkinson 1984: 28)

Some researchers have begun to assess how changing institutional conditions are impacting social formations.\(^{16}\) I have been concerned with the reproduction of ideological narratives that might be used to frame the experiences of contemporary labor migrants. In the wake of flexible production methods and the flexible organization of labor, the inevitable conclusion to be drawn is that there are no institutions that could produce a transnational identity that frames and lends purpose to the contemporary movements of intellectual capital.

\(^{16}\) Cf. Vertovec (2004). Allan M. Findlay and F. L. N. Li (1997) even conducted research on how flexible production processes are affecting the scope of international migration flows.
CHAPTER THREE

Diagnosing Disorganized Capitalism: Economic Actions without Substantive Rationality

In the past few decades, legal frameworks have been adjusted to sustain the competitiveness of state economies and important business organizations. The operations of ‘organized capitalism’ are underpinned by state regulations that assure the sustainability of capitalist institutions. But the 1970s and 1980s were years of economic depression and deregulation. These were the years of Thatcherism and Reaganism. State-spending on welfare was reduced, industrial relations and other forms of organized mediation suffered. Class-politics was in decline and superseded by international social movements and political issues (Cooke 1987: 308). Following the extraordinary changes made to government and business structures, scholars continue to debate over just how to define the new ‘disorganized’ capitalism. In their book entitled, The End of Organized Capitalism (1987), Scott Lash and John Urry characterize disorganization in terms of: (1) the dismantling of the state and its reduced control over economic enterprises, (2) the globalization of markets, (3) the disaggregation of capitalist firms and the emergence of flexible work organizations, as well as (4) the rise of cultural postmodernism, involving a collapse in the distinction between high and popular culture.\(^1\) In advanced economies,

\(^1\) These characteristics are drawn from a fourteen-point list provided by Lash and Urry (1987: 5-6).
institutions have become more streamlined. With the emphasis now placed on innovation, the development of new technologies continually creates new ways of producing knowledge. Science and technology have become fused (Lyotard 1993: 83). Oftentimes techniques get employed without the calculation of end-results or the efficiency of outcomes.

In this paper, I will be talking about how disorganized capitalism leads to a lack of cost-benefit calculations that affects the reproduction of ideological narratives. Broadly speaking, it is necessary to determine the relationship between rational techniques and ideological narratives in order to make this kind of assessment. For this purpose, I’ll be revisiting Max Weber’s theory of formal and substantive rationality. According to Weber, the formal calculation of profit (most formalized as double-entry accounting) is implicit to substantive rationality. In order for there to be capital accounting, there must be a stable environment in which calculations can be made about costs and assets. State market capitalism provides such an environment. It guarantees a line of credit and assures a reliable knowledge of prices and competitors, so that capitalist decision-making – aimed at profit-making – can be effective. Where such knowledge is not available, it is difficult to make decisions based on the reliability of future outcomes. Institutional narratives fall to the wayside as problems of account-keeping and unpredictability take precedence.

**Formal & Substantive Rationality in Organized Capitalism:**

The definition of organized capitalism I’ll be working with is taken from the ‘regulation school’ of economic theorists, developed in France in the 1970s (cf. Jessop
The concept of regulation denotes the specific institutional arrangements and market adjustments that guide individual and collective economic behavior. The capitalist market provides norms for buying and selling, along with guarantees that these norms will be upheld (cf. Aglietta 1974). Max Weber was greatly interested by the relationship between state laws and economic behavior. "The capitalist form of industrial organization," he wrote, "if it is to operate rationally, must be able to depend upon calculable adjudication and administration" (1961: 277). Weber argued that the system of law in the West was closely tied to the political history and the requirements of the capitalistic enterprise. Only in the rational state, with state laws, could capitalism flourish; he wrote:

To those who had interest in the commodity market, the rationalization and systematization of the law in general and, with certain reservations to be stated later, the increasing calculability of the functioning of the legal process in particular, constituted one of the most important conditions for the existence of economic enterprise intended to function with stability and, especially of capitalistic enterprise, which cannot do without legal security.²

Among the essential elements of a rationally planned economy are a monetary system and a price system. In all modern states, the issuance of currency is legally regulated and monopolized. The state controls what type of money is paid out and how it is imposed on the general public (Weber 1947: 281). It also establishes relations of value between different objects and fixes rates of exchange. In a market economy, this knowledge of prices serves to orient economic behavior.

The distinction between formal rationality and substantive rationality was introduced by Weber to add subtlety to his theory of economic behavior. For our purposes, it is important to see how they both emerged within a regulated market environment. Formal rationality involves numerical calculations; at its most formal level, capital or double-entry accounting. Weber writes:

The term ‘formal rationality of economic action’ will be used to designate the extent of quantitative calculation or accounting which is technically possible and which is actually applied.

The term ‘substantive rationality,’ on the other hand, is the degree in which a given group of persons, no matter how it is delimited, is or could be, adequately provided with goods by means of an economically oriented course of social action. This course of action will be interpreted in terms of a given set of ultimate values no matter what they may be.³

Substantive rationality is used to align social interests. It is often articulated in the form of ideological narratives, where actions are motivated by ideas or values. For example, the trademark philosophy of IBM when the company first started was “To Think.” The company encouraged its employees to actively think for themselves rather than just follow rules. The philosophy, however, could only be upheld so long as there was an economic enterprise behind it turning practices into profit. Hence, there is an interdependency between economic calculations and corporate ideologies.

And yet, Weber was careful to note that capitalist economic behavior exists whether or not real economic calculations are actually carried out. It is only the expectation that economic calculations could be made that underpins rational ideologies. Weber explained that the capitalist economic action “rests on the expectation of profit by

the utilization of opportunities for exchange” (Weber 1958: 17). Hence, where capitalist acquisition is rationally pursued, “the corresponding action is adjusted to calculations in terms of capital” (Ibid, p.18). But it is simply the guidance of economic behavior by a comparison of income and expenses that matters to this conception (Ibid, p.19). In the end, what really matters to the reproduction of institutional narratives is profitability.

An institution requires profitability in order to sustain its organizational myths. Meyer and Rowan (1977: 344) famously argued that “modern societies are filled with institutional rules which function as myths depicting various formal structures as rational means to the attainment of desirable ends.” The structure of the business organization is assured by such ‘myths’ on the basis that they are rationally effective (Ibid, p.347). The continuance of such myths, however, has nothing to do with their explicitly stated goals and values. In fact, institutional myths are constantly adapting to a changing business environment. As Alvarez and Robin (1998: 2004) have emphasized, the importance of the corporation’s survival often goes understated and unexplored:

... research on organizational effectiveness has traditionally over-emphasized manifest purposive action, by reference to the organization’s intended outcomes (or formal goals). It is obvious, but critical to note, that if the organization goes out of existence, it can no longer accomplish anything. Hence, perhaps the most important task (latent or manifest) for any organization is its continued survival. While some organizations are designed, and are prepared from the outset, to go out of existence upon completion of the task for which they were initially created, many, perhaps most, organizations are quick to acquire new purposes so as to maintain themselves in existence.

As long as the corporation remains economically competitive, it can sustain its institutional myths. But calculability has become increasingly problematic in the current
environment of floating national currencies and profit-making based on the speculation of financial futures.

**Problems of Accountability in Disorganized Capitalism:**

Prior to the collapse of Bretton Woods in 1973, the exchange rates of national currencies were fixed against the US dollar, which was backed with gold. The decision to get rid of the gold standard, motivated in part by the increasing devaluation of the dollar, left currencies ‘floating’ against one another, their value to be determined by traders. Markets thereafter reflected a relation of costs and prices decided upon by trading partners. Markets, not governments, would regulate themselves.

By the 1980s, trading in financial futures had completely overtaken the trade of commodities (Strange 1986: 113). Differential interest rates and currency exchanges, along with fluctuating oil prices, meant that short-term profits could be gained by simply trading financial instruments. The greatest profit margins grew out of an interim market – where commodities were ever actually sold. Corporations, in order to remain competitive, had to join in the game of speculating on financial futures. The financial side of business grew in importance as compared with the attention given to the production side (Strange 1986: 11). James Roderick of US Steel said in 1979, “The duty of management is to make money, not steel,” before promptly launching into a campaign of acquisitions that diversified the company’s activities (Harvey 1990: 158). Financial

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4 Basically, a financial future is “a promise to buy or sell a financial instrument, like a bond, a currency, or a basket of shares, at a market-fixed price on a given date” (Strange 1986: 120, n.6).

5 This marks a decisive break from the regulated currency market that Max Weber (1947: 280ff) explained led to the institutionalization of capitalist economic behavior.
managers became increasingly concerned with short-term performance. They adopted strategies for making small profits whenever they could, rather than setting up long-term business plans.

Signs of change in the newer form of business organization became glaringly apparent at the onset of Enron’s collapse in late 2001. Enron was an enormous company said to control up to one-quarter of US energy trading when it was at its peak (Eichenwald 2001: 26). In what began as a natural gas and electricity company, Enron became increasingly involved in the trade of financial derivatives. In the 1990s, when electricity was deregulated, it created a new ‘way of trading’ that helped redefine much of the energy market. The company’s stocks soared. At a conference held in February of 2001, they were trading at about $70 a share and the company was valued at $70 billion on the stock market. Still, Enron’s new chief executive, Jeffrey Skilling, said the stock price should be more like $126 a share (Smith & Emshwiller 2001: A1). Later in the same year, investors were thus shocked to learn that Enron was announcing a third-quarter loss. Profits were overstated by more than $600 million over a four-year period. Stocks fell by 86% that year.

Enron’s demise was the largest bankruptcy ever recorded in US history. For months on end, media reported the scurrilous anger of shareholders and investors accusing the firm’s CEO and financial managers of dishonest dealings. But beneath this simple plot lay more insidious concerns about the perfect legality of Enron’s profit-making, which involved the use of off-balance-sheet accounting. Special-purpose entities and partnerships had been set up by Enron to borrow money and funnel cash to the company. These were debts that did not have to be reported on the company’s balance
sheets. Several companies have used such off-sheet mechanisms to increase their financial leverage. It was a practice familiar to stock market analysts and investors. The real problem began when Enron couldn’t afford to pay back the debts showing up on the account books of its special-purpose entities. When the company finally had to pay these debts, they appeared as losses on Enron’s financial reports.

Joe Berardino, chief executive of Arthur Andersen, the accountancy firm responsible for certifying Enron’s books, blamed outdated accountancy methods for Enron’s demise. In a public statement issued to the *Wall Street Journal*, he said:

> Enron’s collapse, like the dot-com meltdown, is a reminder that our financial-reporting model – with its emphasis on historical information and a single earnings-per-share number – is out of date and unresponsive to today’s new business models, complex financial structures, and associated business risks. (Berardino 2001: A18)

Berardino claimed that accountancy rules, like our tax code, have so grown so complex that they are sometimes “more concerned with the form than the actual substance of what is reported” (*Ibid.*). Enron had disclosed volumes of information documenting its economic activities, but the regulations that were in place left investors with only limited insights on what was happening or what was likely to happen in the future. Berardino claimed, “Standard-setting is too slow.” The regulatory systems, including the AICPA (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants), the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission), and the ASB (Auditing Standards Board) are “not keeping up with the issues raised by today’s complex financial issues” (*Ibid.*).

After the fall of Enron, many companies updated their financial reports, in fear that they too would be charged with corrupt business dealings. Filings for bankruptcy
protection were reported nearly every other week in the business news of 2002. WorldCom, Tyco, Kmart, and Global Crossing were among the corporations not to escape unscathed. In eighteen months, half of the ten largest bankruptcies ever to occur in the United States were filed (New York Times 2002: 13).

Conclusion:

When profit-making comes from trading upon debts and financial futures – without the actual sale of a product – what are the guidelines for reporting economic behavior? In the reports of Enron’s demise, the accuracy of the company’s financial statements was called into question, but not the timing of its statements. What is ‘out-of-date’ or ‘up-to-date’ in financial reporting on short-term derivative trading? It is difficult to know. Enron’s CEO, Kenneth Lay, admitted that the company’s financial statements were “opaque and difficult to understand” (Norris 2001: 1). Joe Berardino, of Arthur Andersen, called contemporary accountancy methods “outdated.” In the end, is accountability really a problem of reporting what lies outside of a rational planning structure or a historical frame?

In this paper, I’ve reviewed Max Weber’s theory of substantive and formal rationality to underscore the role played by capital accounting in the making of ideological narratives. The discussion has focused on the importance of state laws and reliable information to capitalist rational actions. Behind the narration of actions motivated by ideas and values is the presumption that these actions will be effective at bringing about results. But the lack of regulation and the interim market of trading upon financial futures make it difficult for rational planning structures to get situated. What is
becoming of substantive rationality and myth-making in contemporary institutions? This was the question asked by George E. Marcus (1999: 12):

... how post-modern (how critically reflexive, how open, how shaken up in rationalist cognition) are the conditions of reflexivity within the operations of various institutions and formal organizations of contemporary late-twentieth-century life?

This is an eminently and urgent empirical question, one whose study requires the sensibility of ethnographers since reflexivity of the sort we are interested in assaying is unlikely to announce itself doctrinally or, say, in the planning departments and operations of organizations. Rather, it must be read as cracks, fissures, and shifts in cases and processes of dealing with phenomena, clients, and situations that don’t fit operative categories and that resist easy fixes.

The next two chapters of this dissertation will focus on cracks in rational policy-making observed in private and public institutions attempting to direct the international mobility of skilled workers. On the one hand, there are multinational corporations that attempt to plan the relocation of their work staff; on the other hand, there are national immigration bureaus that purport to design policies for attracting needed skills to their domestic labor markets. In both cases, the needs assessed and the rational plans designed to fulfill those needs fall short of expectations.
CHAPTER FOUR

Characterization in Corporate-Sponsored Migration: Disembedding Cultural Stereotypes from Career Narratives

In October 2001, I was sitting in the ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Anaheim, California, listening to a former CEO of Windham International and founder of the Global Relocation Partnership, Michael Schell, speak to his audience about the cost effectiveness of international assignment programs. Schell had been in the business of corporate-sponsored migration for more than a decade. At this conference, geared towards human resources professionals and service providers, the focus was on how to design the best policies for moving employees to foreign destinations. Schell surprised his audience from the start by saying that though he was about to give a talk on return on investment (ROI), “everybody knows that you can’t possibly measure ROI on international assignments. It just doesn’t make sense.” Later we were asked to break into small groups and discuss how this could be done, so that we could share our ideas. The session was pretty disappointing. But Schell might have been asked to do the impossible. In the 2003/4 survey conducted by a consortium led by GMAC Global Relocation Services, only 10 per cent of corporate respondents reported that they measured ROI for international assignments.¹ Further evidence suggests that the

¹ ROI was defined as “accomplishing the assignment objectives at the expected cost” (GMAC 2004: 8).
management tools normally used for evaluating the success of corporate programs have largely been thrown to the wayside.

Corporate-sponsored migration is the topic of this chapter, more specifically, the relocation policies used to 'manage' international assignments. Multinational firms sending employees abroad generally offer them two- to three-year contracts and make special arrangements for their temporary accommodation, shipment of furniture, and financial remuneration. These corporate relocation programs offer us a rare insight into the management side of so-called 'global' operations. For those scholars who wish to argue that international business has taken over the role of the state in creating supranational organizations, these administrative technologies might be seen as a tool of international governance (e.g. Miyoshi 1993). However, this chapter will concentrate on the unforeseen effects of relocation policies – how the characterizations they produce are simply not sustainable. One of the consequences of institutional practices is the production of cultural stereotypes. In the process of managing international assignments, human resources (HR) directors portray corporate transferees as avid consumers and ungrateful children. In relations of conflict, as Michel Aglietta (1974) explained, we find the production of class and codified social relations. To onlookers, the corporate transferees live in a big house, travel constantly and appear to be living the high life. But many of these employees are introduced to an elitist lifestyle they never knew in their home countries. Does this make them part of an elite? And if so, then for how long?
Corporate Relocation & the Characterization of Transferees:

Little data is available on the scale of corporate-sponsored migration. In the past decade, however, it is clear that multinational corporations exercise more control over immigration procedures than ever before. In countries such as Sweden, multinationals are permitted to bring in foreign nationals without even applying for temporary working visas. The United Kingdom introduced a pilot program in 2000 that allowed multinationals to ‘self-certify’ visas for their workers. And several countries no longer use labor market tests\(^2\) when bringing in intra-company transferees (e.g. Canada, Norway, the United States, and Germany, *cf.* Salt & McLaughlin 2002). Surveys conducted to measure the importance corporate-sponsored international migration are few and far between, but John Salt (1990: 54) has estimated that 345,000 to 400,000 employees and their families were being moved each year by 100 UK employers in the late 1980s. In the United States, the number of Americans working overseas in 1996 was about 350,000, sixty-five per cent of whom were accompanied by spouses (Schell & Solomon 1997: 174).

When corporations transfer employees to foreign locations, they administer the moves using relocation policies designed by HR departments. These institutional mechanisms are supposed to account for international payment structures, cost-of-living adjustments, visa applications, tax returns, shipment of household goods, and temporary accommodations. In theory, the policy should align company directives with the reasons for the international transfer and measures of the transfer’s success. But in

\(^2\) Asserting that no local workers are available to do the same job as the temporary migrant.
practice, the relocation of employees rarely goes as planned. An anecdote will suffice to demonstrate how this process becomes disorganized when faced with changing business demands. Regis, my husband, works for an oil company that has headquarters in Houston, Texas; but he is currently working out of an office in Melbourne. In April 2005, we learned that the vice-president of Asia Pacific was coming to Melbourne to make an important announcement. The manager in Australia told Regis he had nothing to worry about. Yet, the announcement was made that all expatriates were being asked to return to their home countries in the month of July. Regis was asked to take an important job back in Houston. That day he came home on his lunch hour to tell me that we had one month to pack our things or else leave the company. We finally negotiated a later departure date for September 2005. Come the month of July, plans changed again. Regis' project in Indonesia was being endorsed; the company was preparing to drill. The office in Melbourne would be short-staffed if he were to leave. In August, one month before our intended departure and three months after we were told that we would stay, the company offered Regis a contract for two more years. Weeks later, while the visa was being renewed, the finance department learned that if Regis were to stay two more years, it would cost the company AU$50,000. In Australia, the law has it that if a corporate transferee stays for five years, then a financial penalty is incurred for keeping the job from local Australians. The decision made was to extend Regis' visa for only one more year, to avoid the penalty and give him just a four-year stay. We'll find out next year whether we'll be asked to stay in Melbourne or asked to leave. Clearly, the corporate relocation policy cannot provide a rational life course that allows transferees and corporations to share idealistic
perspectives. But relocation policies still provide tools of governance that give HR managers a semblance of bureaucratic authority and control.

The international migrant provided with the assistance of a corporate relocation package is generally greeted in the host country by a relocation professional (usually a specially trained real estate agent), who introduces them to the city’s most attractive neighborhoods, explains the school system if the employee has children, gives them information on health insurance, public utilities, and accompanies them to get a driver’s license. In the meantime, the employee and his family would be set up in temporary accommodations, either in a hotel or a serviced apartment, with meals in restaurants being reimbursed. This interim period of seeking out more permanent accommodation lasts from one to two months. If the family is left waiting for their household goods to arrive, after finding more permanent accommodation, then the company pays for rental furniture. The company generally contributes to the cost of buying new electrical appliances (fridge, washer/dryer, telephones, stereo, VCR, etc.), as most countries have different amplitudes and voltages. Some expatriates will be given leased vehicles, some with gas cards (such as the employees at Ford), for the duration of their time abroad. Children of relocated migrants are often sent to private schools with international programs that more closely resemble their home school system. The private school system is also more likely to offer education in their native language, if this is desired. Language classes and cross-cultural training programs are often provided to the

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3 There is a strong gender-bias in corporate-sponsored migration towards choosing men for international assignments. In order to reflect the available statistics and general experience I had within the field, I see no harm in using the masculine pronoun to represent the international assignee.
international assignee and his family. For each year that the family is abroad, the company provides them with plane tickets to travel to and from the home country. Oftentimes, these are first-class or business-class tickets, given out one to four times per year.

Obviously, the corporate-sponsored international assignment is filled with perks and bonuses: restaurants, hotels, rental cars and furniture, which might appear to come free of charge. Relocated families are provided with a ready-made lifestyle that is as expensive as it is superficial and, oftentimes, hard to give up. There is a lot of jealousy expressed on the part of local employees towards international assignees with whom they share an office. It is commonly rumored that expatriates get paid two to three times their base salary and that of their local counterparts. This breeds resentment towards the foreign nationals – also on behalf of HR professionals dealing with their benefits package. This resentment grows out of a competition for wages and benefits, but ends with the construction of an expatriate stereotype, that of the overly-spoiled ingrate and spendthrift, who can never get enough. At a conference sponsored by the US Employment Relocation Council (ERC), Therese DeLorenzo from the Bank of America gave this character portrayal:

Typically, when an individual is returning, they’ve done a lot of shopping when they’re on assignment. So they’ve bought lots and lots of very nice souvenirs and very nice handmade furniture, very nice beautiful marble tables when they were placed in Italy, and you know, all kinds of things.

The international assignee, of course, expects to bring all these great things back with them when they return from their assignment. And the cost of shipment is one that the company has to bear. This is where conflict begins to brew. Therese had a case where
the employee wanted to bring his daughter’s prize-winning horse with them to Hong Kong. *How do you define a pet?* she asked aggressively. *Is it a bird, a cat or dog?* Supposedly this girl was an Olympic Equestrian, but as DeLorenzo uttered sardonically to her audience, *I doubt she even rode that horse.* Definitions such as this – *what counts as a pet, what counts as a family member, a child or a dependent?* – all this must be clearly stated in the policy’s benefits scheme.

At an ERC training session on international assignment planning,⁴ a short theatrical play was staged for HR professionals. In the play, all the characters were typecast to represent not only the corporate roles played by transferees and relocation professionals, but the attitude or ethos that each role comprises. The structural relationship between HR manager and employee was dramatized and narrated, with the HR representative cast as ‘hero.’ Chris L. Clear (*Crystal Clear*) was the “well-meaning, hard-working, under-paid corporate relocation manager,” who had the enviable task of organizing the international assignment. I. M. Nice (*I am nice*) was the fictive corporation’s senior vice-president of human resources. Mr. Nice wanted to make sure that the family being transferred had a positive two-year experience. T. Ike Wad (*Tight Wad*) was the vice-president of the business office in Hong Kong where the employee was being assigned. Mr. Wad had a hard time believing how much the relocation would

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⁴ ERC’s “Fundamentals of International Assignments,” training session given at their 2001 National Relocation Conference, San Antonio, Texas, May 9, 2001. The information used to write this chapter was collected at a series of professional conferences geared toward education human resources professionals and service providers working in international relocation. I attended four such conferences from 2001 to 2002 organized by the US Employment Relocation Council (ERC), Corporate Relocation News (CRNnews), and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). I also attended roundtables that were held once a month, from May 2002 to April 2003, where HR professionals in Houston discussed issues pertaining to international relocation.
cost his organization. He wanted the transfer to be executed with as little fuss and expense as possible. Finally, the international transferee was named Steve Nordinary (Mr. Ordinary). He was to be transferred from Smoglanta (Atlanta) to Hong Kong. His wife was called Exa Ordinary (Mrs. Extraordinary), for reasons we’re about to discover.

The theatrical performance was staged to teach HR professionals in the audience about how to communicate the details of a benefits package effectively to their employees. A copy of the relocation policy was alluded to on stage in the form of a telephone book – both weighty and full of tedious details. Mr. Ordinary had been given a copy of it to take home and read, but he passed it on to his wife because he didn’t have time for such things. In the play, he had already begun to work in Hong Kong and his wife was taking care of the move (an all-too-familiar story). At this meeting with the HR representative, Exa Ordinary was the one with the most pressing questions about how the international assignment was going to be arranged. Here’s just one excerpt from a half-hour performance that intermittently stopped for questions and answers from the audience:

**CHRIS L. CLEAR:** Steve and Exa, during the period of your assignment in Hong Kong, you will be provided with a differential, so you can afford to purchase the same items in Hong Kong as you do in Smoglanta. This cost of living differential is actually measured periodically by Funhammer, an international consulting company that specializes in publishing these numbers. According to the table we have run for you, it costs 35% more to live and work in Hong Kong than it does in Smoglanta. Therefore, you are eligible to receive an allowance of $4,375 per month as a cost of living differential.

**MRS. EXA ORDINARY:** So, that means that Steve is getting a 35% salary increase to take this move?

**MR. ORDINARY:** Well, even though that sounds like a big salary increase, 35% is not going to cut it. Exa, tell Crystal about your research.
MRS. EXA ORDINARY: Well, I found a web site that claims Hong Kong costs 75% more than Smoglanta overall.

MR. ORDINARY: That really sounds more realistic. I mean, I've been working there for more than a month or so, and the cost of taxis alone has cost an arm and a leg. Although, that cost will drop once I get our cars to Hong Kong.

MRS. EXA ORDINARY: I suppose I'll want to find us a home in the suburbs – so our children can go to schools similar to their schools here . . . Does the cost-of-living differential include a difference for day care – since I'll be eventually going back to work?

According to the Ordinaries, the 35% rise in base salary was not enough to compensate for the price of living in Hong Kong; they wanted a 75% increase. What is more, Mrs. Exa Ordinary wanted to find a home in the suburbs, go back to work and put the kids in daycare. The transferees’ demands are unrealistic when compared to the HR professional’s cool-headed calculations and deeper insights into the services available in Hong Kong.

These stereotypes of corporate transferees reaping the benefits of compensation packages and still not being satisfied are commonly portrayed in the literature circulated on international relocation. As one journalist wrote about expatriates in Shanghai: “Companies insist that the $18,000-a-month rents, $20,000-a-year school fees and $60,000 cost to join the American Club are worth it to keep their expats happy and turnover low” (Farley 1998). The sarcasm is dripping. In the trade publications, such as Mobility magazine and CRNnews, there are endless advertisements from real estate companies portraying international executives in luxurious homes. Your home is your castle, temporary or otherwise! states the group at Preferred Living. Oftentimes it is a
two-storey home with white picket fence and pool. An entire construction industry has blossomed out of the desire to provide corporate transferees with a standard of living that makes it seem as if they never left home. The Sealand Development Group in Shanghai believes that ‘executive communities’ are the wave of the future (Farley 1998). At Chadwick International, they are exporting US-style modular homes, complete with bathrooms, kitchens, and shiny new appliances. The company’s emerging markets include Algeria, Kenya, and the Philippines (Blustein 1997). Even though the most common international transferee is a technician sent to fill a gap in skills,\(^5\) HR representatives speak about how a global firm must have global leaders – as if this were the main driver for international assignments. Managers of multinational corporations need to be cultivated to have a global mindset. However, the technicians and middle-managers who are transferred to overseas facilities do not fit the elitist profile.

**Ironies of Consumption:**

Even when set up in a big house and given the means to live the ‘high life’ for a short period of time, expatriates rarely fit in with a host country’s elites. International transferees are usually perceived as lacking in good taste and refinement. Americans in New Delhi, for example, reportedly irritated Indian locals. One fashionable Indian woman recalled going to dinner at a US diplomat’s residence and wondering why the American women looked so ‘dowdy.’ Another professional women complained that her American colleagues always wanted to talk about where to buy cheap things and where to go on holiday (Bummiler 1986). Certainly, this propensity towards shopping and tourism

was something I found very prevalent among expatriates in Melbourne. But the corporate relocation package also leads to consumer ironies, where people who never had this kind of spending-power before are suddenly asked to get used it.

Some international transferees are uncomfortable with their new-found status, others revel in it and act as though it came naturally. In Melbourne, I met with an IT professional from India, whose father was a farmer and whose relatives could not afford to leave their small village. The son was perceived to be very rich. Another young man from France had just been hired by his company and set up in a four-bedroom house with pool and rental furniture. He went from living like a student, to sending money back to his parents, paying for his brother to vacation with him in Hawaii, and buying a boat. Many of the discussions I had with women who had lived abroad with corporate assistance were about dealing with maids, gardeners and other hired help. It was an emotional issue and opinions were divided as to whether this was a good thing or not. An American couple who came to Melbourne after having lived in Buenos Aires sorely missed the privileges that money can buy. The transferee’s wife used to have private horse-riding lessons and champagne brunches with friends. She complained bitterly of the prices they had to pay in Australia and resented being put on a budget. In Argentina, she and her husband lived in a rooftop penthouse with its own private elevator, gardener and live-in maid. The irony was that this same woman who complained of her middle-class lifestyle in Melbourne had formerly been a truck driver and an accountant in the United States.

The stories told by temporary labor migrants are unlike the modern bildungsroman. These are not stories of surmounting hardship and rising from rags to
riches. These are stories that mix wealth and poverty—and in any order. The image of
the corporate high-flyer lasts only for so long, then it is superseded by periods of
unemployment and even bankruptcy. In a group of thirty married women I used to meet
with twice a month in my neighborhood, all members of an expatriate club, there were
three managers who lost or left their jobs within a one-year period. Many more were
abruptly transferred to another country. Many Australians I met in Melbourne who were
returning from international assignments had trouble finding work. They remembered
easier times when they lived overseas. Some left again because they simply couldn’t find
a place within the local economy.

When I met Sharon Piocher-Connaught, she and her husband had just finished
building a house in Bali, which required joining two plots of land and displacing a
roadway. It was a monstrous place surrounded by a wall; with a large pool, landscaped
gardens, and fish ponds. While they commissioned the work to be done for them in Bali,
neither of them was employed for two years. Sharon came back to Australia with her
Indonesian husband so that she could look for a job:

Before I left, I worked for Telstra\(^6\) for 23 years. And then, they were
looking for people, well, to take voluntary redundancy, but they were
really targeting the people that they wanted to take. And in the end... they were going through—look, since I left, it hasn’t stopped—they’re
always constantly going through these reorgs and changes and you find
out about it the day after it happened and you don’t know who you report
to and one day you’re reporting to someone in Brisbane, the next day
you’re reporting to someone in Melbourne, and then next week it could be
somebody in Perth. So you just don’t know what’s going on. I just got
fed up with all of this. And they said, “Oh, we’re moving.” I was
working in marketing. “And we’re moving the marketing department to
Brisbane—Do you want to go?” And I said, “No.” So they offered me
this crappy job. And I went, “No, I don’t want to do that.” So, I said,

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\(^6\) Telstra is Australia’s largest telecommunications company.
“Okay, give me – give me a package. I want to leave.” And it was like, “No, no...” Anyway, six months down the track, and I was still saying, “I don’t want to do this. I’m going. I want a package.” They gave me one.

So I went to um... I’d applied – I’d done this course called *Teaching English as a Second Language*: very intensive, one month, full-on, about six months before. And um, I’d done that, I’d got the certificate, and I – the company that I did the training with, they were, you know... They had on their notice board places around the world that were looking for teachers, you just send them a note and see what happens. And I had a reply from one of them saying, “Can you start in January?” So I had left this job in the middle of December and I packed up and I went over to Indonesia in January with one suitcase. I came back with a 25-foot container load. (She laughs.)

And because my background’s in Telcos [Telecommunications], and they found out what my background was, the head office of Telkom Indonesia in the city where I was, in Bandung, so they used to send me off all the time to this Telcom office to teach English to the Telcom people, who thought it was great because they’d ask me all these things about [Telcom] – we’d spend more time talking about Telstra or Telcom in Australia then we did about anything about English. But they got to do a lot of conversation, so they were happy.

And there were some Price Waterhouse consultants working in the company at the time and they found out I was Australian and they’d come and have coffee and – as you do. And I get a phone call out of the blue one day from one of these guys saying, “I’ve left them and I’m now working for this mobile phone company as a start-up in Jakarta, and I really need someone – *Can you come?*

So I went from earning something like... In between being a teacher – I did the teaching for a year and then, when the next year came around they said, “Can you be our director of studies cause you’re the only one who’s got any business sense. ‘Cause everyone here wears pajamas.” I used to go in my business clothes – that’s all I had. I didn’t have all that casual stuff. I used to go around in my business stuff. And the guy who owned the franchise, who owned the business, used to see me, and he’s like, *who’s this woman dressed, you know. And all these teachers, they kinda dress like they’re going to bed, they’re in their pajamas.* (She says this in a rough voice, imitating a man’s.) ‘Cause Indonesians, especially ones that are well-off, are real dressy-dressy people. And they think that, you know, the teaching profession, they dress *disgusting*, you know. So I’m the only one who’s dressed. So I got this job purely on the fact that I’m dressed in business attire and everyone else dressed like they were going to bed, so... So that was okay, that was pretty easy to get that job.
I was getting 3,000,000 rupee a month then, which is something like – oooouu, how much would that be? Oou, maybe AU$600 a month? That’s what my salary was. And these guys offered me US$5000 a month. (She cackles.) With a $3000 a month housing allowance, plus, plus, plus! So I went. And it was a one-year contract.

Sharon wound up staying in Jakarta with the start-up mobile phone company for a year and a half. Then she worked with Siemens and then another telephone company. After the Asian financial crisis, she left Siemens because they could no longer pay her in US dollars. (She would have received only one quarter of the salary if she had been paid in Indonesian rupiahs.) Soon after, she was offered a job that took her to Pakistan for two years. Then she went to Hong Kong – until the IT bubble burst, and there was no longer a need for Telco knowledge in Asia. Sharon’s job was made redundant. She and her husband packed their things and went to Bali for two years to build the house. Then she came back to Melbourne looking for work. What she found was a job in a call center working as an operator. Then she found work in a mobile phone activation center, where she got paid AU$16.35 an hour, with no holiday or sick pay. Sharon started this job in November and by the end of the Christmas holidays, her hours were getting cut back to four, then three days per week. On an hourly wage, it wasn’t enough to live on. Her husband still hadn’t found work. Months later, through word of mouth, she found out that Telstra was looking for a service director and she got the job. But she’s still looking for something else.

I met with George and Robert one afternoon. Both of them returned to Australia after having worked overseas and they found that coming back was like taking a step
back in time. For Robert, finding a job meant going back to what he did 10 years before.

For George, it meant stepping back 15 years.

T: I was just thinking, for both of you, after all that international experience – it must be very hard to find a job that would match your skills back in Melbourne?

R: For me, I didn’t think it would be, but it turned out it was.

G: Yeah, it’s interesting. The actual transition of when you come back to Australia. What you think you have to offer and how you slide back into the system.

R: Mmm. Yeah, well for my wife it’s worked out well. She’s got a great job and it’s taking her where she wants to go. While all that international experience maybe isn’t being utilized – it’s her management experience that’s being utilized, which she wanted to further, rather than just get stuck back into litigation.

R: For me, I’m back about ten years ago.

T: Really?

R: But ahh...

G: What are you doing now?

R: I work for Goldman Sachs as a portfolio manager. I sort of um, I’m just doing the type of stuff I’m doing there now I was doing ten years ago, so . . . But it’s better to start within the whole thing, Yeah.

G: . . . rather than still being outside, looking and so on.

R: Yeah.

G: And ah, people will talk to you more, I think, if you’ve got current employment, that’s local, relevant.

Robert and his wife Cynthia lived in Geneva for four and a half years before coming back to Melbourne. They went to Switzerland so that Cynthia could take a job with the United Nations. “You know those ads they place in the Economist?” said Robert, “Well, my wife is the only person I know who has gotten one of those jobs.” Cynthia was a litigation lawyer and Robert worked in a bank before they left Melbourne. Robert became the trailing spouse in Geneva. After nine months, he found a job in a Swiss bank. Then they had a baby and decided to come back to Australia to be closer to family. It
took him seven months to find work again and this time as a portfolio manager for
Goldman Sachs – nothing as interesting as the kind of work he’d done before. Robert has
since gone back to school to update his skills.

I asked George, “You had no problems coming back with Shell?” George had
lived in Pakistan for four years and Venezuela for two years. He was married with three
kids.

Oh, I came back into a job. Um, cause the way Shell works is Shell
Australia is home-base. If you go overseas you are contracted to the
company [you’re working for]. So I went over and I was with Shell
Pakistan and then Shell Venezuela. But when the assignment’s over, you
come back to Shell Australia. And in theory, they are responsible for you.
But when you come back, because the organization had changed shape
quite a lot, there might be only about 60 per cent of the people than when I
left. And also the retail side of the business, which is the service stations –
which I was in – had changed quite a lot. You come back and you knock
on the door and – I mean, my strategy was I wanted to get out anyway, so
I knock on the door and all my peer group had been promoted or
retrenched . . . But that um, ah, anyway, within six months I was gone.

I left Shell, I haven’t been there for five years. I took the money and went
into an IT business, which was a great idea at that time. And that ran for
three and a bit years. Then I thought, hmmm, there’s more money going
out than coming in. This is not good.

So the next step was: Where do I get income? And it was really what I
was doing before. So I then started to say: How do I get back into the
workforce? And in my circumstances it was . . . Well at that stage I had
literally been out of work in Australia – take the IT aside because it’s not
really the property-side of what I’ve been doing – I’m now working for
Bob Jones. Bob Jones Tire Corporation, and um. When you go to buy
tires, you go to Bearepairs and Goodyear and Bob Jones. So the nature
of the job I had was: any organization, like a franchise organization that
had a network of, whether it’s Coles, Safeway, 7-Eleven, Bob Jones – any
franchise with lots of property. They’re very transferrable skills. So I
thought, Ok, I need to go and get work. But what I came up against was,
um – being away for so long . . . what I found is . . . You think, Okay, I’ve
stepped out of the property role for three years, but I’ve done it for near
twenty. So, I haven’t forgotten it. And then, so you start to sort of do the
ring-around and basically you’re door-knocking. You answer ads in the
paper and ah, typically an ad is a filtering process, they send people in . . .
I hate to be disparaging, but 21-year old Carla is receiving all these ads, she will filter them and if it hasn’t got the magic words, “recently worked in Australia” or “has worked for another organization,” or whatever. And ahh, you ring them up and say, you know, I haven't heard from you or I'm just surprised I didn’t get an interview, why not? Can you explain? “Well you haven’t worked for anybody in . . .” And you say, that’s true. “Why is that?” Well, I was overseas. “Ok.” Do you know what I was doing overseas? “No, not really.” I was actually training people to do what you’re trying to recruit for now. And in a lot of cases, if you didn’t meet the full keywords that they were looking for in your resume, then ah, so you just got to put your name on the map.

And the two jobs that I have got since, since I went back into the workforce – I got them for myself: 7-Eleven and then Bob Jones.

I look at the experience thinking it just staggers me the number of people that I’ve met through this type of process. And with Shell – they give you an outsourcing facility – and I kept saying, this is such an inefficient operation that we have all of these 35- to 55-year old people out of work and trying to get back into a job. It’s like when you get off the merry-go-round, trying to find a spot to get back on. It’s really difficult. I mean, why is it so difficult? There are actually very competent people out there.

**Disembedded Characters:**

The artificial living standards set up by corporations for transferring their employees are not enduring. As seen in these life stories told by international migrants, the corporate benefits program is only one moment in a career that is filled with periods of unemployment and uncertainty. Sharon went from being an English teacher in Indonesia to becoming a highly-paid manager in telecommunications, only to return to Australia and work in a call-center for AU$16 per hour. Robert and George had similar experiences. George was considered to be an expert in setting up networks of service stations before he came back to Australia. When he returned, not only could he not find a job, but potential employers did not want to hear about the work that he did overseas. It
is a predicament shared by many Australians who have worked abroad. Local knowledge is the only knowledge that counts on this extremely nationalistic job market.

The temporal succession of the international migrant’s career narrative is also disrupted by fluctuating business demands and the high-rate of attrition associated with international assignments. Whereas HR directors, such as Brenda Fender of Riverwood International, would like to see pre-departure planning and post-departure assessment, the realities of the workplace make such planning largely ineffective. Timothy Dwyer, from KPMG, explained:

Many times companies try to put in place programs which are very elaborate, have a lot of structure and forms, and evaluation processes which take several days to go through, and in an ideal world that would be great, but I don’t know of many clients today, certainly the HR folks, who have the luxury of time to really focus on those things.

There can be no prearranged career development when employers are filling positions based on urgent need. Adding to this lack of linear succession is the fact that many employees quit their companies after returning from international assignments. The attrition rates are staggering: 20 to 48 per cent quit within one year of return (Handler & Lane 1997: 68). ERC surveys report that about 40 per cent of returning employees leave their companies within two years.

This paper has aimed to bring forward two issues. On the one hand, it examined the production of cultural stereotypes. Through the institutional mechanisms of HR relocation policies, we see the portrayal of corporate transferees as extravagant consumers. This character portrayal is widely circulated in literature and media surrounding corporate-sponsored relocation. Most people would find it easy to imagine
that multinational firms are sending high-ranking executives abroad and setting them up with luxurious standards of living. The second aim of this paper was to complicate this all too one-dimensional stereotype. By focusing on the disorganized implementation of relocation policies and the fragmented career progression of individual migrants, we are able to see how these migrants’ lives are not confined to the depiction of the corporate high-flyer. The HR relocation package enjoyed by some international migrants turns out to be but one fragmentary moment in a life story that does not follow any institutionalized plot or plan.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Idiom of the IT Worker, 1998-2002: State Immigration Laws at the height of the High-Tech Boom

From the mid-1950s to the beginning of the 1970s, massive inflows of migrants arrived in industrialized nations. War-torn countries depleted of working-age citizens, with economies that experienced unprecedented growth, faced the postwar years with aggravated labor shortages. Most industrialized nations began recruiting workers from abroad and designed immigration policies to serve labor market demands. Michael Piore (1979) has cogently argued that the industrial organization of work determined the amplitude, origins, and specific character of these migration flows. Foreign migrants were generally uneducated, unskilled, and hired to perform routinized tasks. They were treated as expendable commodities. Then in the beginning of the 1970s, policies promoting economic migration were drastically modified or revoked. Governments stopped renewing residence permits. In some cases they offered monetary incentives so that migrants would leave (Krane 1979: 6). The oil crisis of 1973 plunged most industrialized nations into economic recession and launched a new era of immigration restrictions. Austria, Switzerland, France, and Germany – most democratic governments – consolidated their borders and told foreigners to keep out (Plender 1998: 92). The only countries that escaped this general trend were the United States, Canada, and Australia.
One by one this triumvirate of ‘traditional immigration countries’ reformed its immigration laws with this in common: They replaced national preferences with policies that selected foreigners with desired skills and qualifications. In the United States, the Walter-McCarran Act was passed (1952) and then amended (1965) to eliminate race as a criterion of admission. The new system invoked seven categories of preference, with priority placed on family reunification, followed by immigrants with skills that were in short supply. Australia’s government followed suit, making amendments in 1956 and 1966 to grant highly-qualified non-Europeans temporary entry, and then finally allowing them to immigrate permanently. Canada eliminated racial bias from its admissions procedures in 1962. Its infamous points system was introduced in 1967, providing a standardized assessment tool used to evaluate permanent residence applications. The economic approach that these countries embraced contrasted sharply with the restrictions imposed by other nations. From the 1960s to the 1970s, a noticeable ‘brain drain’ was occurring that funneled talent out of the developing nations and into the United States, Australia, and Canada. From 1961 to 1972, about 300,000 scientific, technical, and professional workers moved from under-developed countries to Western nations. The triumvirate (U.S., Canada, Australia) received almost half of these skilled workers.¹

In the 1990s, rumors of the ‘brain drain’ resurfaced. Only this time, the direction of the flows and the characteristics of migrants remain very obscure. What is certain is that since the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, a shift in immigration law-making has led to an increase in skilled migration, with states attempting to capture foreigners with highly specific qualifications. The amendments did not receive much

¹ Ong et al. (1992: 543); cf. UNCTAD (1975).
attention until the end of the 1990s. Then at the turn of the century, business people and politicians began to repeat the slogan, "There is a Global War for Talent." Newspapers in Paris and London, the United States and Singapore reported, this is war\(^2\) – a war for talent, that is. Employers could not fill job positions with requisite skills; anxiety grew to unprecedented proportions. A wave of immigration reforms ensued.

This chapter is built around the year 1998, whence arose numerous debates that stirred a national competition for skilled talent. In the United States, at the height of the high-tech boom, employers clamored for more IT workers. When they finally got them, they received too few and too late. A number of other countries also witnessed failed attempts to recruit foreign workers. This paper then looks at how the changing nature of work contributes to the difficulties inherent in assessing the numbers and characteristics of skilled workers needed. In the failure to properly assess and/or address labor market shortages, I discard the economic framework in favor of an alternative analysis of recent immigration reforms. The rapid rise of high-tech stocks and the subsequent threat to U.S. leadership caused by labor shortages became quite an international sensation. I analyze this in terms of an event that had ripple effects. Legislative reforms introduced by the U.S. government subsequently released a tide of similar amendments in countries that were close to it economically and historically, but in ever-widening concentric circles. The pattern of reforms suggests that the labor market is not integral to the ways in which these policies are being made. In the absence of economic rationalism, I examine policy-making in terms of the 'ripple effect.' This has important implications for the

construction of national interest, while it recognizes invisible processes and complex
temporalities that exist outside the scope of economic geographies.

The High-Tech Boom & Specialty Occupation Workers in the U.S.:

In the United States, the H-1 category originally permitted the entry of foreigners
"coming temporarily to the United States to perform temporary services of an exceptional
nature requiring such merit and ability."\(^3\) The number of H-1B visas issued rose
dramatically, from 45,000 in 1981 to 78,000 in 1988 (Lowell 2001: 134). Over the
course of the 1980s, complaints mounted over the perceived misuse and overuse of the
program. Foreign workers were said to have negative effects on American wages and
working conditions. In 1990, Congress initiated a set of reforms that substantially
changed the visa’s usage. The Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT90) redefined the H-
1B category so that it applied only to ‘specialty occupation’ workers, that is, workers who
hold a bachelor’s degree or relevant expertise in the occupation they are being hired for,
which must involve the “theoretical or practical application of a body of highly
specialized knowledge.” The act also introduced new employer sanctions; but most
importantly, it imposed a cap on the number of H-1B visas that could be issued within a
given fiscal year.

The new legislation was adopted without major mishap until 1997, when the cap
was met for the first time. Instead of rejecting the surplus visa applications, the
Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began processing petitions against the cap
for the following year. With the fiscal year (FY) running from October 1\(^{st}\) to September

\(^3\) INA/ACT 101, Section 101(a)(15)(H).
31st, the supplementary visa applications processed in FY1997 were issued with an employment start date of October 1, 1998. But demand for foreign workers did not subside, it only grew. In 1998, the cap was met in the first week of May, only seven months into the fiscal year. Employers and lobbyists clamored for more visas. On 25 February 1998, a hearing was held before a judiciary committee to discuss labor shortages in the information technology sector.\(^4\) Notably, this was at a time when the IT sector was making substantial contributions to the U.S. economy. According to the Department of Commerce, the high-tech sector was responsible for more than one-quarter of U.S. real economic growth between 1992 and 1997 (Sen. Abraham 1998). Switzerland’s Institute for Management Development attributed U.S. dominance in global economic affairs to its firm grasp on information technology (AILF 1998). But IT employers felt their competitive edge was being threatened by recent labor shortages. A representative from Microsoft told the Senate Committee that the company recruited for 2,522 technical positions in FY1997, but only 1,707 job openings got filled. Other employers shared similar stories. CEO’s from fourteen of the nation’s leading IT companies, including Microsoft, Netscape, and Texas Instruments, signed a letter in 1998 stating:

> Failure to raise the H-1B cap will aid our foreign competitors by limiting the growth and innovation potential of U.S. companies while pushing our talented people way from our shores . . . [this] could mean a loss of America’s high technology leadership in the world.


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Finally, and not surprisingly, legislators chose to raise the cap on H-1B visas. The original cap had been set at 65,000 visas to be issued in a given fiscal year. In 1998, the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act (ACWIA) raised the limit to 115,000 for FY1999 – an increase of more than three-quarters the initial H-1B visa allotment. Under the new legislation, the cap would be held constant throughout FY2000, and then decrease again to 107,500 in FY2001, only to return to the original visa allotment of 65,000 per annum in FY2002. The raise on the cap for H-1B visas was meant to be a temporary measure used to plug labor shortages, while in the interim, long-term programs could be implemented to train American citizens to meet the skill requirements that employers so desperately needed. With an increase of more than three-quarters the original visa allotment, things should have gone smoothly from here on out. But they didn’t. Come FY1999, there was again a shortage of visas, despite the now 115,000 H-1Bs made available to employers. On August 5, 1999, the associate manager of labor policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce told legislators: “For the third year in a row, business was unable to hire those skilled workers that they need, and this situation is only going to get worse.” (Cleveland 1999). And it did. In FY1999, the cap was met in June, only 9 months into the fiscal year. In FY2000, the cap was met in March, only 6 months into the fiscal year. Employers took up their heavy artillery.

Meanwhile, information technology stocks soared through the roof. The Nasdaq, a composite index containing mostly technology companies, shot up 85.6 percent in 1999 (Louis 2001). The market for technology stocks doubled in little more than a year (BBC 2001a). Profits continued to rise in 2000. From the end of 1999 until March 2000, the Nasdaq gained 24.1 percent in just 10 weeks (Louis 2001). In March 2000, Nasdaq
entered the stock market 'hall of fame' with a record $15 billion collected in just one month (BBC 2001b). During the high-tech fever, soon to be called the 'high-tech bubble,' congressmen and senators passed new legislation to raise the cap on H-1B visas.

The U.S. Department of Commerce’s Office of Technology Policy (OTP) predicted that the demand for IT workers would grow by 150,000 per year for the next eight years. They also predicted that the IT industry’s demand for new workers would figure in the range of 1.4 million between 1996 and 2006 (cf. Brooks Masters & Ruthizer 2000). The U.S. domestic workforce simply could not keep up with such a demand. In order to preserve and protect the U.S. economy’s leadership in world markets, in particular in the IT industry, the American Competitiveness Act in the Twenty-First Century (AC-21) was passed as an amendment to the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act (ACWIA) of 1998. This act was not nearly as controversial as its younger sister. Whereas the ACWIA was highly contested in its earlier bills, and took two years to be accepted by Congress, the AC-21 was deliberated for just ten days. It was passed by a different congress, but earlier debates were still fresh in memory. A Senate Report issued with AC-21 retorted, “in 1998, the error Congress made was in underestimating the workforce needs of the United States in the year 2000” (Senate Rep. No.106-260, 2000: 2, italics added). The underestimation was already ‘an error.’ AC-21 raised the cap on H-1Bs again, in an emergency measure to succor employer demand, the new cap allowed 215,000 visas to be issued in FY2000, almost double the number that had been allotted two years before, and more than three times the number allocated in 1990.
An abrupt change in demand for IT skills came about in the second half of year 2000. The Nasdaq, after its spectacular performance in 1999, "more than halved in the last eight months of 2000." (BBC 2001a). The decline began in March and April, just after the Nasdaq had registered an all-time record month of gains. One year later, technology stocks were worth a fraction of their 2000-year levels. *Yahoo!* lost almost 90% of its market value from March 2000 to March 2001 (BBC 2001b). Other technology stocks traded at an equivalent of 10% their 2000-year highs (Ibid.). "[I]t should have been a quiet day," said Arthur Cashin, a 40-year veteran of the stock market, "Then, bang, zoom. Out comes this [consumer prices] number that shocks everybody. There was no desperation selling going on, but there were very, very few buyers. So prices kept going lower. Every rally was met by waves of selling."\(^5\) As it turns out, the cap on H-1Bs was not met in FY2001.\(^6\) The number of petitions submitted for FY2002 fell even lower. For the 195,000 visas that were available, only 79,100 new visas were filed against the cap. During FY2003, only 78,000 foreign workers counted toward the cap of 195,000.

**Skilled Migrants as ‘Slippery Objects’ – the Changing Nature of Work:**

At the signing of the American Competitiveness Act in the Twenty-First Century (AC-21), congressman McCain was prescient of the danger in these slapstick measures:

The original H-1B visa ceiling of 65,000, enacted in 1990, did not adequately forecast American companies’ need for high-tech foreign

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\(^6\) The AC-21 set the H-1B cap at 215,000 for FY2000, 195,000 for FY2001 through FY2003, after which the cap would resume its original level of 65,000 for FY2004.
workers... Yet, our important 1998 legislation raising the H-1B caps similarly missed the mark by understating domestic demand for highly trained professionals. While I strongly support passage of this legislation to increase H-1B visa admissions, I also wonder: given Congress’ shortsightedness each time we have attempted to forecast the private sector’s demand for highly skilled workers, how are we to know this time that we have struck the right balance? (McCain 2000: S9646, italics added)

The plight of the H-1B visa in the United States is not altogether unique. Similar programs designed to attract skilled labor have met with disastrous results in other countries. Many of the problems with immigration control reflect improper assessments of workforce demand. I believe the mismatch labor market demand and supplies of immigrant labor is a result of the poor characterization of workforce shortages, which in turn is a reflection of the changing nature and organization of work.

As it turns out, labor shortages in the United States were not industry-specific. Information technology has spread to many sectors of the economy. The National Research Council (NRC) reports that 18 percent of computer scientists, systems analysts, computer engineers, and programmers are employed in manufacturing, 11 percent in finance and related industries, 7 percent in retail and wholesale trade, and 9 percent in government (NRC 2001: 40-41, italics added). Microsoft's Michael Murray told the Senate Judiciary Committee, “even Mom & Pop retail stores selling T-shirts on the Internet, will require employees who have the technical skills necessary to succeed in the digital economy” (Murray 1998). We are witnessing a shift from the industrialized economy to the information age; “Software is fast becoming the medium and language of all work. Whether the task is to control heavy machines or track banking operations,
software professionals lend their labor and expertise to an unprecedented diversity of businesses” (Aneesh 2001: 359).

Furthermore, labor shortages are not job-specific. In the IT sectors, employers say that it is the quality of skills, and not the quantity of workers that can meet their business needs. “IT workers are not interchangeable with each other,” writes the National Research Council, “any shortage in fact refers not to IT workers but to qualified IT workers — with all of the discussion and nuance that relates to the definition of ‘qualified.’” (NRC 2001: 102, italics added). Businesses are always on the lookout for outstanding talent. The whizz-kid or dynamo is taken on staff, regardless of whether there is a position available. On research and development teams, ‘brilliance’ is a strategic asset. In Hong Kong, a market-research director advises his clients to go to the Philippines, India, Singapore or Australia to find good creative thinkers (Wolin 2000).

Also, the job positions being advertised often call for a hybridization of skills. In 1999 two hundred Swedish firms advertising 4,000 job openings, were looking for a profile that included “professional experience, social skills, capacity to motivate and a sense of commitment, as well as adequate training and a sound command of the Swedish language” (Gaillard 2001: 238). It is not unusual these days, to find companies assessing their applicants’ social skills and hands-on experience with technological products (cf: NRC 2001: 110-11). In some cases, the unique combination of abilities can make it nearly impossible for native workers to fit the requirements. For example, how many Chinese-speaking Russians are there with a background in Soviet-era cryptography? (Zachary 2000: R8). Employers might conceivably find a foreign worker and then rewrite the job description so as to write-off domestic workers and bypass labor market
tests. But what advantage would there be in doing so? Foreigners in the United States employed in engineering and science professions typically *earn more* than their American counterparts (Anderson 1998). If employers aren’t hiring cheaper labor, then why are they hiring foreigners?

Something to keep in mind is that labor shortages are changing at the speed of technological invention. Each new product requires new operating skills and perhaps new workers. The National Research Council reports that job categories are “too coarse and do not reflect important distinctions between IT jobs,” precisely because new kinds of jobs are always emerging (NRC 2001: xvi). Different software products have created labor shortages for this reason. Also, the explosion of Web activity and network computing has created a need for skills that workers never received as part of their training. Employment and Immigration Canada reports “a growing obsolescence of technical skills which is not being addressed effectively through training and education” (McKague 1992: 11). Like the streamlining of production and the management of ‘just-in-time’ inventory that emerged in the 1980s, employers are now experiencing a demand for ‘just-in-time labor’ (Aneesh 2001: 358). A U.S. immigration briefing released in 1993 refers to the ‘spot shortages’ that employers face when they seek to bring in foreign workers (Endelman & Loughran 1993).

Given the hybridization of skills and the last-minute calls for hire, it is not surprising that analysts have trouble diagnosing labor market shortages. Employers stress the need to have the *right* skills at the *right* time, but having these two domains match up is more a matter of coincidence that the result of careful planning. Where there is a failure to define labor shortages, immigration policies are destined to fail to satisfy
economic needs. Illustrative of the changing nature of work, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) encourages its 30-odd member countries “to foster the international mobility of skilled workers” (2002:1, italics added). But it quickly adds it would be “short-sighted,” “to rely too heavily on importing qualified science and technology personnel in the longer term as demand conditions may change or sources of supply may shift.” (OECD 2002: 7, italics added).

The Failure to Make Ends Meet:

Julia Onslow-Cole, attorney at law in the United Kingdom, describes the last few years of immigration reforms as “a roller coaster ride,”

Immigration policymakers worldwide have been on a roller coaster ride over the past three years. Barely has the ink dried on one policy when events have changed the landscape dramatically and policymakers have been forced back to the drawing board. (Onslow-Cole 2002a: 221)

Attempts to manage the number of incoming migrants have been curiously ineffective in several countries seeking to recruit skilled workers. On the shirt-tails of the United States, Germany initiated a ‘green card’ program designed to facilitate the entry of high-tech specialists, effective as of August 1st, 2000. The program began with a quota of 20,000 green cards to be issued in a given year (OECD 2001: 189). Under the new regulations, specialists from outside the EU with either a degree in information technology or a work contract that paid a minimum salary of DEM 100,000 (US $50,000) per year, could be approved to work in Germany for five years (Werner 2001: 321). One

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7 The name of Germany’s green card program was borrowed from the United States’ green card permanent residence scheme, discussed below.
year after the program started, only 8,600 communication and technology specialists had arrived in Germany (OECD 2002: 6). The annual quota was not met. Program levels were set to recruit 1,800 workers from India, but only 300 Indian specialists came in (Werner 2001: 323). The rejection rate was very low, well below 5% (Ibid, p.323). Qualified workers simply didn’t apply.

In Hong Kong, the problem of ‘capturing’ the right worker, with the proper category of entry, has been more protracted. The Hong Kong government has always privileged the entry of overseas professionals to the highly-qualified mainland Chinese (Chiu 2002: 157). But in the face of aggravated labor shortages, an effort was made in 1994 to recruit professionals under a pilot program that allowed for the entry of 1,000 skilled personnel. The program was unsuccessful; only 600 mainland professionals entered, and it has since been abolished. In 1999, another attempt was made to recruit skills from the mainland. The Admission of Talent Scheme was implemented in December 1999. Applicants must have outstanding qualifications, a post-graduate degree, preferably a Ph.D. or equivalent. They may supply documents to support their extraordinary abilities such as publications, research studies, or other written attestations. They should possess expertise or skills that are not readily available in Hong Kong (Chiu 2002: 157; Lam 2001: 417).

The Hong Kong government expected 1,000 to 2,000 applications in the first year, but the results were disappointing. By October 7, 2000, only 349 applications had been filed and a fraction of these, 74 applications, were approved. Of the remaining 275 petitions, 219 were refused or withdrawn, and 56 cases were left pending (Chiu 2002: 158). Furthermore, employers criticize the program for requiring minimum credentials
that are not relevant to business needs. While a superior academic degree might be
necessary for high-level research, business people seek professionals at managerial or
operational levels. More than exceptional talents, employers need workers to meet their
daily operational needs (Lam 2001: 417-18).

Legislators appear to have lost sight of what is going on in their own domestic
markets. There never was a committee report for the American Competitiveness and
Workforce Improvement Act (1998). The Senate Report released in 2000 said the
numerical limit placed on H-1B visas was ‘chosen arbitrarily.’ Professor Charles Keely
of Georgetown University was cited,

The [65,000] number was set without public hearings, is arbitrary, and
was in no way arrived at by analyzing demand, labor shortages, business
conditions, or skilled labor needed by firms to remain globally
competitive. (Senate Report 2000: 5)

If policies are made without due concern for national labor markets, how then are we to
assess the process of policy-making in the absence of economic rationalism? In recent
years, analysts have noted the convergence of policies across state systems (Castles &
Miller 1993; Cornelius et al. 1994). In a number of labor-importing countries, the
legislative intent and the actual outcomes of immigration policies is growing wider and
wider, while the instruments they choose manifest a growing resemblance.\footnote{What Cornelius et al. (1994) refer to as the “gap hypothesis” and the “convergence hypothesis,” respectively.} Countries
that pursued very different approaches to immigration in the past are revealing a
similarity of choices when it comes to selecting the political technology they will use to
bring in migrant workers.
The High-Tech Boom & its Ripple Effects:

In the post-war years, immigration policies were designed to fulfil economic needs said to serve the national interest (Hollifield 1992: 14). In France and Australia, foreigners were recruited on the basis of a declining population. In Germany and Switzerland, the concern was over labor shortages and economic growth. In the United States, immigration was said to be a natural part of nation-building (cf. Fuchs 1990). So while policy approaches varied according to national interest, the process of recruiting foreign labor was common to market economies. In this economic rationale, workforce demand and the recruitment of immigrant labor were linked in a linear narrative of cause and effect. Labor market shortages created demand which can be alleviated through the recruitment of foreign workers.

However, states have recently begun to use their immigration laws for ends that do not address neoliberal interests. Namely, they are becoming competitive with other states. Policy-makers have recognized that immigration laws can be used as a means of attracting skilled workers – not necessarily ‘selecting’ them. According to the game of attraction, relaxed immigration controls bring in talented foreigners that will contribute to economic growth. But this leads to the non sequitur of not having first determined what will benefit growth.9 These shifts in policy-making pose particular problems for the analysis of recent immigration reforms. The way in which I shall proceed is by examining the sweep of legislative amendments that followed the debates on H-1B visas in terms of ‘the ripple effect.’ The idea for this approach came from reading Barbara

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9 Precisely what Paul Krugman (1996) points out as “mindless competition”: an obsession with competitiveness that can be pernicious to domestic policy and have no economic benefit at all.
Adam’s (1999) article on “Radiated Identities,” hence I will comment on her piece in some detail, before applying this theoretical framework to the analysis of contemporary immigration policy-making.

Barbara Adam (1999) uses the nuclear accident at Chernobyl as an exemplar for contemporary phenomena that confound basic assumptions of Enlightenment theory. She highlights the lack of scientific proof and the inability of experts to establish a causal chain of events that would explain the Chernobyl disaster or the extent of its damages. On the morning of 28 April 1986, scientists woke up in Sweden to find the nuclear reactor registering abnormally high levels of radiation. They didn’t know where the radiation was coming from, only that it was there and that large quantities of radioactivity were being released into the atmosphere. After the fact, the timing of the event and the implications of its aftermath could not be agreed upon. Some scientists and politicians told people not to consume the local milk and vegetables, others said to not to drink the rain water and to stay inside (Adam 1999: 144). The origins of radiation could not be calculated because radiation is going on all around us and the amount of emission is not proportional to radiation symptoms (Ibid, p.150). Adam writes: “How could we differentiate between radiation from the accident at Chernobyl, natural background radiation, radioactive pollution from nuclear testing, and leakages from nuclear power stations around the world?” (Ibid, p.147). Radiation has life-cycles that affect our present and our future. To really grasp its effects, “We need simultaneously to peer into the future and the past while recognizing the interpenetration and inseparable mutual implication of what we conventionally understood as past, present, and future” (Ibid, p.148). In the classical notion of time, a mistake can be undone, not so with radioactivity
(Ibid, p.150). These invisible processes cannot be measured, but we know that they are there, because there is no escaping our involvement. Radiation is made manifest through its material symptoms.

With regards to immigration reforms, legislative amendments introduced since the end of the 1980s point to diffuse processes that went unrecognised, until the U.S. debates over specialty occupation workers made these reforms become visible. Prior to the debates over H-1Bs, the immigration reforms did not ‘matter.’ Not until U.S. economic leadership was at stake were the diffuse policies given a purpose. In 1998 the high-tech boom excited the drive for competition and superiority that makes for national history. All of a sudden, these dispersed policies became an issue of national interest. The information technology bubble offered policy-makers an idiom within which nations could reformulate their laws and justify the dismissal of labor market tests (protecting the national workforce) in favor of the expedited processing of visas for skilled professionals. The IT workforce became an object that several countries could compete for.

In the year 1998, the U.S. senate judiciary committee listened to the complaints lodged by IT employers about the shortage of qualified workers. News of the possible threat to U.S. economic leadership traveled fast. On the other side of the ocean, there was a familiar echo in a discussion paper released by Australia’s National Office for the Information Economy:

Like other nations, Australia is currently experiencing skill shortages in the information technology (IT) and telecommunications (T) industries. This is seen as a constraint to the growth of competitiveness of Australian industry and to the emerging information economy. (NOIE 1998: 3)
In August 1998, the government announced that it would expedite visa applications for IT workers. A “Migrations Occupations in Demand List” (MODL) was added to the already existing procedures, effective as of July 1999. Foreigners applying for working visas who can show experience in one of the listed professions are exempted from the labor market test when they have a work contract with an Australian employer. At the top of the occupations in demand list are the names of information technology managers and computer specialists.

In Canada, reports issued in 1997 and 1998 also spoke of dire shortages of IT workers. The private-sector based Software Human Resources Council counted approximately 15,000 open high-tech jobs left waiting to be filled across the country (Guly 1997: 1). The government responded by launching a pilot project in May 1997 to facilitate the entry of software developers. Under the new program, applicants who qualified under one of the seven designated job categories received expedited processing of their visa petitions.10 Whereas the normal processing time is two-and-a-half years, the pilot project allows permits to be issued within several weeks (Guly 1997: 1). The same year the debates on H-1Bs reached a turbulent climax, the Canadian Advanced Technology Association (CATA) predicted that there would be a shortage of more than 56,000 information technology workers over the next five years in Ontario alone (Canadian Business 1998: 49). In October 1998, the government stepped up the ante by offering employment authorization to the spouses of skilled foreign workers. The program was intended to make Canada a ‘more attractive’ destination for skilled workers.

10 The seven generic job descriptions open to expedited admission are: senior animation effects editor, embedded systems software designer, MIS software designer, multimedia software developer, software developer – services, software products developer, and telecommunications software designer (McLaughlin & Salt 2002: 66-67).
Germany, on the other hand, in 1998, lifted the restrictions on the issuance of work permits to non-EU/EEA nationals. In September of the same year, an ordinance was passed to facilitate the entry of intra-company transferees. Thereafter, a multinational with operating facilities in Germany could transfer its technical specialists and managers without having to deal with labor-market testing. What is more, employees performing services in a "a board, director, or managerial capacity" are no longer subject to the requirements of a work permit at all (Christian 2000: 25). In February 2000, Germany introduced a new ‘green card’ for foreign IT specialists. The name for the program was borrowed from the United States, although the visas are very different. A well-known trade unionist, Bill Morris, said “it is the United States’ green-card policy that ‘has built the strength of the US economy to what it is today’” (Ashley 1996: 18). Obviously Germany was trying to rub off a little bit of that success. Reporters commented,

\begin{quote}
Germany is stepping up efforts to attract talented foreigners, enacting new policies that for the first time will allow it to compete with the U.S. in the battle for highly skilled professionals, scientists and technicians from the developing world. (Zachary & Rohwedder 2001: A8, italics added)
\end{quote}

The new ‘green card’ allows specialists from non-EU countries to work in Germany for up to five years. While President Clinton paid visits to India’s computer parks, so did Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. “We want to make our advanced technology available here and we will compete with countries like the U.S. for India’s best brains,” he said to software engineers near Bangalore (BBC News 2001c).

\footnote{Apart from the most of the member states in the European Union (EU), the European Economic Area Agreement (EEA) includes Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.}

\footnote{The U.S. green card qualifies its holder to permanent residence.}
In the United Kingdom, the year 1998 ushered in a new National Skills Task Force. Its first report expressed concern over the shortage of skills in information technology (Rollason 2001: 332). The Institute of Employment Research at the University of Warwick predicted that IT employers would need to recruit more than 340,000 people between 1997 and 2006 (Ibid.). In January 1999, the Information Technology, Communications and Electronics (ITCE) Skills Strategy Group was created to come up with national strategies for how to meet the needs of the ITCE sector. The government's intention was "to attract the most skilled and most enterprising people from abroad" (Rollason 2001: 333). Then in March 2000, the government announced a slew of immigration reforms that substantially altered the UK's work permit programs. The sweeping amendments included a number of pilot programs designed to attract skilled migrants. The Highly Skilled Migration Program was announced for individuals of outstanding talent (effective for one year as of January 2002). The Innovator Category was introduced to facilitate the entry of entrepreneurs (effective from Sept. 2000 to Sept. 2002). But Julia Onslow-Cole, attorney at law, describes the outcome as quite disappointing:

The innovator category in the U.K., which was designed to attract all the people in the high tech sectors, has been really quite a flop. I think in a whole year they attracted 112 candidates, which really isn't very much. Even the highly skilled migrant program which was introduced in January of this year - the numbers for that have been quite disappointing. And I think that most of the candidates are redundant investment bankers, a substantial number of them are already in the U.K. on a work permit, so this is not fresh talent that the U.K. government is attracting.

(Onslow-Cole 2002b)
While the programs were designed to compete for skilled workers, they fell short of their legislative intent. As one reporter speculated, “the government hopes that [it] will offer a more workable approach than a visa quota process that pays no attention to specific labor needs” (Gordon 2000: 2). Specters of the H-1B visa program linger in the wings.

In Conclusion:

The U.S. government’s failure to raise the cap, and when it did, in offering too few visas and too late, created uncertainty as to the future of its leadership in the information technology industry. The same industry that appeared responsible for U.S. dominance in world economic affairs. Nation leaders from around the globe followed the H-1B debates with interest. The late 1990s witnessed a rush of immigration reforms as countries joined the race to attract IT skills. Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, and Japan might have been added to the list of nations that created legislative responses to alleviate ostensible IT shortages, following the H-1B debates. France, the Netherlands, and Denmark also reported a lack of IT skills (McLaughlan & Salt 2002: 5). There are certainly others. The U.S. policy debates of 1998 appear to have released a ‘ripple effect’ that has extended its radius in subsequent years.

Demetrious Papademetriou, co-director of the International Migration Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote for The Washington Post,

... the rest of the developed world is waking up to the fact that America’s cherry-picking of international tech talent amounts to an enormous competitive advantage, one that, if left unchallenged, could extend U.S. dominance in information technology indefinitely. Our competitors are doing something about it. (Papademetriou 2000: A25)
Across the ocean in London, labor analyst Andrew Milroy said, "U.S. companies go around the world cherry-picking the best skills... Now the rest of the world wants to do the same (Zachary 2000: R8). In Singapore, Yeo Cheow Tong, Minister of Communications and Information Technology reiterated, "Talent is a passport and is nationality-blind... We are in a global war for talent" (McKindsey 2001).

It is very interesting to note that the 'war for talent' emerged when it did and how it did. U.S. dominance in the high-tech industry is key to understanding what triggered the outpouring of immigration reforms. It explains why the 'IT worker' was latched onto as such an important idiom, eventually leading to the recognition of a 'global war for talent,' with countries competing for one and the same labor pool. When the debates over raising the cap on H-1B visas hit the international newspapers, nations closest to the U.S., both economically and historically, were motivated to reform their immigration laws in much the same perspective. The IT workforce supplied an idiom for expressing the need for foreign workers, the fact that skills shortages were never addressed according to labor market needs was brushed aside.
CHAPTER SIX

The Shifting Poetics of Nationhood: Locating Nostalgia in Contemporary Migration Narratives

The idea of nationhood is more poignantly imagined when living in a foreign country as a temporary migrant. In the company of foreign nationals in Melbourne, there were countless occasions when people went out of their way to obtain traditional items found only in their home countries. The French bought unpasteurized cheeses in bulk. Americans paid up to AU$18 a box for their favorite breakfast cereals. One American woman would drive out to the airport to buy authentic ingredients for enchiladas. We all hosted gatherings to celebrate national events and festivals. Even our weekend dinners often took up a national theme. *What do they eat in Canada? Well, have you tried my Rice Krispie squares?* The more exotic and foreign, the more the delicacy was sure to please.

In this paper, I’d like to explore the poetics of nationhood as a rhetorical convention that appears in migration discourse. There is something about living away from one’s home country that evokes nostalgia for that country’s folkways. As the popular song by Thomas H. Bayly (1797-1839) chimes, “Absence makes the heart grown fonder, Isle of Beauty, fare thee well!” It is a rhetorical convention with a history. The act of representing ‘home’ as the nation was a nineteenth-century invention. The object of this paper is to trace how the poetics of home and nationhood first became embedded
in nineteenth-century migration narratives. Then we’ll be able to trace how these rhetorical figures are shifting in stories told by contemporary labor migrants.

On the topic of nostalgia, Kathleen Stewart (1992: 252) once wrote that it is created by “positioning a once was in relation to a now.” This juxtaposition of the present with an imaginary past is exemplified by the way Novalis (1772-1801) wrote about the homeland:

There nature appears more human and understanding, a dim memory reflects through the transparent present, sharply outlined images of the world, and so one enjoys through memory a double world, free of all cruelty and violence, a world that is the magical, poetic, fable-like projection of our senses.¹

It is a vision of home framed by the pastoral motif, where all is happy and peaceful in nature. The juxtaposition of pastoral images with contemporary elements became very popular in the representations of landscape in early modern Europe (cf. Rosand 1988). By the late eighteenth century, the rhetoric of the pastoral homeland was repeated over and over again with the invention of national discourse. Since nationhood was figuratively located in nature, individuals raised in the same homeland were steeped in the same folk traditions (cf. Mosse 1964: 15). The representation of nationhood using the pastoral motif was key to this expression of national belonging.

In the nineteenth century, Europeans migrated to the colonies en masse. Their responses to international migration revealed two prevailing conventions: the New World was represented as a land of opportunity, whereas the Old World was often remembered

¹ I owe this citation to Azade Seyhan’s (2001: 3) thoughtful text, Writing Outside the Nation.
with nostalgia. In the former case, English immigrants often described America as a land of beauty and abundance. Thomas Hutchins (1797, [1776]: 503-4) wrote: “Everything that a reasonable mind can desire, is to be found, or may with little pains be produced here.” John Filson (1784: 107-9) called Kentucky “the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey.” But other immigrants experienced their stay in the colonies as a condition of exile. During the political and religious persecutions of the nineteenth century, many Europeans came to the colonies seeking refuge, often continuing to fight for national sovereignty (Gould 1980: 268-71). The re-enactment of folkloric ways became a means of sustaining the dream of returning to the homeland. Both of these responses to international migration are longstanding conventions that can still be discerned today (e.g. Chamberlain 1997; Kells 1995; Werbner 1980). And notably, they both employ the pastoral motif as part of their representational strategy, one in the optic of opportunism and discovery, the other aimed at recovery and renewal. However, there is a newer response that I wish to focus on in the second half of this paper. Among labor migrants for whom the flexibility of the workplace has eroded any sense of rational-economic motive for these international moves, the responses to migration are no longer framed by a notion of ‘place’ or ‘nationhood.’ That is, migrants who work abroad on temporary contracts tend to express their feelings of belonging without the metaphor of place. The first half of this chapter will focus on how the pastoral motif was used to naturalize people’s attachment to the land. In the second half of the chapter, I’ll focus on stories told by international labor migrants where the object of nostalgia is no longer the home or the nation. Hence, we’ll be exploring how the use of the pastoral motif has shifted of late.
The Pastoral Mode:

As a literary construct, the pastoral is an image depicting the Golden Age or a pastoral Eden. It commonly represents nature as filled with bounteous fruits, crops, and animals, which never need tending. It is a peaceful paradise that offers riches without toil. In Western traditions, we know it best through the imaginary Arcadia in Virgil’s Eclogues. Virgil writes of a Golden Age where:

All stains of our past wickedness being cleansed away.
   . . . presents will come from nature’s wild . . .
Goats shall walk home, their udders taut with milk, and nobody
   Herding them . . .
   . . . [and] every land will be self-supporting.
The soil will need no harrowing, the vine no pruning-knife;
   And the tough ploughman may at last unyoke his oxen.\(^2\)

Virgil’s Eclogues had an important influence on Renaissance art and architecture.\(^3\) In the beginning of the fourteenth century and until the end of the eighteenth century, the composition of pastoral verse remained popular in Italy, France, England, Spain, Holland, and Germany (Freedman 1989: 1). At court, pastoral motifs were borrowed from Classical sources to represent contemporary dramatic intrigue. This entailed emptying out the pastoral signifier of its direct associations with the countryside. As Raymond Williams (1973) explained, “living tensions are excised” in Renaissance pastorals, so that “selected images stand as themselves: not in a living, but in an enameled world.”\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Virgil (1964), Eclogue IV, lines 14-22; 37-41.

\(^3\) Several authors have noted the importance of Virgil’s Eclogues for the composition of the Renaissance pastoral, see Trevelyan’s (1944) Introduction to the Eclogues, Freedman (1989: 1), and Chaudhuri (1989), esp. “Virgil Allegorized,” pp.9-22.

In the seventeenth century, Protestant reformers made pastoral illusion into a mode for social critique. This was at a time when the persecution of Protestants was widespread and many were sent into exile. John Bunyan wrote his *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) from inside the walls of a prison cell. During this period of religious strife, the use of the pastoral was flourishing. But Protestants adapted the tradition in innovative ways. As Republicans in Holland and England critiqued the aristocracy, they offered a different version of Arcadia: one with Dutch or English elements found in their immediate surroundings. Van Mander (1548-1606) recommended populating country scenes with both pastoral types and ordinary-looking peasants (Kettering 1983: 86). Ben Jonson in his play *The Sad Shepherd* (1612) called his shepherds and shepherdesses to a feast in Sherwood Forest that located the pastoral retreat in an English, rather than classical, Arcadia. In this way, contemporary elements were superimposed onto a timeless past or future. The principles of classicism were adapted to symbolize the aspirations of a new nation.

From the early eighteenth century onwards, particularly in England, the pastoral motif served in the language of social critique and national distinction. Protestant reformers sought to carve out a uniquely non-aristocratic tradition that was founded upon diligence and honesty. Their claims to truth, however, were adorned with images of peace and happiness – images that operated independently of the reformers’ ethical injunctions. It is in tracing how these images were juxtaposed with contemporary elements to represent an idealized past or future that we can come to grasp the poetics of

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5 One seventeenth-century Italian critic stated, “it seems that today men resolve not to read or write other than pastorals” (Kettering 1983: 20).
historical narratives. In the case of an idealized future, the image of landed property became an important symbol of social status and power. Bourgeois merchants aspired to make this image their own. Then as party politics developed, a discourse about the improvement of the nation was associated with the representation of laborers working in the fields. Peasants and their folkways came to represent national distinctiveness.

**Landed Property:**

Property and status were intimately associated in Renaissance England. People who lived in country estates exercised power in their local counties, or bought estates in order to make a bid to possess that distinction. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that seventeenth-century English nobles went into great debt to improve their properties only to improve their social status. When Robert Walpole began building a house in Houghton in 1721, employing the best architects and displaying the finest collection of pictures in all of England, he was clearly in competition with his neighbors. There could be only one principal manor house in the country of Norfolk; and Walpole, a member of the minor gentry, was vying for that position. It sparked a quarrel with his brother-in-law, Lord Townshend. As Lord Hervey commented, “Lord Townshend looked upon his own seat at Raynham as the metropolis of Norfolk, was proud of the superiority, and considered every stone that augmented the splendor of Houghton as a diminution of the grandeur of Raynham” (Girouard 1978: 4). Describing landownership between 1680 and 1740, M. J. Habbakuk (1940: 12) pointed out that people who bought land “desired to have that significance in society which only the possession of land could give.” Property had become an important means of displaying wealth and power.
By the early seventeenth century, the country estate was being represented using the pastoral motif. With an implicit critique of Classical styles of extravagance in the houses kept by the aristocracy, other private estates were lauded for their pastoral delights and communitarian values. Ben Jonson’s poem “To Penhurst” (1616) is often said to be the first exemplar of this new species of poetry. The Penhurst estate stood in the county of Kent and belonged to Sir Robert Sidney. It was said not to have been built for ‘envious show.’ The elements that give the owner pride and joy are found in nature. A long passage of the poem is taken up by a description of what treasures can be culled from the estate’s fields and lakes:

The painted partridge lies in every field,
And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed.
And if the high-swol’n Medway fail thy dish,
Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net,

Then hath thy orchard fruit, thy garden flowers,
Fresh as the air, and new as are the hours.
The early cherry, with the later plum,
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come;
The blushing apricot and woolly peach
Hang on thy walls that every child may reach.

The resonances with Virgil’s Arcadia are unmistakable. Fish jump into the fisherman’s net. Children have only to reach up and pluck blushing apricots from trees. The air is fresh, the house was built with ‘no man’s groan,’ and the lady of the house is always ready to receive visitors with warm hospitality. People who come to Penhurst find

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6 Other examples of country house poems include Aemelia Lanyer’s ‘The Description of Cookham’ (1611), Thomas Carew’s ‘To Saxham’ (1640), and Andrew Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’ (1681).
themselves offered food and drink, no matter what their dress. Penhurst is the locus of a happy community — a community in the garden. As Richard Gill (1972: 227) pointed out, Jonson not only describes a house, "he makes it into a symbol of humane order and true community." The elements in this poem were later taken up by writers such as Alexander Pope and they can be traced throughout the novels of the nineteenth century (Ibid, pp.227-52).

**Peasants Attached to the Land:**

Country estates grew out of official enclosure policies that displaced much of the peasant population. By the late eighteenth century, "porcelain figures of Norwegian peasants [had] joined Dresden shepherdesses in the decoration of fashionable drawing-rooms." The peasants’ resistance to commercial agriculture reinforced this image of pastoral innocence. In Ireland, for example, the Catholic Irish were typecast as being more ‘communal’ than their English counterparts — so communal in fact, that it was pointless to expect them to partake in any agricultural improvements (cf. Miller 1985: 105-9). If given a little extra pocket money, they would spend it. Rather than work to earn a surplus, they would idle away most of their day. Irish Catholics were portrayed as communitarian, cheerful, and hospitable, but terribly naïve. One traveler described them as "lamentably deficient in that practical common sense, persevering industry, and taste for the decencies and comforts of life" (Ibid, p.122). Irish Catholics would be trapped in their pastoral ways.

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7 Burke (1978: 10-11).
The nationalist discourse that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used the ‘folk’ to represent the uniqueness – and pastoral innocence – of national traditions (cf. Abrahams 1993). As landowners sought to resist the encroachment of the international aristocracy, the language of resistance was often expressed in the pastoral mode. In Germany, for instance, the Volk was conceived in heroic terms, by men such as Father Jahn, Arndt, and Fichte, during the wars against Napoleon (Mosse 1964: 14). In Sweden, a return to ‘Gothic’ virtues was stirred by the loss of Finland to Russia in 1809. Popular culture in Poland was deliberately renewed during Russian occupation. Italian folksongs regained their popularity as an expression of opposition to Austrian rule.\(^8\) The return to ‘traditional’ folkways became a mode of political participation. By the nineteenth century, these romantic nationalisms also naturalized the people’s relationship to the land. When the Grimm brothers came out with their famous collection of poetry in 1812, they referred to popular folklore as the ‘poetry of nature’ (*Naturpoesie*). Jakob Grimm said the poems were not made – they grew, just like trees. Likewise, the Swedish poet-historian Erik Gustav Geijer and the French scholar, Claude Fauriel, referred to folksongs as the ‘poetry of nature.’\(^9\) In the rhetoric of national discourse, the people’s attachment to the nation and its folkways was naturalized in the pastoral mode.

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\(^8\) All of these examples of resurgent nativism are mentioned by Peter Burke (1978: 13).

\(^9\) Grimm (1965: 4, n.10). I owe these references on ‘nature poetry’ to Burke (1978: 4).
Land & Folkways in 19th-century Migration Narratives:

The transatlantic migrations of the nineteenth century have been called “the greatest transfer of populations in the history of mankind” (Armengaud 1976: 70). Between 1815 and the beginning of the World War I, roughly 52 million emigrants left Europe, of whom 37 million traveled to North America, 11 million to South America, and 3.5 million, mostly British, went to Australia and New Zealand. 10 This period also marked a significant turning point in the character of migration. Up until the beginning of the nineteenth century, any organized emigration across the Atlantic involved the transportation of slaves and indentured laborers. But after 1815, emigrants from Europe were wage-earners seeking employment and land ownership in the colonies. The massive exodus that followed is known as the period of voluntary migration (Citroën 1951; Ferenczi 1970). The reasons emigrants gave for leaving were borrowed from neoclassical economics. “There was no work in Ireland, so we had to go.” “Land is cheap in Canada, so we’re going to live there.” Whatever the reason, there was an extraordinary similarity in the responses to international migration. Some migrants dreamed of setting up house in the colonies and owning a plot of land. Others lived in a condition of exile and reaffirmed their national folkways. But in both cases, we can trace the use of the pastoral motif – ascribed to land and national folk traditions.

“Every immigration to America,” wrote Carl Wittke (1952: 111), “has included men and women who dreamed of building a Utopia on the prairies of mid-America.”11 Wittke was commenting on the hopes of Germans leaving for America. But a similar

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11 I owe this reference to Charlotte Erickson (1994: 34).
sentiment was echoed by English immigrants attracted to life in the countryside. The commercialization of agriculture in Europe played a large role in prompting the displacements of the nineteenth century. Both in eastern and western Europe, people were pushed off common lands and placed in the vulnerable position of seeking seasonal labor. Added to this, the population was growing at an alarming rate. The roads were filled with vagrants and travelers looking for temporary work. The prospect of land and the culturally-laden significance of land in the property-based economies of Europe made it a significant ‘lure’ for would-be emigrants. Publicity campaigns were launched in England and Germany that advertised ‘free land’ to new immigrants (Citroën 1951: 10). Among English emigrants especially, the representation of the country house or freehold estate figured strongly in their responses to international migration. An English immigrant working in Ohio wrote to his family:

I should like to have some land, for they live so comfortably who milk their own cows, live in their own houses, grow their own corn, make their own sugar and everything they want.\footnote{13}

Ironically, it was the people with industrial skills from urban areas in England who were most attracted to the idea of farming in America. Another Englishman described the lot of his sister and brother-in-law in the New World:

Kate and John is quite aristocrats at least they wold think themselves so if they were in England and had a hundred & sixty acers of land and a house

\footnote{12 With the improvement in horticultural technologies and the use of fallow lands for crops, food production tripled between 1700 and 1870 (Moch 2003: 108).}

\footnote{13 Letter written in 1818, published in Knight (1818: 30). Charlotte Erickson (1994: 45) commented that well-read immigrants expected “to find the American farmers themselves to be shining examples of the pure and simple virtues of men in intimate contact with nature.”}
of their own and twenty acers of wheat and two horses and a cow and kill all our own game plenty of hares rabbits prairie chickens geese & wild ducks.\(^\text{14}\)

As Rowland Berthoff (1968: 109) noted, “To be lord of his own acres – that universal ambition in a country like Britain where land signified rank – was the dream which turned the British countryman, whether laborer, tenant, or younger son of the gentry, toward America.”

The nineteenth century also saw political upheavals that sent many Europeans into exile. Failed attempts to overthrow regimes occurred in Poland in 1830, France in 1848, and Russia in 1881 (Williams 1970: 141). Slavs emigrated out of central and south-eastern Europe in opposition to the rule of Vienna or Budapest (Gould 1980: 270-71). The Irish coming to America felt they were being forced to migrate because of English occupation.\(^\text{15}\) In these cases, anything that could provide a link with the past was latched onto as a means of self-expression. When Scottish Jacobites were sent into exile, they imported herring from their homeland “as a culinary link with hearth and memory” (Tayler 1941: xii). Much the same way as French migrants import their cheeses and Americans seek out their favorite brands of cereal today. The re-creation of this imagined past is often used as a means of expressing difference from the host country’s folkways as well as solidarity with the home country. Polish emigrants’ reactions to America are a case in point. After Poland’s failed insurrections in 1831 and 1863, tens of


\(^{15}\) In a letter addressed to Great Britain, Patrick Ford (1881) accused England’s ‘Great Criminal Class’ of having “driven millions into exile beyond the Atlantic waves” (Jacobson 2002: 13).
thousands of Poles were either deported or fled to other parts of Europe and the Americas.\textsuperscript{16} From a distance, the exiled celebrated national traditions as an expression of their commitment to the Polish nation. In America, parish priests, colonization societies, and nationalist organizations aimed to insure that Poles would never lose their Fatherland while they were abroad (Jacobson 2002: 14). Street displays, poetry readings and dramatic representations all contributed to renewing their ties with the Polish nation. As one participant at a festival claimed, “Let us celebrate this anniversary as it is fitting Poles in exile.” Polishness (\textit{Polsko}) was protected as a political treasure (\textit{Ibid}, p.35). Notably, by 1900, immigrants were forming social networks based on national affiliations.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{21\textsuperscript{st}-century Migration without Nationhood:}

A different response to international migration can be discerned in stories told by contemporary labor migrants. In the transcriptions reproduced below, the feeling of belonging is \textit{not} associated with land or folkways. As Stacia Zabusky (1995) noted in her ethnography of the European Space Agency, the language of national difference soon loses its currency among international professionals living and working together. Cultural stereotypes associated with food, clothing and behaviors rapidly grow stale and quite boring (Zabusky 1995: 162-63). In the conversations that follow we can see how the pastoral depiction of nationhood is shifting towards other forms of belonging. Here is

\textsuperscript{16} Poland was subjugated to Russia, Prussia and Austria at the time.

\textsuperscript{17} Whereas in 1800, peasants and artisans in Europe did not express a sense of national belonging; their ties were locally defined (Burke 1978: 12).
a conversation between Regis and Lawrence, who liked to call himself “Lawrence of Arabia,” with a roll of the *rrr*; where the difference between international labor migrants and their more sedentary relatives was registered. Regis begins:

R: My uncle was showing a lot of resentment, and it was every time I would open my mouth and talk about things, I would use experience [*sic*] of Canada, France, Houston, Australia, Southeast Asia, you know, it’s coming from all [over] the place. But that’s . . . me, that’s what I’ve been through. And the guy was, you know, stayed in France all his life and felt probably challenged.
L: Threatened.
R: Threatened. If it’s not threatened . . .
L: On top of the —
R: . . . then it’s challenged and resented.
L: Yeah. He didn’t understand.
R: No he doesn’t. To him, it’s like it’s going in his mind, he doesn’t understand why would you do that . . . in the first place. [i.e. Why would you go and work overseas.] There are people that are very sedentary and there are people that are more nomadic and you know . . .

R: I’m still trying to . . . manage to have a family and being around . . .
L: I married an expat girl.
R: Yeah.
L: The day of our graduation, the professor said, “Those who are going overseas, will need to marry those who travel overseas, and those . . .” No, [reacting to Regis’ look of scepticism] he was right, he was right – what the supervisor said, “Those who want to go overseas and work, will need to marry someone who goes, those who want to stay, to marry someone that stays.” – And he was *a hundred and fifty* percent right. I couldn’t have had a better supervisor.

Then Lawrence became sentimental about coming back to Australia.

L: As soon as you come back home and you say well, “I’m marrying, I’ve married an expat girl who doesn’t know where home is.” *Oh, well you’ve married an alien.* That was the extent of my mother and father. Cause they’ve never done anything with their life. Now my dad’s dying of cancer, *I wish I had gone to India; I wish I had gone and seen – I wish...* All I hear is “*I wish, I wish*” in those emails.
There were three other women in the room – myself included – who had diverged off into our own discussion up until this point.\textsuperscript{18} Then Dorothy chimed in:

D: See my parents, they visited us all overseas . . .

And when Dorothy told us about how she left “KL” (Kuala Lumpur) to go to Jakarta (because of her husband’s company), Lawrence added:

L: I’m starting to find that um, travel, you always, after about 18 months you say well,
D: Yeah, it’s time to move.
L: Exactly – aah, aah, it’s in your blood.
(Dorothy laughs.)

And Amanda asked him, in a voice that is uncommonly loud and clear:

A: Where’s your favorite country? (Pause) Or city?
L: – London.
A: Your favorite city’s London?!? (Amazed.) Out of all places that you lived?
T: Why do you like London? Why?
A: Why? Why?
L: Aah, I call London home? Um, is this a problem? No, no.

Now except for Regis and myself, Lawrence was speaking to other Australians – Amanda and Dorothy had just come back to Australia after living abroad for several years and though they were finding it difficult to be back, the notion of settling elsewhere was apparently unnerving to them.

D: Cause you met your wife there?
L: No, I wouldn’t, not so much that.

\textsuperscript{18} The other people in the room were Dorothy (D), myself (T), and Amanda (A).
If you’re stuck, the British will always get you out. We were stuck in Lagos airport: British Airways got us home, didn’t ask questions. Ah, in Abu Dhabi, they got us out when Saddam started to invade. They just didn’t ask questions, they, they did something right, and I think they’ve traded more in the globe than most other countries, and they know how the global market works, and the kind of stable – that is a stable economy. And if there’s a problem, then they know how to get, get out of it. And I’ve always called it more of a place to call home.

A: How are the people?

L: Very open. On a hot day or on a freezing cold day you’d go walk along Queensway – opposite Manavalach – and you’d go into a coffee shop, a café, and you’d sit down, and you’d be sitting with a – an ole’ couple, who might have lived in Yemen or Cypress for all their life or Hong Kong, and then all of a sudden you realize it’s about half past eight at night, and you’ve got so much more in common. Or you go down to Waterloo and you’ve got eighteen hundred, um, hotels, eighteenth-century hotels, which are done out in old fashion and you can spend hours. So that really catches you. You walk down onto a lane and you find something which is intriguing, it’s got life and vigor. And that’s what I find nice. And they accept you in a lot more – globally.

T: Yeah.

L: In that sense. Oh, I find that pretty invigorating. You know.

I got pretty excited at this point and I still do, looking over my transcript. But my excitement was not entirely shared – or it was misunderstood or/and I mis-phrased it to be a critique of Australia, and Melbourne, in particular – because I thought Lawrence’s worldliness was great.

T: Melbourne still has a way to come in that sense. They call it very cosmopolitan, but –

L: Oh, I think so, for a city of Australia.

D: Yes. (Dorothy laughs.)

A: They call it that for – compared to the rest of Australia. (Amanda continued to discuss it in comparison to Sydney. A very Melbournian thing to do!)

And Lawrence joined his compatriots in Melbourne’s defence, but notice the language he uses, he does not idolize what is Australian, he idolizes what is Arabic.

19 Short for ‘café.’
L: I’m not scared, if I walked out Brunswick or Sydney Road, I’m not scared of speaking Arabic or going and having a coffee and talking Arabic or going down and speaking another language I might know.20 I don’t feel -- You know, you feel welcome in that part. And they kind of welcome you in. They’ll always recognize you again, if I go into a Lebanese caf or something. They always make you welcome and that’s pretty hard to beat in, in Melbourne.

Amanda turned to me.

A: What do you think would be – Like, what, what is a cosmopolitan city to you? What do you think the most cosmopolitan city is?

T: Well, it is cosmopolitan, you know. But it’s not the same type of worldliness that he’s talking about when he talks about London. He’s talking about acceptance and when you really don’t give a damn where people are from. You’re not going to – you don’t really want to hear about Yemen if you’re talking to somebody from Yemen. You just want to talk to them. About anything.

L: Hmm. (Laurence nods with agreement.)

T: It’s not about cultural differences.

A: Uhh.

But the preacher in me didn’t get the final word . . .

T: And that’s what cosmopolitanism is about, it’s about reaffirming these sorts of traditions. These old, you know – the Greek community’s got their community, you’ve got Balacava and the Jewish community, and everybody’s really extending themselves to be more traditional than the homeland.

A: Mmmm.

T: Whereas the worldliness in London or in Paris or in New York, it’s just, it’s a big mix and you –

D: Maybe it’s cause we’re so isolated down here.

A: Yeah, I was just about to say.

D: Europe’s not a place . . .

L: Absolutely.

A: Our location . . . Australia’s location is not the best . . .

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20 Lawrence named his son an Arabic name and he did have troubles in the airports, obviously there were a number of occasions when Arabic associations became an issue.
And so Australia’s reputation was ‘saved’ because it was so far away from Europe – and that made it somewhat understandable that Lawrence found something in London that was not available in Melbourne. Sorta kinda. I’m sure it could be turned various ways.

Lawrence and I spoke later, over lunch on the following Saturday. It was just the two of us. This time, under no uncertain terms, he said he couldn’t wait to leave Australia. He did leave a couple of months later, for Venezuela.

The first time I met Lawrence he reminded me a lot of friends we had back in Houston, who had lived and worked overseas for more than thirty years. Andy was reaching the age of retirement, he turned sixty while we were in Texas, but he kept working to pay off a debt incurred when a company he had set up in Canada went bankrupt. While in Houston Andy worked for an environmental agency that cleaned up building sites. He had always worked on temporary contracts, in mining or structural engineering. Whereas other people he knew were retiring, Andy and his wife Carol didn’t have a house to retire to; he figured it was because they never settled,

... that’s what was wrong with us, we never ever stayed in one place – anywhere long enough.

One day I asked Carol, “Do you ever think about settling down? Staying in one place?”

“No not really,” was her answer,

It would be too boring. We can only stay in one place for so long and then we look for change. There’s always the curiosity to see something new, and then the fever just takes over.

Carol said to me:
I may not have a home, but I’m never without a place. The place has always been the interest, not what we’re living in. I would be just as happy living in a trailer as in a palace. We had a great bit of dealings with the people – which made it – it makes anywhere. As long as you’re in a family unit, wherever you are is home.

There is a piece of fiction that caught my eye once, published in a woman’s expatriate magazine. It’s relevant here because it demonstrates the re-positioning of the pastoral motif. The story is told in the first person; it’s about a woman who wants to fly.

She pulls a chair between the rubbery plants on the balcony, while Frank sleeps. She scrambles to the balcony wall. A dog barks in the flat yard below. Renée balances, and leaps into thinness.

It’s the first time, but she knows just how its done. She pushes forward, holding her arms to her sides, like gliding through water. She surges and swoops towards the lane and the church, then rises up, hovering above the trees, pushing from her knees, and flying towards the mountains.

The hills are greener here, the landscape more complex. The undergrowth is thick and colorful. She touches on a ledge and birds startle, with a scatter of wings. Her skin is warm and she feels a silent laughter in the atmosphere, a bird conspiracy in consciousness. The air is new and she knows the rain will follow.

A strange hotel stands on top of the Avila. She alights and runs barefoot down a path. This hotel has been deserted for years. Windows are cracked. Clouds float through the bedrooms and fog up the glass.

Six months ago, at the Rainbow room in Rockefeller Center, Frank told her he’d been offered a job in Caracas. “But we can stay in New York for the rest of our lives, if that’s what you want,” he said.21

The woman wakes up from her dream. She is in Caracas. Her husband is beside her.

Later she tries describing to him what has happened to her. She tries to tell him that she

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can fly. But he doesn’t understand and then it starts to rain, so they run for cover. Renée tries to forget about flying. One day she decides to take the gondola up to the mountains to ‘get rid’ this magnetic pull that keeps tugging at her.

She sets out one morning, when clouds waft like scarves across the mountain top. She waits in line for twenty minutes. At last the cable car jerks up the hillside, swinging, stopping on the way for tourists to photograph the view. The top is misty, and crowded with people. Vendors line their wares along the walkway to the hotel, handicrafts made from gourds and macramé. There’s also a large cafeteria where you can buy yourself a snack. Renée heads down the path towards the hotel.

Nothing is as she remembers. The hotel is different in shape and dimension. This is a 1950’s monstrosity, while her hotel had been tall and delicate. Where then, had she flown to? She sits on a bench, breathless. Two or three boys sit on a wall, lolling against each other and grinning. They have a huge black insect tied to a thread. It buzzes around their heads, while they watch her reaction, hoping to startle or repulse her.

Her mind is on other things. On a sense of betrayal that requires explanation. It unsettles her to feel self-doubt, when before there had been conviction and the sense of being chosen. There’s no need to stay at the top of the mountain any longer.

She decides to devote herself to the baby. She’ll shop for curtain fabric with a pattern of clouds and rainbows. There will be a baby shower, and birthing classes in a granite high-rise downtown.\textsuperscript{22}

Once the baby comes Renée becomes ‘rooted’ again. “She is rooted here and Frank is holding her, and he can see the baby’s head . . .” (Holmes 2000: 55).

This poetic fiction plays with the placement of the pastoral motif – only this time, nature’s paradise becomes Renée’s tourist trap. Renée imagines the view from the top of mount Avila as she would expect it to look: green grass, rolling hills, bird songs, fresh air, and waves of pleasure through and through. But in the strange hotel that stands on

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid}, p.55.
top of the mountain, she finds the windows cracked and clouds are drifting into the rooms. She is transported back to the view from the Rainbow room in the Rockefeller Center, on the day her husband told her he was offered a job in Caracas. There she stood looking out the window, but she all she could see was white. “There was supposed to be a view of the city from the Rainbow Room,” writes Holmes (2000: 54), but “the windows were white with clouds.”

Her fantasy paradise upon mount Avila leaves her restless and floating, repeatedly transported there in her imagination; until she goes there, physically, one day, in a gondola. Then the image begins to crack and fade. She sees boys playing with bugs, taunting her with their grinning faces. Tourists are everywhere and vendors with alleyways of cheap souvenirs. The place is crowded — “Nothing is as she remembers” (p.55). Renée falls back to earth and decides to devote herself to her family. She plans to go out and buy curtains, have a baby shower, schedule birth classes; in other words, to occupy herself with domestic affairs. So the pastoral motif is re-situated from the mountaintop to the family. And Renée’s idealism is now the object of home-making.

What is striking about the stories told by Carole, Andy, Lawrence, and ‘Renée’ is that they no are longer framed by nostalgia for a place or nation. Carole said, it’s not about the place. I would be just as happy living in a trailer as in a palace. And frankly, she and her husband did both. When Laurence spoke of ‘home,’ he employed the pastoral motif to talk about London – not because it was his homeland, but because it is where he felt safe and secure. He felt accepted, in despite, perhaps, of his appreciation of Arabic culture. Laurence’s son carried an Arabic name, for which they were incessantly reminded every time they traveled through western airports. What Laurence longed for
was the feeling of just blending in. On this note, I was quite entertained by an anecdote told to me by a woman from Holland who lived in Japan for three years. Elizabeth said, “It’s more the little things that I remember, like being one with the locals.”

E: You know, cause when we were living in Japan, we had visited Kyoto, that’s the old capital –
T: Yeah.
E: It was about 6 o’clock and we went back on the bullet train, this fast train, to Nagoria. And we had bought – like the Japanese – beer or juices, tins and cans and finger food, we just had snacks on the train. And we were leaving . . . and ah, [as] the train started to leave, everybody opened the can, “pssss” [the sound of a can opening]. So we did it at the same time.
T: (I laugh.)
E: It was all at the same time. And I told my husband, ohhh, we’re one of the locals now.
T: (Still laughing.)
E: No, it feels – it felt so, aah, that togetherness was so, I thought, “ok, now I understand them, I understand them.”

This is where these stories lead – to the little things. Remember the time the rice cooker exploded and rice got stuck to the ceiling; the time you sat in front of the bus to make sure the bus driver didn’t fall asleep on those steep and windy roads; the time you got the plumber in and he stayed all day with you, drinking tea and talking. In these stories, the poetics of migration is focused on the ‘little things’ that happen, rather than national differences. The pastoral motif is no longer attached to place or a nationhood.
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